Reimagining Policing, Security and Incarcerated Labor Project

Project Background and Design

October 2021

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WHY IS THIS WORK IMPORTANT?

This commitment is informed by the calls for advancing racial justice by Reimagine Oregon and other Black community leaders during this time of increased social awareness of the countless killings of Black and Brown people across the United States at the hands of police. Due to this increased social awareness, Portland's Black community, among others, are demanding a reimagining of how our society chooses to conduct public safety and approach justice. Metro is committed to our own reimagining process in line with these demands – rethinking our relationships with the carceral system and approaches to policing, security and incarcerated labor. This project will elevate the work of many community groups and partners who have and are deeply engaging in this work. This includes utilizing published reports, recordings of trainings and conversations and engagement as needed.

PAALF (now known as Imagine Black) states, "Police agencies in Portland, including Portland Police Bureau, Multnomah County Sheriff, Trimet police, and Portland State's Campus Public Safety officers, like police in other cities, maintain practices of violence against BIPOC people; poor and houseless people; queer, trans, and gender non-binary people; and immigrants and refugees." Much of this violence can be traced back to settler colonial roots. In the article, Indigenous Cultural Values Counter the Damages of White Settler Colonialism, "settler colonialism is a structure not an event' (2006, 388). Like any structure, it requires ongoing maintenance, and like all systems of oppression that require denial of privilege to come, the structure of settler colonialism largely remains invisible. Over time, it comes to seem permanent, impenetrable and appears inevitable." This is project will allow Metro to understand our influence to better these outcomes.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The purpose of this project is to inform policies and practices that will reduce the harm of Policing, Security and Incarcerated Labor has on Black, Indigenous and other communities and staff of color.

Through this project, we seek to create deeper understanding about how government actions, including Metro's budget and policy decisions, have led to inequitable access, opportunity and outcomes for Black people in the greater Portland area. Since Metro is committed to taking action to dismantle racist systems, this is one of many necessary steps the agency can take to create more welcoming communities where Black, Indigenous and people of color in our region can benefit equitably from public investments.

The project process continues to center black folks' voices and is dedicated to educating Metro staff involved through research, recorded trainings/talks and other information available to us. A comprehensive collection of facts related to the disparities across the criminal legal and prison systems can be found in *There's overwhelming evidence that the criminal justice system is racist. Here's the proof* published by the Washington Post. A selection of statistics are included below.

Information about the criminal legal system and its impact on Black, Indigenous and other people of color

- The criminal legal system, at each point in the process from stops to arrests to convictions, discriminates against Black, Indigenous, and other people of color at alarming rates compared to white folks.
- A large study completed in 2020 of 95 million traffic stops in the US found that black people wre much more likely to be pulled over than white people, and black drivers were also more likely to have their cars searched after a stop even though white drivers were more likely to be found with illicit drugs.
  - A 2019 study in Portland reinforced this national trend, finding that black drivers and pedestrians were much more likely to be stopped, receive tickets and be arrested for drug possession than their white counterparts.
- Police use-of-force is also disproportionately used against Black people – a 2019 study found that black men were 2.5 times more likely than white men to be killed by police.
- According to data published by the Department of Education, Black students in 2016 were nearly four times more likely to be suspended than white students. Disparate rates of school discipline can increase interactions with the criminal legal system and supports the school-to-prison pipeline that helps account for disparate rates of incarceration for Black Americans.

Information about the carceral (prison) system and its impact on Black Indigenous and other people of color

