

AUSTIN, TX

Mayor Steve Adler

Mayor's Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities Task Force

When the City of Austin experienced a police shooting of an unarmed Black teenage boy following a series of shooting deaths across the country, community activists and concerned citizens expressed outrage and demanded that action be taken to combat racism, particularly in law enforcement. The Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities (IRSI) Task Force that was created by Mayor Steve Adler was charged initially with developing a series of recommendations to dismantle institutional racism and systemic inequities in the Austin region. Knowing that institutional racism and system inequities plagued a variety of areas that also needed attention, the Mayor's charge to the Task Force was development of a set of recommendations impacting five core areas: Education; Civil & Criminal Justice; Real Estate & Housing; Finance, Banking, & Industry; and Health & Wellness. The Mayor invited the President of Huston-Tillotson University and the Superintendent of the Austin Independent School District to co-chair the Task Force. They, in turn, formed a steering committee that helped identify working groups for the five core areas to be examined. Business leaders and community activists were invited to participate in the process.

The Task Force's initial goal was achieved in six months – the deadline that had been set. The Austin City Council officially received the IRSI Task Force report in April 2017, and community leaders requested that the Task Force Co-Chairs continue to work to implement the recommendations and track their progress. To this end, the Task Force collaborated with the IBM Design Thinking Global Headquarters to prioritize the 256 recommendations in order to produce a shorter list and begin developing implementation plans.

The first priority will be to develop implementation plans including outcomes, timelines, and other details needed for a comprehensive roadmap, and means to evaluate their progress. The following draft prioritized recommendations will be reviewed and, as necessary, revised as the working groups continue their efforts to develop the implementation plans.

Civil & Criminal Justice

- Leverage criminal justice and education institutions with community organizations and other related stakeholders, creating a sustainable ecosystem of collective responsibility to train and support an ongoing focus to develop anti-racist, culturally responsive staff and officers.
- [Gov't] creates protocols to ensure cultural competency of all personnel.
- [Gov't] to collect and analyze data on disparities in outcomes and dispositions on race.

Health & Wellness and Civil & Criminal Justice

- Reveal, report, and act on health disparities and data, transparency, and accountability regarding disparities.
- Cultural competency and linguistic sensitivity: Moving beyond cultural sensitivity to address institutional racism will require competencies that highlight perspectives and experiences that otherwise would remain hidden. Language related barriers must be addressed to ensure access for all.

Education

- Build racial equity and capacity through ongoing training and peer groups that are developed with educational and community stakeholders.
- Assessments need to be developed extremely carefully and need to be created by members of communities of color so that they are truly representative of their experience.
- Early wins are crucial for success. The initiative to create training is great, but only if it's able to have measured success that enables its growth and development.
- Participants felt that, to be able to proficiently create a language and curriculum for building racial competency in their classroom, they would need all educational leaders to be involved.

Finance, Banking & Industry

- Identify Resources for the City of Austin. There needs to be a designated group of people working within the City of Austin to help bring these initiatives to life and get the resources that are needed to achieve the goals.
- Start to collect informative data that will help drive strategic decisions for the City and community.
- Education and continuous growth involving City of Austin data analysis/reports and continued measurements of growth/phases as these initiatives are pushed to the public.

Real Estate & Housing has no prioritized recommendations at present. As recommendations are developed, available resources include but are not limited to five reports: the [People's Plan](#), Policy Link Report, [Anti-Displacement Report](#), [IRSI Task Force Report](#): Housing & Real Estate Recommendations, and Gentrification Report ([Uprooted: Residential Displacement in Austin's Gentrifying Neighborhoods and What Can Be Done About It](#)). The City of Austin's Neighborhood Housing and Community Development group will also be releasing their recommendations in an attempt to distill the 352 recommendations from the aforementioned reports into a list of 15 displacement mitigation strategies. This is part of the [Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint](#) implementation plan to be released soon.

Austin officials say the conversation about race equity and systemic injustice is ongoing and dynamic and has led to continued conversations about ways to make impactful change. Meeting future challenges, they recognize, will require taking risks that will make many people uncomfortable. The common goal is to encourage people to see how institutional racism and systemic inequities do not serve the self-interest of any person in the community, and to see that, by developing and implementing an anti-racist, social justice perspective and approach, all in Austin may enjoy shared access, opportunity, and prosperity. But finding the resources to support the effort poses a challenge.

Leadership Austin, a local professional development nonprofit, collaborates with the Task Force to provide Beyond Diversity, a race equity seminar series, to their alumni and community leaders – nearly 1,000 attendees over the last year. The challenge has been to raise funds to provide inexpensive or very-low-cost options for those who cannot afford the seminar's \$325 registration fee, and Leadership Austin has been working with local foundations to provide scholarships for people in the community who are interested in participating.

Many of the community activists serving in the working groups have found it difficult to take time away from work, family, and other responsibilities. The Task Force has considered the possibility of providing stipends to those needing them, but funding for them would have to be identified. Funding is also needed to train local practitioners and facilitators for Courageous Conversations About Race, a program that helps educators examine the relationship between race and achievement. And nearly 60 practitioners could be trained to apply the Beyond Diversity protocol to everyday activities, including Task Force work, with half of these receiving 15-month

training to provide one-day race equity seminars that would supplement workshop offerings to the entire community.

Finally, the longevity of the initiative requires a long-term commitment to develop and implement plans, assess goals, and maintain accountability to ensure sustainability, transparency, and the desired cultural transformation. One ongoing challenge is maintaining people's engagement over time, which poses a dueling complication with continuity while also providing an opportunity to involve many people across the initiative's lifespan. Officials say it was always known that the initiative would be long-term in nature.

Additional information on Austin's initiative is available from Dr. Kazique Prince, Senior Policy Advisor and Education Coordinator, Office of Mayor Steve Adler, at kazique.prince@austintexas.gov, or 512-978-2125.