



**Washington County  
Auditor's Office**

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**Racial/Ethnic Diversity  
of  
County Boards and Commissions**

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Final Report  
November 29, 2022



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County Auditor

# Diversity of County Boards and Commissions

## Executive Summary

We undertook this project to assess the effectiveness of County efforts to diversify the membership of County boards & commissions (boards). The objective of this review is to determine whether the membership of Washington County boards on December 31, 2021 was more racially/ethnically diverse than the membership of boards on December 31, 2018, and to examine relationships between certain changes in board governance and increases in board diversity.

What we found:

- Diversity is maximized when all groups are represented and have equal shares of the population. Proportionality or representativeness is maximized when the proportions of a characteristic in a body match those of the general population. The two are easily confused, and the County's Equity Resolution is ambiguous.
- The racial/ethnic diversity of County boards increased substantially between 2018 and 2021, but county boards remain substantially less diverse than the county population.
- The racial/ethnic representativeness of County boards increased slightly between 2018 and 2021, but the County clearly has a way to go to achieve racial/ethnic proportionality.
- The overrepresentation of Whites and the underrepresentation of Hispanics contributed most to the disproportionality of board membership.
- Blacks and Whites are overrepresented on County boards relative to their share of the county population.
- County efforts to increase board diversity appear to have been effective.
- Changes to the BCC and County Administration appear to have played a substantial role in increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of appointments to county boards.
- Providing the BCC with race/ethnicity information on applicants had a substantial impact on the diversity of county boards.

- Changes to board bylaws do not appear to have increased racial/ethnic diversity or proportionality, but the full effect of such changes may not yet be apparent.

What we recommend:

1. The BCC should clarify the language of the Equity Resolution to define the concept of diversity more clearly.
2. The County should clarify its goals for board diversity.
3. To increase the racial/equity diversity of board membership, the County should reduce White membership and increase the number of board members from all other race/ethnicity groups.
4. To increase racial/equity proportionality of board membership, the County should reduce the proportions of Black and White membership and increase the proportions of Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Island and multi-racial members.
5. To increase the racial/ethnic diversity of board membership, the County should continue to provide the BCC with the race/ethnicity of board applicants.
6. The County should continue its efforts to increase racial/ethnic diversity by revising membership provisions in board bylaws.
7. County Counsel should monitor upcoming U.S. Supreme Court decisions and advise the BCC whether and how it can continue to consider race/ethnicity in making board appointments.
8. The County should encourage applicants for County boards to share additional information regarding their identification with "any group that is societally, socially or economically disadvantaged and is considered a protected class by federal or state law" so that it may more effectively fulfill its commitment to "dismantling long-standing systems, programs, policies and practices that may have historically created obstacles to the success of ... [other marginalized groups]" in appointments to County boards.

## Introduction/Background

In February 2020 the BCC adopted the Washington County Equity Resolution. That resolution defines “Diversity” as “the ways in which people differ. Diversity encompasses all of the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another.” Other language in the resolution helps to clarify the characteristics of interest. The government of Washington County commits itself to “dismantling long-standing systems, programs, policies and practices that may have historically created obstacles to the success of people of color, members of ethnic communities and any marginalized group.”

In this report we examine the effectiveness of County efforts to increase the racial/ethnic diversity of its appointed boards, committees and commissions (boards). Washington County has several appointed boards. Most boards advise the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) on particular county programs. Two, the Board of Property Tax Appeals and the Civil Service Commission, perform quasi-judicial functions, resolving disputes involving property taxes and civil service employment, respectively. Some boards are established by state law, but most have been created by the BCC to provide community input into County decision-making.

Most board members are volunteers appointed by the BCC. Several are County employees serving specified roles in the County. Because County actions, such as County recruitment efforts, BCC discretion and/or County hiring and promotion practices, can influence the diversity of these seats, we refer to them as “discretionary seats.” Approximately eighty percent (80%) of total board seats are discretionary seats.

