



**DATE:** May 19, 2022  
**TO:** AAPA Lighthouse Awards Panel  
**FROM:** Jay Doran, Engagement and Communications Program Manager, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion  
**SUBJECT:** Port of Seattle's Equity Index

### **SUMMARY**

The [Port of Seattle's Equity Index](#) is an interactive map that displays a visual representation of social and environmental disparities in King County, Washington. Using 21 indicators within four categories, the Equity Index illustrates the degree to which different communities experience pollution burdens and social inequities. Across the region, there are significant variations in pollution exposure, access to economic opportunities, and the overall standard of living.

The index was created by the Port of Seattle's Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as a tool for the Port to understand those variations that exist within the region and use that information to direct resources towards the areas of greatest need. Port staff uses the Equity Index to equitably guide funding decisions and broadly inform policy decisions across the Port. The Equity Index is available as a resource for community members and organizations to learn more about disparities in their community.

### **BACKGROUND, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES**

The Port of Seattle's mission is to promote economic opportunities and quality of life in the region by advancing trade, travel, commerce, and job creation in an equitable, accountable, and environmentally responsible manner.

Nearly three years ago, the leadership of our organization came to a difficult realization. They realized that for too long, many in our region, including the Port of Seattle, have benefitted from and operated in an unjust, racist society. They realized that our institutional practices made it difficult for people of color and women to thrive and gain leadership positions, businesses owned by women and people of color to win contracts, and diverse communities in our surrounding area to contribute meaningfully to our decision-making processes. By failing to acknowledge inequities, our leadership acknowledged that we play a role in perpetuating them. We can and must do better, so we made a commitment to change.

The Port of Seattle commits to leading regional and national efforts to achieve equity and social justice. Our vision is to develop a Port that mirrors — throughout its breadth of operations and services and within its leadership structure — the diversity of our community, instills principles

of equity in its culture, and ensures a fair and intentional distribution of opportunities with the goal of expanding economic development and quality of life for all.

In 2019, the Port of Seattle created the [Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#), becoming the first port authority in the United States to create such an office or department. Through developing an organizationally cross-cutting OEDI, the Port is building capacity to address institutional racism within the Port and to transform policies, practices, and processes.

Not only did the Port create OEDI, which is staffed with experts in racial equity, but the organization also illustrated its commitment to racial equity by updating its mission, values, [Century Agenda](#) (see Goal 5), and creating an EDI Strategic Plan ([2019-2020](#); [2021](#); [2022](#)), to name a few. The Port of Seattle has come a long way over the last two years. We have [achieved a great deal](#), but, our work is far from over.

One of our strategies to achieve our vision for equity is to create meaningful, tangible economic benefits for the communities we serve, with particular attention to communities that have historically been underfunded and marginalized – communities of color, low-income communities, and immigrant and refugee communities. To do this, we need to understand what communities are experiencing the greatest needs, what those needs are, and what sort of resources, funding, and programs can address those needs. As a result, we created the [Equity Index](#).

As stated above, the Equity Index is an interactive map that displays a visual representation of social and environmental disparities in King County, Washington. Using 21 indicators within four categories, the Equity Index illustrates the degree to which different communities experience pollution burdens and social inequities.

The four categories of indicators featured in the index are economy, livability, accessibility, and environment. They are defined as follows:

- Economy — Indicators that demonstrate the opportunity for the creation, retention, transfer, and accumulation of wealth within a community for residents, businesses, and community stakeholders (e.g. poverty rate, median household income, educational attainment).
- Livability — Indicators that demonstrate a safe and healthy standard of living (e.g. housing cost burden, homeownership rate, transit access).
- Accessibility — Indicators that are not necessary for survival but advance the standard of living in a community so that people of all abilities can fully access and participate in public

life (e.g. proximity to parks and open space, access to healthy food, pedestrian and bike facilities).

- Environment — Indicators that represent the health of the environment, including human-made impacts and bio-physical elements, and thus the vitality of the community (e.g. diesel emissions, risk of toxic release from facilities, traffic density).

As you will see when accessing the Equity Index, [the map](#) displays and ranks individual and combined environmental health and social indicators. The data is broken down by census block group in King County, and the census block groups with the least access to opportunities and resources are ranked very low (lighter colors), while communities with the most access to opportunities and resources are ranked very high (darker colors).