- About 1.5 million people are now imprisoned in the United States, producing the highest rates of incarceration in the world. Since 1980, the number of people in U.S. federal, state or local prisons and jails has increased more than 450%. This number becomes exponentially bigger when considering the more than 7 million individuals under some form of correctional control in our nation (held, incarcerated, paroled, furloughed).
- The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world and the highest number of people behind bars, far higher than the rates of other heavily populated countries. As a result of the growth in prisons, the "punishment industry," estimated at $182 billion per year, has become a key contributor to the U.S economy – from private prisons that require investments, design, financing and new construction to build – to developers of new technologies used by law enforcement, all the way down to the phone cards sold at higher than market rates to inmates.
- Businesses and public agencies directly benefit economically from the carceral system by tapping into prison labor since they can compensate workers at a rate far below that of the minimum wage.
- More than 70% of people in prison are people of color. The imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women. Although there is limited data about formerly incarcerated Native and Indigenous peoples, the 2010 Census data reveals that Native peoples are overrepresented in the criminal legal system and are incarcerated at a rate more than double that of white Americans. In states with large Native American populations, such as North Dakota and Oklahoma, incarceration rates of Native peoples can be up to seven times that of white populations.

POLICY CONTEXT – PLANS AND DEMANDS

As national, local and internal calls for accountability continue, the project team continues to follow organizations and research that guide accountability and change. Below are demands and plans specific to Metro that call us into this work and demand a more safe community for Black and brown greater Portlanders and staff.

Reimagine Oregon

A group of Black leader's came together in summer 2020 to work with elected officials to begin dismantling systemic racism in Oregon, recognizing that police violence is rooted in a web of oppressive systems, under-investment and inequitable access to resources, opportunity and stability.

Policy demands include specific actions among the following topic areas:

- Education
- Police divestments
- Housing
- Health & wellbeing
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Community Safety
- Legislative process

Metro Council continues to engage, lead, and support the work of Reimagine Oregon, while delivering on our specific commitments.

Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Metro's own Strategic Plan to Advance Equity (SPAREDI) calls us into this space through the following goals:

- Goal B: Meaningfully engage communities of color. This means listening to and centering the voices of all marginalized communities and prioritizing their needs in our actions.
- Goal C: Metro hires, trains and promotes a racially diverse workforce. This means creating work places that feel welcoming and safe to Black and Indigenous staff and other staff of color.
- Goal D: Metro creates safe and welcoming services, programs and destinations. This means ensuring that Black, brown, queer, trans, femme, disabled and undocumented visitors and program participants feel safe and welcome and are free from harassment and discrimination.

Black Caucus & POC ERG

In September 2020 the People of Color & Black Caucus employee resource groups (ERG) submitted a letter to Marissa Madrigal titled "Demands to address systemic racism and white supremacy at Metro".

These demands were based on a compilation of survey responses that the ERG received during the summer of 2020. Below are some of the demands from the letter:

- Metro needs to ban all contracts and procurement that exploit people experiencing incarceration. For current or potential contracts that include labor by people experiencing incarceration. Metro needs to either ensure workers are paid a living wage or cancel the contracts. The decision-making process to determine this action must include people experiencing incarceration who will be impacted by the decision. All product and capital procurement needs to be purchased from companies who pay their workers a living wage.

- Metro needs to change its policy on refusing to employ workers with criminal backgrounds.

  - Context: If a person is safe enough to work side by side with our employees as a temp, they are safe enough to become a Metro employee. Currently Metro refuses to employ some workers with criminal backgrounds even though they are already working side by side with Metro employees.

- Metro council should update code, administrative rules and all intergovernmental agreements requiring that police departments and government agencies working with them can no longer qualify for grant funds. These documents also need to be reviewed and updated to require that applicants must focus on projects that support the agency's DEL strategy and allocates resources towards those most vulnerable.

- Create a safe environment for Black staff and build better systems of accountability, reporting and repair to support employees experiencing harassment and reduce incidences of harassment.

- Metro needs to ban police from receiving any allocation of funding from grants, bonds, tax revenue, etc. that is intended to increase livability in our region.

  - Context: As an example, Oregon City recently awarded its police department $25,000 to sweep people experiencing homelessness out of their city. Their funding comes from Metro's community enhancement grant program.

Committee on Racial Equity

On June 18, 2020 Metro's Committee on Racial Equity (CORE) drafted and collectively signed a letter to Metro Council (Attachment C) calling on Council to advance safety and prosperity for the region's Black community by advancing the policy agendas set forth by Portland African American Leadership Forum (PAALF) and Unite Oregon. These agendas called for divestment in harmful systems, reinvestments in Black lives, and projection for BIPOC communities from violence.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project is working to document the agency's touch points with police, security, and our use of incarcerated labor, facilitate a path forward on addressing those touch points and create action plans to help guide the work.