Some board members are elected officials or non-County employees specified as members in state law, board by-laws, or intergovernmental agreements. Other members are appointed by officials or groups other than the County. Because the County has no influence over the diversity of these seats, we refer to them as “non-discretionary seats.” Approximately twenty percent (20%) of total board seats are non-discretionary seats.

County boards range in size from three to twenty-one seats. To ensure we were comparing “apples to apples,” we focused our attention and analyses on 24 boards in place in both 2018 and 2021. 244 of 259 seats (94%) on these boards were occupied at the end of 2018. 247 of 282 seats (88%) were occupied at the end of 2021.

Our primary objective was to assess the effectiveness of County efforts to diversify the membership of County boards. We examined changes in the collective racial/ethnic membership of these boards at the end of 2018 and the end of 2021. To identify County impacts on board diversity, we looked particularly for changes in the diversity of discretionary seats. To examine the effectiveness of County efforts to increase board diversity, we looked for relationships between actions taken by the County and increases in the diversity of discretionary seats.

## Diversity vs. Proportionality

Expectations of what it means for a population to become more racially and ethnically “diverse” may differ. To some it may simply mean increasing the number of members from minority groups. To others, it may mean more closely matching the membership of racial/ethnic groups to their proportions in the general population. To some, it may mean increasing the number of different racial/ethnic groups included, and to others, it may refer to approaching an equal number of members from each racial/ethnic group.

The concept of racial/ethnic diversity we use is that adopted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Diversity refers to the representation and relative size of different racial and ethnic groups within a population. Diversity is maximized when all groups are represented in equal shares.

Diversity is sometimes confused with proportionality or representativeness. For example, the County informs applicants to its boards that one of its appointment criteria is the degree to which the candidate will contribute to demographic variety reflecting the racial population of the region. Such language suggests that the County’s goal is proportionality rather than diversity

We examined changes in both the racial/ethnic diversity and the racial/ethnic proportionality of the total membership of 24 county boards between 2018 and 2021.

## Finding and Conclusions

Overall, the number of Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) members on county boards increased by sixteen seats from 2018 to 2021, while White membership decreased by twelve seats. Seats filled by Asians or Asian Americans more than doubled from five to twelve. Black or African American seats nearly doubled from 7 to 13.

### ***Racial/Ethnic Diversity of Board Membership***

The Census uses a Racial and Ethnic Diversity Index to measure the diversity of the United States, and the states and counties of the country. The Racial and Ethnic Diversity Index of the U.S Census measures the probability that two people chosen at random will be from different race and ethnicity groups. The measure varies from 0% to 100% and tells us that in 2020 the chance that two people chosen at random from the US population would be from different racial and ethnic groups was 61.1%. State diversity in 2020 ranged from 18.5% in Maine to 76.0% in Hawaii. In 2020 Washington County (DI = 58.0%) was the most diverse county in Oregon, and Oregon (DI = 46.1%) ranked 29<sup>th</sup> in diversity among the 50 states.

To examine increases in the racial/ethnic diversity of Washington County boards, we calculated DI for the collective membership of county boards in place at the end of 2018 and the end of 2021. The DI of board membership rose from 25% in 2018 to 36% in 2021. While this represents

**a substantial increase (11%) in board diversity, county boards remained substantially less diverse than the county population (2021 DI = 58%).**