The Port recognizes pollution, access to economic opportunity, and a healthy standard of living varies across the region. The index was created as a tool for the Port to visualize those variations that exist across the region, and thus direct resources towards the areas of greatest need. The intended use of the Equity Index was to equitably guide funding decisions for the [South King County Fund](#) (SKCF), but after the tool was developed and we recognize its potential, we have set a goal for more programs, departments, and projects across the organization to use the tool to broadly inform resource allocation and policy decisions. While our Equity Index is specific to our region – King County – this type of interactive, GIS technology would be beneficial for other Port authorities to help them understand and quantify the barriers, challenges, and strengths of the communities they serve.

The successful use of the Equity Index for the SKCF is already apparent. Using the Equity Index to inform funding priorities and resource allocations, the Port award near-airport communities more than \$4 million in 2021 to address noise mitigation, environmental health and sustainability, economic recovery from the pandemic, and workforce development in port-related industries.

Additionally other Port programs have begun using the Equity Index to inform their decision making, and we are seeing positive results in several areas, including the Port's [Northwest Ports Clean Air Strategy](#). And, as open-source technology, the index is available to the public and being used by our community partners to improve their work. Examples of this include the [Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship Committee](#), the [Low Income Housing Institute](#), and [Forterra](#).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Port of Seattle contracted with Community Attributes, Inc. (CAI) to develop this [GIS, web-based mapping tool](#). The total cost of the project was roughly \$75,000, which included the development of the tool, the data collection and index calculation, the creation of the indices, the user guide, and user and administrator training.

A group of internal and external stakeholders and advisors collaborated to select the categories and indicators used in the tool. The index calculation methodology is derived from work by the Kirwan Institute on Race and Social Justice. This resource is free to the public and designed to

share information about factors that contribute to equity and access to opportunity throughout King County. The information displayed in the Equity Index does not represent an exhaustive list of community characteristics associated with equity. Instead, the map is designed as one tool of many that can be utilized to inform decision making, strategic intervention, calls to action, and stakeholder engagement to promote greater equity and access to opportunity across the region we serve.

The four categories were selected in alignment with the Port's Century Agenda Goals. Economy aligns with Century Agenda Goal #3 – “responsibly invest in the economic growth of the region and all its communities.” Livability aligns with Century Agenda Goal #6 – “be a highly effective public agency” and Objective #18 – “partner and engage with external stakeholders to build healthy, safe, and equitable communities.” Accessibility aligns with Century Agenda Goal #5 – “become a model for equity, diversity, and inclusion.” And finally, environment aligns with Century Agenda Goal #4 – “be the greenest and most energy efficient port in North America.”

The methodology used to score census block groups is directly leveraged from the Washington State Environmental Healthy Disparities Map and Kirwan Institute, Ohio State University. Each indicator is ranked very low to very high corresponding to percentiles. Indicators were then averaged to result in a score for each of four categories (economy, livability, accessibility, and environment).

### **ABOUT THE PORT OF SEATTLE**

Founded in 1911 by a vote of the people as a special purpose government, the Port of Seattle's mission is to promote economic opportunities and quality of life in the region by advancing trade, travel, commerce, and job creation in an equitable, accountable, and environmentally responsible manner.

Our vision is to add 100,000 jobs through economic growth led by the Port, for a total of 300,000 Port-related jobs in the region, while reducing our environmental footprint. We are committed to creating opportunity for all, stewarding our environment responsibly, partnering with surrounding communities, promoting social responsibility, conducting ourselves transparently and holding ourselves accountable.

The Port of Seattle is a leader in moving people and cargo across the country and around the world. With facilities and property ranging in scope from a half-acre park to one of the largest

airports and container terminals on the West Coast, we maximize the public assets in our portfolio with an eye toward best uses and environmental sustainability.

Learn more about the Port of Seattle's [Century Agenda/Strategic Objectives](#) and [values](#).

In addition to this document, the following are included in this submission:

- A [recording of a community](#) webinar on the creation and use of the Equity Index and the PowerPoint used for the webinar
- The [Equity Index User Guide](#)
- The Equity Index [Data Definitions](#) and [Literature Review](#)

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or follow-up, please contact me at [Doran.J@PortSeattle.org](mailto:Doran.J@PortSeattle.org).

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Doran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jay" being more prominent than the last name "Doran".

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