Project Goals & Outcomes

- **Completion of Reimagining Policing, Security and Incarcerated Labor Learning Cohort**
  The learning cohort created a space for participants to gain a deeper understanding of how the law enforcement and carceral systems connect with their work.
- **Internal assessment**
  The internal assessment will inventory Metro's touch points with Police, Security and Incarcerated Labor within the Parks and Nature, Waste Prevention and Environmental Services, Venues and Planning and Development departments. This will provide context that will guide the development of the department action plans.
- **Decision Making Framework working group**
  The Decision Making Framework working group, made up of staff with personal and/or professional experiences relevant to this work, will help set the vision and direction for the agency as we make decisions to address our touch points with police, security and incarcerated labor.
- **Department action plans**
  With direction from the Decision Making Framework working group, Policing Committee members will develop department specific action plans that address their departments touch points and goals to address those touch points that align with agency goals.
- **Coordinate a process for project transition to implementation**
  The project team is committed to a smooth transition as the work moves to the implementation phase of the actions plans. We will work to secure possible funding sources needed to implement this work.

Project process to date

- **Developing Shared Learning and Shared Analysis**
  The shared learning and shared analysis project phase set the foundation for long term project success. During the winter/spring of 2021 the project leadership team led a 4-part learning cohort series that covered the basics of criminology, racial disparities across criminal justice and planted the seed for us to engage in this work. The cohort included staff that were supporting the work of the project. This series helped create a shared language and a shared analysis among participants. We have continued to engage with the cohort monthly to offer additional space to dive into these topics.

- **Development and workgroups**
  The project leadership team has convened two teams to support the success of the work. Those teams are the Policing Committee and the Decision Making Framework working group. Both teams support the project by guiding decisions and leading important bodies of work respectively. To date the team have completed the learning cohort and documented and analyzed their department specific internal assessments.

- **Completion of Internal Assessment**
  Metro has many touch points with security, policing and the use of incarcerated labor. This project has inventoried touch points in the departments listed below and will begin to assess if there are alternative strategies to better reflect Metro's values and commitments.

  - Parks and Nature
  - Waste Prevention and Environmental Services
  - Venues
  - Planning and Development

Additional outcomes and bodies of work
- Security at Metro sites
  Project team members have been working to reimagine what security looks like at the Metro Regional Center (MRC). The work includes re-evaluating the entrance of MRC to feel more welcoming to BIPOC staff, guests and community members and reworking existing security job descriptions that will take a trauma-informed approach to Metro's security needs.

- HR Background Check Policy
  In an effort to dismantle systems of inequity, particularly inequity based on race, Metro changed its pre-employment background check process to no longer require criminal background checks for nearly 95% of positions that previously required one. Effective July 1st 2021, only 22 classifications will require enhanced checks. These positions includes positions that work directly with children and those that require a commercial driver's license (CDL) for their job.

- Metro Together
  The project leadership team is supporting the Metro Together project by providing input around safety and security needs as it relates to protecting Metro staff and property.

- Hub for questions and strategic direction
  The project has become a central hub for support across the agency. We have supported different departments with questions around security needs, surveillance and signage and support with recruitments.

APPENDIXES

Shared understanding – Project Language

Policing

Policing is a social relationship made up of a set of practices that are empowered by the state to enforce law and social control through the use of force. Reinforcing the oppressive social and economic relationships that have been central to the US throughout its history, the roots of policing in the United States are closely linked to the capture of people escaping slavery, and the enforcement of Black Codes. Similarly, police forces have been used to keep new immigrants "in line" and prevent the poor and working classes from making demands. As social conditions change, how policing is used to target poor people, people of color, immigrants, and others who do not conform on the street or in their homes also shifts. The choices policing requires about which people to target, what to target them for, and when to arrest and book them play a major role in who ultimately gets imprisoned.