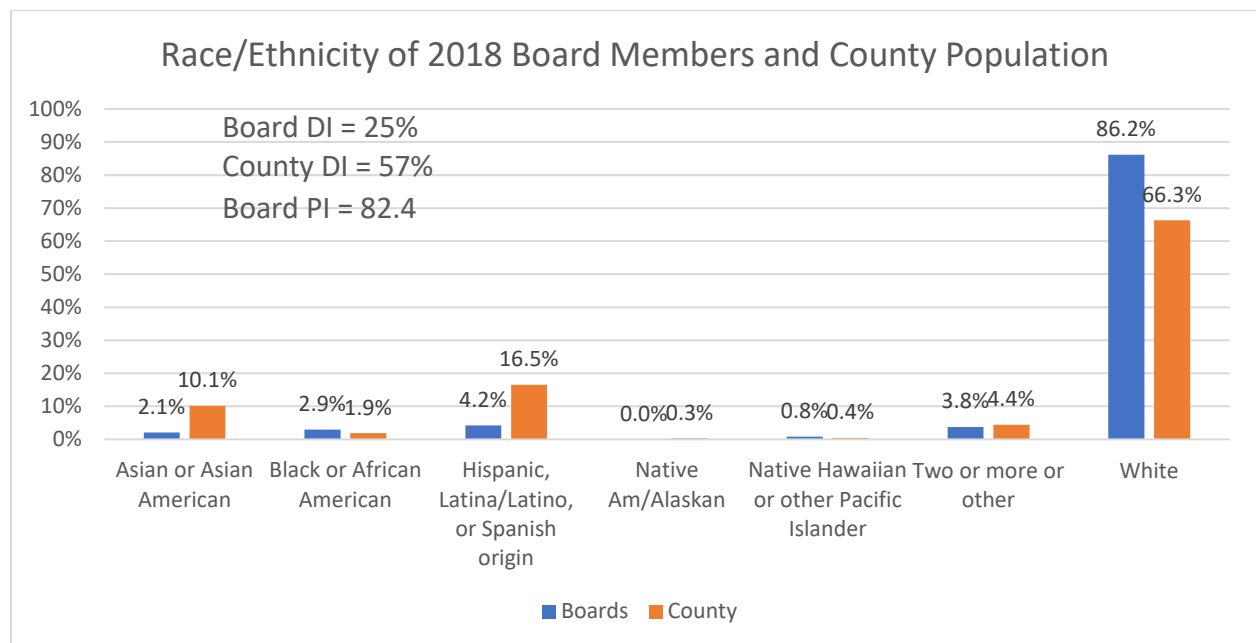
The diversity index for discretionary seats on county boards rose by 10% over this period. This indicates that **the actions of county government contributed substantially to the increase in the diversity of county boards.**

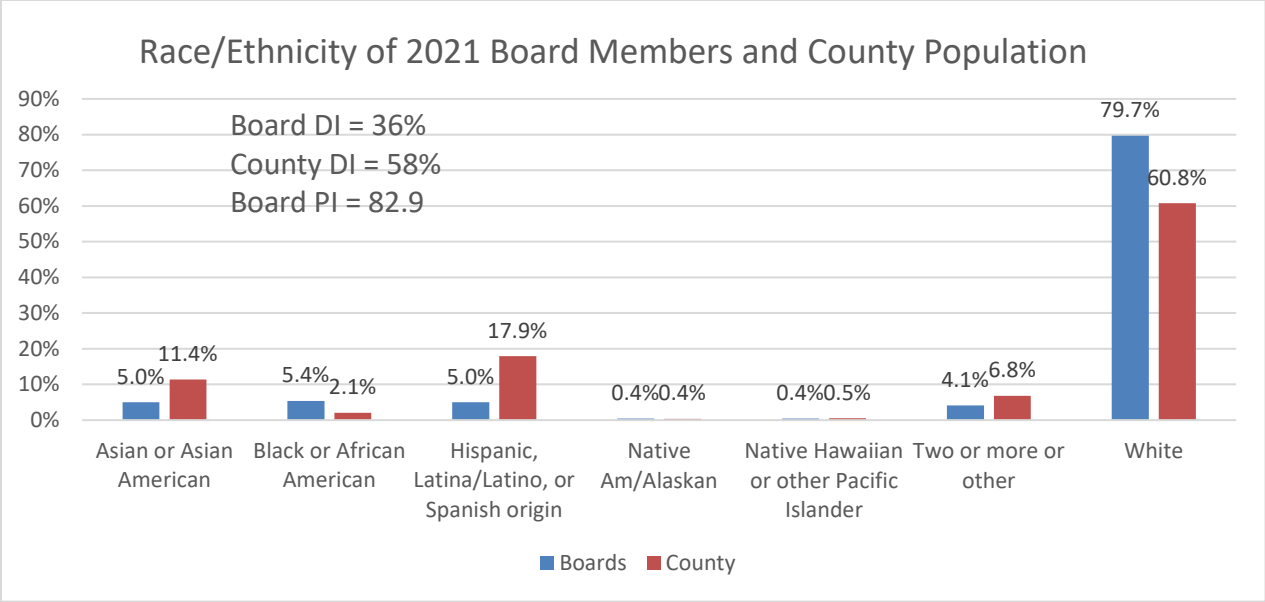
***Racial/Ethnic Proportionality of Board Membership***

