

Initial Council Questions for the Appointment of the Director of the Seattle Office for Civil Rights

Patricia Lally

1. *One of the duties of the SOCR includes advising the Chief, Mayor and Council on policies and procedures related to a) the operations of the Seattle Women's Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Seattle LGBT Commission, and the Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities and b) making recommendations concerning statements, reports and complaints relative to problems of civil rights. (See Municipal Code section 3.14.910.)*

In your view, how will you handle the situation where one or more of the commissions have a legislative or budgetary recommendation that the Executive may not intend to propose to the Council? How will you handle an instance where the Executive may propose a legislative or budgetary recommendation that one or more of the commissions don't support?

SOCR serves these Commissions by:

- Offering organizational/administrative/event planning services.
- Providing policy and research support.

Our staffing role gives us ongoing opportunities to advise the Commissions and to share the Mayor's and/or City Council's perspective on particular issues. We also advise the Mayor and City Council regarding the Commissions' positions when appropriate.

That said, I can foresee situations when one or more of the Commissions may have legislative or budgetary recommendations that the Mayor does not support; or when the Mayor proposes a legislative or budgetary recommendation that one or more of the Commissions do not support.

Neither of these situations lends itself to neat, theoretical solutions. My actions would depend on the specific nature and details of the situation, but they would be guided by the following principles:

- **Transparency:** As much as possible, I would convey to all parties the positions that each of us hold on the proposal in question. I regard it as critical to provide the best communication and policy advice to all parties.
- **Clarity:** I would make it clear to all parties my own position and situational responsibilities. I do report directly to the Mayor's Office and I do have reporting responsibilities to City Council.
- **Respect for institutional roles and positions:** I have great respect for the statutory independence of the Commissions, and I would not stand in the way of their conveying their own recommendations to Council, even if they contradicted the Mayor's position. At the same time, I would take appropriate steps to inform the

Commissions of the Mayor's position. I also would safeguard the Commissions' ability to communicate directly with Council regarding their positions on issues, regardless of the Mayor's stance.

- 2. Another responsibility of the SOCR Director is to administer all ordinances pertaining to the Office for Civil Rights and take appropriate remedial action where necessary. How much do you think the Director should emphasize the duty to oversee investigation of complaints, in comparison to the Director's policy role?*

OCR serves at least three functions. We are an enforcement agency that investigates allegations of discrimination and violations of two labor ordinances. Our enforcement unit conducts full and thorough investigations, negotiates settlements when possible, and issues findings and conclusions to the Charging Party and Respondent. Enforcement operates in a neutral, unbiased manner; it plays no role in advocacy, except to uphold the ordinances and the laws it enforces.

In addition, SOCR advises the Mayor and City Council on a variety of policy issues concerning discrimination and social justice that impact both City of Seattle employees and the community at large. SOCR also coordinates the City of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), which works to achieve racial equity within Seattle City government and in partnership with the community.

I regard these three key roles (enforcement, policy and RSJI) as complimentary, not in competition or conflict with one another. In practice, the enforcement unit's work is ongoing and not affected by policy initiatives and developments. In the same way, SOCR's policy and RSJI roles and workloads are determined by factors that are not related to the specific work of the enforcement unit. I see myself as responsible for ensuring that all three functions move forward smoothly, productively and that the enforcement unit remains, as it should, a neutral operation.

- 3. The Office of the Auditor issued a recent report that responds to the 2013-2014 City Council Statement of Legislative Intent in which the report reviews the adequacy of the Seattle Office for Civil Rights' investigation and enforcement functions and provides information about its technical assistance to businesses.*

Will you seek standards for improvement as noted in the City Auditor's SOCR Enforcement and Outreach Audit?

SOCR has taken steps to implement all of the recommendations suggested by the Auditor's Office, and I look forward to reporting on this in detail on March 19, 2014.

4. *What is an example of your past leadership and achievement with SOCR or in general with civil rights?*

My leadership interests are both formal and informal. For example, I am a Past President of the Latina/o Bar Association of Washington where I served as a director from 2007 to 2011. During my tenure as President, I led a local response to Arizona State's Immigration law and need for global immigration reform. During that same time, LBAW, under my direction, responded to allegations of Seattle Police Department's excessive use of force in the Monetti case - this response resulted in a multi-community coalition that addressed the need for police reform.

In 2011, I was selected as a National Hispania Leadership Institute Fellow. NHLI is a non-profit organization designed to address the disparity of representation of Latinas in leadership positions. As a fellow, I attended a four-week program in the span of nine months that included, a week-long leadership program at the Harvard Kennedy School, a week at the Center for Creative Leadership, one week in Washington D.C. meeting with elected and appointed officials and a week of leadership team building. This intensive program served to focus my interest in community advocacy and provided me with an enhanced skill set for such work.

In 2009, I was appointed to the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission which considered the impact of race, implicit bias and inequities of the criminal justice system. I have also been and remain active with community-based organizations such as El Centro De La Raza, Casa Latina (recently resigned as a board member), as well as multi-organization coalitions that serve community members in the human services and civil rights arenas.

As the first generation in my family to graduate from college, I am a keen believer that education is the great equalizer. To that end, for years I have participated in education pipeline programs designed to keep students of color in school (both in Yakima, Bellevue and Seattle, Washington). I have also served as mentor to both Seattle University and the University of Washington Latina law school students.

