

Template for a petition to establish a Racial Equity Initiative in your city, county, or state

(modeled on community organizing in the city of Boston)

Dear [mayor, county executive or governor],

I write in support of [name the organizing effort], and ask that you create [an initiative or office] that would guide every city department in setting goals to reduce inequities in their area of work. This would include housing, licensing, transportation, elder services, neighborhood services, human resources, procurement, and the other areas of city life where People of Color face limited opportunities and worse outcomes. Other municipalities across the country are moving beyond diversity in hiring and contracting, towards systematically addressing racial inequities. Introducing racial equity planning to our [city, county or state] departments would build on the experience of these other local governments, as well as agencies that have already implemented significant equity initiatives, such as [name any departments that have taken significant steps].

We are comprised of an increasingly racially diverse population: [insert local racial demographics. This diversity is one of our greatest strengths, but solely focusing on this diversity masks the stark racial and ethnic inequities that characterize almost every area of life – from education and housing to development and health. We face very different opportunities and futures depending on our skin color, language proficiency, country of origin, and neighborhood of residence due to structural and institutional racism. “Structural” and “institutional” racism refers to the historical (such as redlining) and current (such as legislative) factors that reinforce racism; these factors work to both create and maintain inequities. These forms of systemic racism are embedded in our city’s policies and programs and work to the benefit of White people and the detriment of People of Color.

There are a number of exciting national and local models from which [insert city/county/jurisdiction] administration can draw. The Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative, launched in 2004 under Mayor Greg Nickels and the Seattle City Council, requires every city department to apply a racial equity impact analysis to its work in the community. Over the last decade, many more jurisdictions have launched racial equity initiatives. Currently, nearly 100 jurisdictions from across the country are working with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, recognizing the power and influence of their own operations.

This model creates accountability for departments to report on equity outcomes from their work. The result has been a range of new, intentional policies to reduce inequities in areas such as transportation, job creation, criminal justice, contracting and procurement, and workforce



equity. There is currently a solid field of practice that will allow us to operationalize our values, normalizing conversations about race, using a racial equity analysis in routine decision making, and organizing within our own institutions to build skills to advance racial equity and to work in partnership with other institutions and community based organizations to advance racial equity in the community.

You will be supported by a wide-range of supportive efforts to advance racial equity, including [name efforts both internal to government and in the community]. These efforts are an important start, but insufficient without jurisdiction-wide focus.

Organizations that are already doing substantial and influential racial justice and equity work are supportive, including [name organizations]. I believe that a Racial Equity Initiative will provide a formalized framework to synergize the efforts of these organizations, as well as to integrate them into city infrastructure.

It is crucial that our commitment to racial equity be framed clearly and with conviction. We have seen changes take place with great speed when approached with urgency. I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

[Printed name and signature]