Racial/ethnic proportionality or representativeness refers to the extent to which the racial/ethnic makeup of a group matches the racial/ethnic proportions of the general population. An increase in racial/ethnic proportionality means that racial/ethnic membership of a group more closely resembles that of the general population. Representativeness is maximized when those proportions match perfectly.

We calculated a proportionality index of board membership as a measure of the extent to which the collective membership of these 24 boards matched the racial/ethnic proportions of the county population in each year. Proportionality scores range from 0 to 100, and the higher the score, the more closely board membership reflects the racial/ethnic proportion of the county population.

In 2018 the proportionality of county boards was 82.5. In 2021 it was 82.9. This shows **a slight increase in the representativeness of board membership.** The challenge the County faces in making its boards more representative is that the County itself is becoming increasingly diverse. Washington County is chasing a moving target and despite the significant increase in the DI of board membership, board representativeness (PI) remains virtually unchanged.





As shown in the table below, **overrepresentation of Whites and underrepresentation of Hispanics contribute most to the disproportionality of county boards.** Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites are overrepresented on county boards compared to their shares of the county population.

Percent of County Population and Board Seats by Race/Ethnicity 2021

Race/Ethnicity	Boards %	County %	Difference
Asian or Asian American	4.9%	11.4%	-6.5%
Black or African American	5.4%	2.1%	+3.3%
Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish descent	4.9%	17.9%	-13.0%
Native American or Alaskan Native	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.5%	-0.01%
Two or more races	4.1%	6.8%	-2.7%
White, not Hispanic	79.7%	60.8%	+18.9%

## **Changes in Board Governance**

We also explored how significant changes to BCC membership and County Administration, changes to the BCC's appointment process, and changes to board bylaws may have impacted the diversity of discretionary seats on County boards.

### ***Changes to Appointing Authorities***

The BCC appoints applicants to most of the discretionary seats on county boards. Some seats are filled by employees hired and promoted by county management. A BCC of five white men, of whom a majority were conservatives, and the personnel actions of county management led by a white male determined appointments to the 2018 boards. The general practice was that department liaisons recommended board applicants for appointment, and the BCC followed those recommendations.

Seats on the 2021 boards were filled by a majority progressive BCC. Three new Commissioners joined the BCC on January 1, 2019, and the new BCC was less inclined to follow departmental recommendations for board appointments. By January 1, 2021, the County had its first-ever female County Administrator and its first-ever BIPOC Commissioner. The BCC was now majority female and progressive. The County had established its Office of Equity Inclusion and Community Engagement and hired its first-ever Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer.