Prison Industrial Complex

The overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.

Criminalization

The process through which actions become illegal and people become labeled "criminal". Entire groups of people and communities are criminalized when targeted by policing.

School to prison pipeline

Policies that encourage police presence at schools, harsh tactics including physical restraint and punishments that result in suspensions and out-of-class time. When combined with zero-tolerance policies, a teacher's decision to refer students for punishment can mean they are pushed out of the classroom and much more likely to be introduced into the criminal justice system.

Surveillance

Surveillance is a rapidly proliferating set of practices that permits authorities and private citizens to collect, analyze and disseminate information through rapidly developing technological means. Few activities in our public or private lives are not affected in some way by surveillance, and it is arguably becoming the dominant regulatory technique in modern societies. Modern surveillance practices can be as overt as cameras and government-issued ID cards, or less visible forms such as credit scores, medical records, cell-phone meta-data, and Internet-connected household appliances. What they all have in common is they give groups and individuals the ability to use

the information they collect to intervene in and affect the lives of people in ways that can critical implications for values for privacy and justice.

Nonviolent Community Safety

Nonviolent Community Safety, essentially, brings peacebuilding approaches together with community development and social activism to form empowering, non0violent community building approaches to creating safety in local communities.

Nonviolent Community Safety describes approaches to safety that are community initiated and controlled. It is much more of an 'opening-up' and community building process than the common 'lock-up' and isolating 'power-over' responses to safety that tend to dominate in our society. The annual "Reclaim The Night' marches Aboriginal Night Patrols and the many Lesbian and Gay anti-violence street patrols are just some examples of nonviolent community safety initiatives.

Anti-blackness

A two-part formation that both strips Blackness of value (dehumanizes), and systematically marginalizes Black people. Society often associates politically incorrect comments with the overt nature of anti-Blackness. Beneath this anti-Black racism is the covert structural and systemic racism which predetermines the socioeconomic status of Black people in this country and is held in place by anti-Black policies, institutions and ideologies.

Anti-Blackness is also the disregard for anti-Black institutions and policies. This disregard is the product of class, race, and/or gender privilege certain individuals experience due to anti-Black institutions and policies.

Slave Patrol:

The origins of modern-day policing can be traced back to the "Slave Patrol." The earliest formal slave patrol was created in the Carolinas in the early 1700s with one mission: to establish a system of terror and squash slave uprisings with the capacity to pursue, apprehend, and return runaway slaves to their owners. Tactics included the use of excessive force to control and produce desired slave behavior.

Slave Patrols continued until the end of the Civil War and the passage of the 13th Amendment. Following the Civil War, during Reconstruction, slave patrols were replaced by militia-style groups who were empowered to control and deny access to equal rights to freed slaves. They relentlessly and systematically enforced Black Codes, strict local and state laws that regulated and restricted access to labor, wages, voting rights, and general freedoms for formerly enslaved people.

-NAACP – [The Origins of Modern Day Policing](#)

Project members

Project members include Metro staff from across the agency:

Project Leadership team members:
Punneh Abdolhosseini | Senior Solid Waste Planner, WPES
Loni Black | Associate Planner, Communications
Reed Brodersen | Senior Program Analyst, DEI

Policing Committee team members:
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Holly Calhoun | Deputy Human Resource Director, HR
Rory Greenfield | MRC Campus Operations Manager
Matan Gold | Associate Planner, Communications
Gloria Pinzon | Senior Public Affairs Specialist, Communications
Joel Morton | Legal Counsel II, OMA
Lake McTighe | Senior Transportation Planner, Planning & Development

Decision Making Framework Working Group Members:
Loni Black | Associate Planner, Communications (Chair)
Pilar Karlin | Intern, Council
Hila Ritter |Principle Solid Waste Planner, WPES
Russell Sanchez | Policy Advisor, DEI
Tara Miler | Program Manager, Parks and Nature
Ruby White | Program Manager, Parks and Nature