

# WASHINGTON RACE EQUITY & JUSTICE INITIATIVE

## INVITATION TO JOIN

We are people, communities and organizations working together for racial fairness and justice in the law, legal profession, and justice systems.

The Race Equity & Justice Initiative (REJI) is a call for action to all who understand that we need to work together to challenge the racial bias that has been built into our societal fabric. Tensions and fears from tragedies in Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston, Flint, Pasco, and so many other places continue to increase due to recent contentious national events. As a result, many vulnerable communities, especially communities of color, are targeted and treated as less worthy. We ask those who are dedicated to equity and justice to join us by signing on to the following principles and commitments.

## VISION

A fair and just society respects basic human rights and allows all people to thrive and reach their potential. We share a vision of a community free from bias, systemic unfairness and oppression, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Everyone deserves access to affordable, safe, and stable housing, quality education and health care, a legal system that delivers justice to all, a sustainable source of income, fair treatment by financial institutions, ample and nutritious food, clean water, and freedom from environmental hazards.

## FRAMEWORK

There are many ways to think about and understand racial justice, but by sharing common language, we can gain greater strength and understanding. REJI uses Professor John A. Powell's powerful tools for talking about race equity work, aiming for a society where everyone belongs within the [Circle of Human Concern](#) as full members of society, without exception. But, we recognize that our social, economic, legal, civic, and political structures reflect, produce and maintain racialized outcomes, meaning that the structures and systems we have created systematically bar certain racial groups from fully participating in society, target them for discrimination, and take away power and resources. Our work is about ending these historic patterns.

## REJI ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. Policies, structures, and systems that deny people and communities of color what is necessary for a full and fair life exist in the United States and in our local communities. These structurally racialized systems have been built and are maintained by conscious and unconscious racial bias that pervades society, to the benefit of white people and to the disadvantage of people of color.
2. These racialized systems work to keep communities of color outside the Circle of Human Concern and perpetuate harm. Examples of how laws, rules, and norms operate today include disproportionately pulling members of communities of color into the civil, juvenile and criminal justice systems; zoning and forcing communities into substandard and unaffordable housing; denying adequate health care, education, and jobs; seizing familial and community land and wealth; threatening personal and physical safety; and, isolating communities of color from social, economic and political power.
3. Bias and structural oppression based on factors such as gender or gender identity, immigration status or nationality, age, disability, religion, poverty and social class, sexual orientation, membership in an indigenous (native) group or ethnicity are equally harmful to individuals, communities, and the notion of a just society. Further, the damaging effects of oppression are multiplied when race intersects with these other identity factors.
4. The effects of bias and structural racialization are especially damaging to the social fabric of our democracy when they are woven into the law, legal profession and justice system, where they can weaken the ability of these systems to safeguard equity and justice under the rule of law.
5. True justice cannot be achieved until the legal and justice systems and all who work in these systems are conscious of and able to counter the impact of racialized systems, racialized structures and bias. Doing so requires acknowledging that different groups are situated differently, and that targeted, intentional approaches may be needed to reach just and equitable outcomes.
6. Progress toward equity and justice has largely come from the wisdom and courage of people from communities most harmed by bias and systemic oppression. Thus, race equity work must be pursued in direct solidarity with, and guidance from, communities of color and community-based movements.
7. Structurally racialized systems take their most direct and immediate toll on communities of color. They are also damaging to white people, as white privilege is understood, whether consciously or not, to be unearned and gained through the stolen humanity of others. This means that white people and people of color have very different as well as common work to do to expose and dismantle racialized systems.

## REJI COMMITMENTS

As signers and supporters of the Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative, we commit to:

1. Work together with, take guidance from, be part of, and hold ourselves accountable to community-based movements in communities most affected by structural racialization and structurally racialized systems.
2. Change structures, policies, processes, and practices in the law, legal profession, and justice system that allow harm and disparate outcomes for communities of color to continue unabated.
3. Promote and support legal and policy reforms to advance race equity and racial justice, recognizing that differently situated groups may require different strategies to achieve more equitable outcomes.
4. Continuously examine whether we and the organizations we work with operate in ways that align with the race equity and justice values and goals we support. This commitment includes ensuring that race equity is reflected in policies and practices for recruitment and hiring, work acceptance, priority-setting, governance, organizational culture, and community partnerships and accountability, particularly with low-income communities of color.
5. Continually explore how race and poverty intersect to make worse the effects of racial discrimination.
6. Expand and strengthen the REJI alliance to include diverse partnerships and the sharing of our resources with anyone who is committed to dismantling structurally racialized systems.
7. Ensure our organizations invest in active, ongoing learning that will teach us to see, reveal, and transform structures that create racialized outcomes and push communities of color outside the Circle of Human Concern. This commitment requires that we help members of our organizations and communities to actively and expressly challenge the use of racist language and behaviors, openly listen when we ourselves are challenged, and learn techniques and tools for reducing and eliminating implicit and explicit bias.

*Additional details, definitions, and examples can be found at the Race Equity & Justice Initiative's website, <http://waraceequityandjustice.wordpress.com>. To request additional information or sign onto the REJI Acknowledgments and Commitments, please contact [jenniferw@justleadwa.org](mailto:jenniferw@justleadwa.org).*