5. *What are your goals for the next three years, if confirmed, and what do you see as the most significant challenges to achieving those goals?*

My goals for the next three years include:

- Enforcement:
 - Lead the enforcement unit to develop a system of more proactive case resolutions, settlements and closures, i.e. more effectively offer facilitated

resolution opportunities before the parties to a charge become obligated to respond to time-consuming requests for information. I believe this would satisfy some respondents' concerns that the investigative process is too time-consuming, particularly when the final outcome is readily apparent. It will also improve the pace of case closures, and increase our percentage of cases that result in settlements for Charging Parties.

- Upgrade our enforcement unit technology to increase automation that will standardize investigative processes and better manage case information and achieve greater efficiencies.
- Policy and outreach:
 - Center SOCR's policy function within the department, to serve and be seen as the "social justice experts" both internally to City government and also externally to other jurisdictions. Our policy work should support best practices in City government, and also be the place where other departments can receive policy assistance and learn about best practices and innovations at the national level.
 - Improve the depth, breadth and quality of SOCR's community outreach. Our outreach plans should include clear identification of goals, the communities we strive to reach, and rigorous quality control to ensure effectiveness.
 - Expand SOCR's business outreach to ensure a diverse pool of businesses are recruited and invited to participate proactively in SOCR's process as key stakeholders. I see the advisory group created by the Job Assistance Ordinance as a model for this type of transparent participation.
- Race and Social Justice Initiative:
 - This year marks the last year of RSJI's current three-year strategic plan. In 2014 SOCR will assess RSJI's progress and develop a new RSJI three-year plan. The project will launch on April 19, 2014, with the first of several community focus group discussions. SOCR will inform the conversation with information gathered from the first RSJI Community Survey (conducted in Q4 2013). The focus group discussions are intended to ensure that we: 1) fully understand the community's identified challenges; 2) construct targeted strategies to address the identified barriers to equity and 3) incorporate the appropriate measurement strategy to allow for meaningful measurement and/or success of the targeted strategy. I will work closely with the Mayor's Office and Council to seek input on elected officials' vision for RSJI, as well as to ensure alignment with Citywide goals and initiatives.

6. *Can you describe and discuss what you see as the top challenges and complexities facing the SOCR? How might you address those challenges and complexities?*

Our challenges:

Measures of success: SOCR must continue to develop and use clear measures to gauge our success, in enforcement, policy and RSJI. While measuring the performance, productivity and quality of the enforcement unit is relatively straightforward and easy to assess, measuring the effectiveness of community outreach and RSJI is much more challenging. For example, one RSJI goal is to serve as a culture change agent, however, measuring the effectiveness of RSJI's strategies to accomplish this goal is not as clear cut. Previously, RSJI created the Racial Equity Toolkit to create greater equity in City programs and policies. At first glance, one may wonder, how do we measure the effectiveness of the Toolkit. But we know the use of the Toolkit has assisted numerous City departments in developing appropriate programs and policies. In that instance, we can measure the Toolkit's usefulness by its positive impact on a Department program, such as the SDOT's use of a RSJI lens to develop its Pedestrian Master Plan or the City Attorney's Office decision to seek 364 days (rather than 365 days) for gross misdemeanors to avoid a potential deportation trigger for some non-citizen defendants. In other words, selecting the appropriate measurement is key to a meaningful assessment.

In sum, we must be able to clearly demonstrate the impact of our work. To this end, SOCR is wrestling to determine key measurements that will guide our future assessment analysis. We must be clear about what measures we choose as quantifiers of our success. How we frame our query plays a powerful role in determining our current and future strategies. We are currently working with the Mayor's Office to develop meaningful measurement tools to apply to our strategies.

Coordination of City services: How do we break down silos among departments to develop coordinated solutions to larger, more structural issues? This problem reaches beyond a small department like SOCR, but it impacts our work nonetheless. For example, SOCR frequently deals with housing, employment and mental health issues, but our mandated scope of action can be much narrower than what customers actually require. How can we coordinate with other departments to develop better, more comprehensive ways to serve Seattle residents?

Resources: SOCR struggles with a shortage of resources. As a new director, I bring fresh eyes to the Office for Civil Rights. SOCR staff accomplishes extraordinary things from week to week, but we creatively scramble to keep up, especially in areas of work that are essentially unfunded. For example, SOCR is responsible for the City's ADA coordination (non-facilities), yet we do so without funding for this position. We have re-allocated internal resources to satisfy our ADA Coordinator responsibilities, but these types of solutions are not sustainable options.

7. How can you demonstrate your commitment to diversity in hiring, workplace operations, contracting, and constituent services?

SOCR is one of the most diverse departments in the Seattle City government. We attract individuals who are committed and passionate about civil rights, including those who have personally experienced the challenges and pain of discrimination. I anticipate that our next new-hires likely will be bilingual community advocates who have the interest, aptitude and ability to conduct RSJI trainings to City employees and community members, who will assist in outreach and engagement, including outreach to minority owned businesses and who will bring their unique perspectives to our department.

8. How can a director of SOCR maintain good employee morale and motivation?

It's my promise to support SOCR's talented, dedicated employees in their work, to help them grow, to communicate freely, and to be fair and respectful. I also pledge that I will give them the recognition they deserve, go to bat for them, and have fun while we work hard.

The demand to serve is strong: many in our City and in our communities rely on the services SOCR offers. I trust that all of us at SOCR will continue to meet this demand with professionalism, dedication and passion for justice.