We examined the diversity of board members appointed before January 1, 2019, those appointed in 2019 or 2020, and those appointed in 2021 to explore how these changes may have impacted county boards. The diversity index of discretionary seats on the 2018 boards was 28%. Discretionary seats filled between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2020 had a diversity index of 39%, and those filled in 2021 had a diversity index of 46%. **Changes to the BCC and County Administration appear to have played a substantial role in increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of appointments to county boards.**

### ***Availability of Race/Ethnicity Information of Board Applicants***

Before February 2021, applicants could indicate their race/ethnicity on their applications form but were instructed that it would not be considered in making appointments. Demographic information was not provided to the BCC when making appointments. Beginning in February 2021, applicants were encouraged to provide their race/ethnicity and were told that:

*Washington County is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Completing the demographic information on the application is voluntary, but we encourage you to provide that information. The County uses this information to help ensure that advisory body appointments represent a broad cross-section of community. State and federal law prohibit use of this information to discriminate against you; however we will consider as elements of our appointment criteria, the degree to which the candidate will contribute*



*to one or more of the following: (a) Diversity of viewpoint; (b) Demographic variety reflecting the racial and gender population of the state or the region of appointment; and (c) Remediation of existing disparities between the number of qualified applicants of one race or gender and the number of members of such groups serving on the board, commission, committee or council.*

Board liaisons provided the BCC with the race/ethnicity of applicants and informed the BCC what the racial/ethnic composition of a board would be if the BCC made recommended appointments.

We examined the change in the racial/ethnic diversity of discretionary seats on the 2021 boards held by members appointed before and after racial/ethnic identity information became available to the BCC. Discretionary seats held by applicants appointed before February 2021 had a racial/ethnic diversity index of 33%, while those held by applicants appointed after the BCC received this information had an index of 52%. This 19% increase in diversity strongly suggests that **providing the BCC with race/ethnicity information on applicants played a substantial role in increasing the diversity of county boards.**

### ***Changes to Bylaws***

Between April 2019 and April 2021, the BCC adopted new language in the bylaws of eight of the twenty-four boards reviewed. New language on board membership increased the emphasis on member diversity, added seats to the board and/or limited the length and number of terms that members can serve. We examined the impact of these bylaw changes. Because seven of the eight boards changed more than one provision, we were unable to isolate the impact of each type of change.

The collective diversity index of boards with changed bylaws increased from 25% to 33%, a gain of eight percentage points. However, boards whose bylaws remained unchanged increased their index from 26% to 36%, a gain of ten percentage points. **We cannot conclude that BCC changes to board bylaws have been effective in increasing racial/ethnic diversity.**

**Neither can we conclude that BCC changes to bylaws increased the racial/ethnic representativeness of county boards.** Boards that made bylaws changes had a collective proportionality score of 85.2 in 2021, down slightly from 85.6 in 2018. Boards that made no changes increased their proportionality score from 86.1 to 87.0.

We note that at the end of 2021, fifteen seats (13%) on the eight boards that changed their bylaws remained unfilled. This suggests that the impacts of bylaw changes may not have been fully realized by that time.

### **Racial/Ethnic Diversity and Proportionality**

Today both diversity and representativeness are seen as worthy goals in government but increasing either can mean sacrificing the other.

Maximizing the diversity of board membership would reduce the proportionality score from the current 82.9 to 62.8. On the other hand, maximizing the representativeness of board membership would limit board diversity to that of the county population (currently 58%).

Current board membership clearly tilts toward proportionality over diversity. A more balanced approach to diversity and proportionality might achieve scores for each index of about 80. For example, the racial/ethnic proportions for boards in the table below would yield a DI of 79% and a PI of 81.

Race/Ethnicity	Boards %	County %	Difference
Asian or Asian American	10%	11.4%	-1.4%
Black or African American	10%	2.1%	+7.9%
Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish descent	10%	17.9%	-7.9%
Native American or Alaskan Native	10%	0.4%	+9.6%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	10%	0.5%	+9.5%
Two or more races	10%	6.8%	+3.2%
White, not Hispanic	40%	60.8%	-20.8%

We encourage the County to **clarify its diversity goal for board membership**. Until the goal is clear, we cannot really assess progress toward the goal. If the County goal is to increase the diversity (DI) of board membership, it has made significant progress. However, if the County’s goal is to increase the representativeness (PI) of board membership to an increasingly diverse County population, it has barely moved the needle.

### Legal Developments

Decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States in pending and future cases could impact DEI efforts throughout the country, including the BCC’s ability to consider race/ethnicity as a factor in appointment to county boards. County Counsel should monitor developments and inform the Board on this issue.



November 21, 2022

John Hutzler, County Auditor  
Washington County Auditor's Office  
221 S First Avenue  
Hillsboro, OR 97123-3901

Dear Mr. Hutzler,

This letter provides a written response to the County Auditor's final draft audit report titled *Diversity of County Boards and Commissions*.

Thank you for sharing your audit report and taking the time to audit the diversity of boards and commissions. Below is our response to each recommendation in the audit

**RECOMMENDATION 1**

The BCC should clarify the language of the Equity Resolution to define the concept of diversity more clearly.

**Response:**

It may be helpful to the public and the Washington County workforce to define the concept of diversity more clearly. Diversity is a complex concept that includes visible and invisible, as well as permanent and changeable differences. CAO/OEICE will provide recommendations for Board consideration.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

The County should clarify its goals for board and commission diversity.

**Response:**

Agree. CAO/OEICE will provide recommendations for Board consideration.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**

To increase the racial/equity diversity of board membership, the County should reduce White membership and increase the number of board members from all other race/ethnicity groups.

**Response:**

Board and Commission membership diversity has increased. CAO/OEICE feels the County should reduce the barriers to service on Boards and Commissions for all community members. OEICE will continue to provide targeted outreach to under-represented communities and promote demographics of board and commissions members that reflect the diversity of the County's population.

**RECOMMENDATION 4**

To increase racial/equity proportionality of board membership, the County should reduce the proportions of Black and White membership and increase the proportions of Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Island and multi-racial members.

**Response:**

Board and Commission membership diversity has increased. CAO/OEICE feels the County should reduce the barriers to service on Boards and Commissions for all community members. OEICE will continue to provide targeted outreach to under-represented communities and promote demographics of board and commissions members that reflect the diversity of the County’s population.

**RECOMMENDATION 5**

To increase the racial/ethnic diversity of board membership, the County should continue to provide the BCC with the race/ethnicity of board applicants.

**Response:**

Agree. These demographics are shared at the time of appointment with the Board and will continue to be reported cumulatively on an annual basis.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

The County should continue its efforts to increase racial/ethnic diversity by revising membership provisions in board bylaws.

**Response**

Agree. CAO will share this with all departments/offices in the County and ask they work with OEICE to consider EDI language in the periodic revisions of their respective bylaws, recognizing that not all boards and commissions have bylaws that can be changed.

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

County Counsel should monitor upcoming U.S. Supreme Court decisions and advise the BCC whether and how it can continue to consider race/ethnicity in making board appointments.

**Response:**

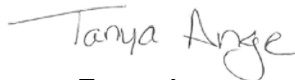
Current US Supreme Court considerations of diversity are limited to race-based criteria used to provide preferences in higher education. The county does not use race-based criteria. The county focuses on reducing barriers to participation by under-represented members of the community.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

The County should encourage applicants for County boards to share additional information regarding their identification with “any group that is societally, socially or economically disadvantaged and is considered a protected class by federal or state law” so that it may more effectively fulfill its commitment to “dismantling long-standing systems, programs, policies and practices that may have historically created obstacles to the success of ... [other marginalized groups]” in appointments to County boards.

<b>Response:</b>
The BCC and County staff will continue to encourage applicants to complete the demographic questions and highlight relevant aspects of their lived and professional experience in their application. BCC's continued attention to the diversity of lived and professional experiences in board appointments will continue to promote overall board diversity.

Sincerely,



Tanya Ange  
County  
Administrator

cc: