

# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

annual report



2021

*in the words of our vibrant  
Pierce County employees*

**acceptance**  
**respect**  
**fairness**  
**connection**  
**dignity**  
**opportunity**  
**success**  
**mentorship**  
**trust**

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## *a message from our County executive*

Welcome to Pierce County's first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) annual report! The title of "annual report" is a bit of a misnomer, I suppose, as we've been working on [several DEI initiatives](#) for about two years. However, in the spirit of being accountable and open, we want to give our Pierce County community a first look at what we've been up to.

In the pages that follow you will see the measures we are tracking to evaluate our effectiveness and results. But, of course, DEI is about much more than just numbers and data. It's about creating a workplace where everyone can use their distinct voice, achieve their career goals, and have an opportunity to fully be themselves. In this way, we ensure we not only create a positive, fulfilling place to work but we also provide the best services for the residents of Pierce County.

I invite you to read this report and learn more about a few of the people who are working to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive Pierce County. I trust that, like me, you will find each of them to be inspiring and uplifting. I appreciate their willingness to share their lives and their work with us.

I also want to thank the Pierce County employees who serve as members of our five DEI work groups for their steadfast commitment and encouragement. They are working diligently to make our workplace welcoming, open and supportive to everyone. They are a constant source of learning and perspective for me.

Change doesn't happen overnight but I'm confident we are making good progress. We remain committed to being transparent and accountable in our government operations, and that includes our work with DEI. You can follow along and keep track of how we're doing at our Open Pierce County dashboard and the DEI-focused webpages at [piercecountywa.gov](http://piercecountywa.gov).

Thank you,



Bruce F. Dammeier

Executive

# our commitment

Part of Pierce County's Strategic Plan is to [hire and develop talented employees](#).

The goal is to have a productive, innovative staff serving our residents. The diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiative is being championed by employees. The mission: to promote and foster a culture that embraces, demonstrates, and celebrates diversity, equity, and inclusion, and reflects the community in which we serve and live.

We are committed to attracting, hiring, and retaining great talent, so we can continue making Pierce County the best place to live, work and raise a family.

In this report, you will hear from staff from diverse backgrounds, and the work they are doing to advance DEI in the community. We'll tell you what we've done, and what we're planning to do next.

## GOALS

**34.4%**

Minority Employees

*Currently at 21.3%*

**50%**

Female Employees

*Currently at 48%*



# DEI *in action*

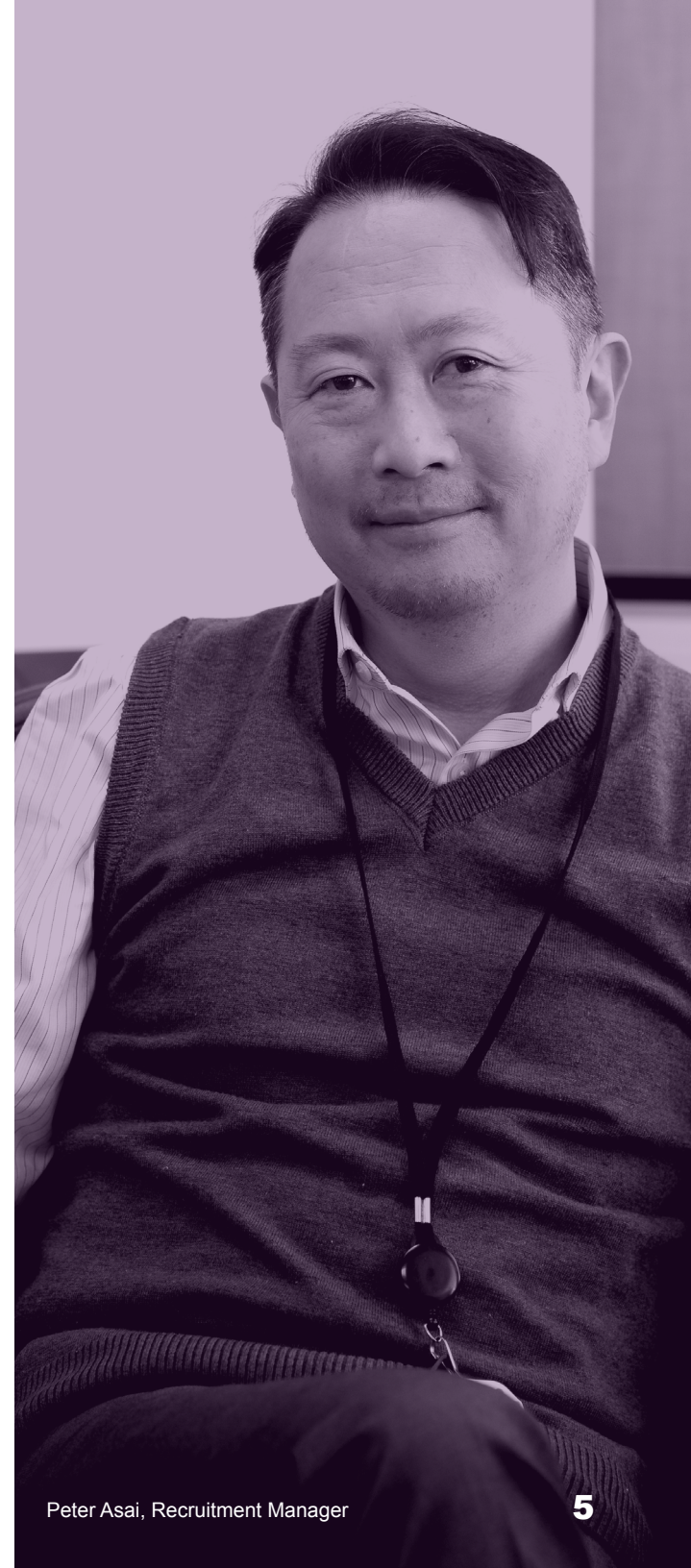
Pierce County is on the cutting edge of recruitment practices. We moved away from the “post and pray” method of advertising job openings, and have started to actively recruit the right talent.

Peter Asai, who runs the recruitment program for Pierce County, has led this initiative. He says the key to success is transparent communication. Knowing that Pierce County values diversity, equity and inclusion, recruiters and hiring managers have frank discussions about the needs of the department. These conversations can be as straightforward as stating a department lacks diversity.

**A lack of diversity  
forces a single way of thinking.  
Having different backgrounds in a workplace  
makes space for creativity and opportunity,  
Asai explained.**

One of the reasons Asai, a Japanese American, took the job at Pierce County was because of the diversity of the talent acquisition team. He wants to ensure that same experience for every department.

“Every organization needs help with DEI,” says Asai. There’s no correct path to get there, and the work is never complete. He acknowledges that there is still a lot of work to do. But Pierce County is making strides toward a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce.



Peter Asai, Recruitment Manager

# Lucky Bradley *acceptance*

Lucky Bradley is a grant compliance auditor for Pierce County. When she came on board in 2019, she told the interviewer she was transgender, and she needed an employer that would be supportive. Pierce County has not disappointed.

“Management has been fantastic,” she said.

Her manager implemented pronouns on emails, practices to address

microaggressions, and training from the Rainbow Center.

Lucky has been pivotal in offering feedback and sharing her experience, so the County can continue to grow in its support of transgender employees.

“They are making it a more accepting place so people can be who they are,” she said. “it’s a safe place to work and very nurturing.”

she sees a lot of passion behind the DEI work happening in Pierce County.

“They want to help and grow and learn because they have realized that the more variety you have, the better overall work you’re going to do, and the better community you’re going to build with it,” Lucky said.



“ They are making it a more accepting place so people can be who they are.”

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# Sarah Colleen Sotomish *respect*

Sarah Colleen Sotomish is an attorney who comes from a long line of tribal leaders at the Quinault Nation. From an early age she was taught to be a part of the solution. She was one of the first tribal liaisons in the state of Washington after the Centennial Accord was signed in 1989. She worked for more than 20 years for the state government in tribal-state-federal relations. Now she's using this experience to bring the tribes and Pierce County into a government-to-government partnership.

She is the senior counsel for tribal relations to Executive Dammeier. This position was created especially for her because Dammeier wanted to develop and enhance government-to-government relationships with the Nisqually, Puyallup, Muckleshoot and Squaxin Island tribes. Dammeier knew Sarah Colleen was the right person for the job. When he interviewed her in 2017, she saw how important and valuable this work could be.

"I'm very excited about the opportunity to help Pierce County establish those relationships with the tribes because that government-to-government process hasn't been done before at a county level," she said. The goal is to institutionalize the process of working in partnership with the tribes so it becomes part of the fabric of Pierce County.

One of her key objectives for getting these relationships started is understanding each other on a level that will create trust and mutual respect.

"If the tribes and the County are going to work together, they need to know more about each other," she said. She implemented training for key stakeholders, who have all said the training was great. Sarah Colleen has already seen a notable shift from those who have gone through the training. For example, she's getting pulled into projects to assess tribal impact now.

"I think that's a success," she said. "Little by little, we're learning to work with the tribes."

# Joseph Evans *fairness*

Joseph Evans is a public defender who manages the Juvenile Delinquency Unit. In June 2020, Executive Dammeier started a [Criminal Justice Work Group](#) and asked Evans to lead it.

“The task force’s job was to review the policies and practices of Pierce County when it came to criminal justice,” Evans said. “We spearheaded different reforms that can make Pierce County’s justice system more equitable.”

They examined the policies across many functions—the Prosecutor’s Office, Sheriff’s

Department, Assigned Counsel, and the courts—and made recommendations to the Executive’s office. The goal is to create a justice system that is just for everyone.

“There were some policies that were not put in place to be discriminatory, but had a discriminatory outcome,” Evans said.

One policy that was examined was reviewing who can take part in Drug Court, a program that gives non-violent offenders a path to recovery instead of jail. One of the

requirements for participating in Drug Court was that offenders have no previous gang affiliation, which created disparities. That policy has since changed, which Evans believes will reduce disparities, and contribute to less crime in our community.

“It’s really important, in order to prevent crime and, frankly to help our communities, that we create access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs,” Evans said.



“ If this justice system is going to work for everyone we have to make sure it doesn't create unfair outcomes.

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# Patti Jackson-Kidder

*connection*

Patti Jackson-Kidder is the corrections bureau chief with the Pierce County Sheriff's Department. She has been with the sheriff's department for 32 years, but when she started, law enforcement was a largely male profession. She's committed to recruiting a diverse group of people to work in her department.

Jackson-Kidder sees the roles she recruits for as a level playing field. Everyone is held to the same standards, takes the same tests and receives the same payscale and benefits.

"I'm very committed to the equality that we've fought so many years for," she said.

**"I try to educate people  
that if we have a role for you,  
you'll be treated equally across the board."**

This is important to the work as well, because the County must maintain a safe, secure facility where people are treated fairly.

"It takes the camaraderie and collaboration of different personalities, different genders, different races," she said. "People from every walk of life are incarcerated and they can connect better with someone who shares their background." Pattie believes these connections are what create safe and healthy facilities.

# Sangkros Lok *dignity*

Sangkros Lok is a recreation coordinator at Pierce County Parks, where he runs the Pierce [Outdoor Life program](#). He has been with the County for about a year, and has been through the new recruitment process. He believes Pierce County is doing a great job of bringing in the right people, with different backgrounds.

“There’s room for improvement, however everyone across the board, is working together so that we have the right people in place, and the right mixture of people,” Lok said.

Lok’s runs a program for the County dedicated to creating equity and inclusion. “It’s a program working with at-risk kids from juvenile detention,” Lok said. “That opportunity allows me to teach them leadership skills and how to make better choices in life.”

Pierce Outdoor Life gives kids who have entered the justice system an alternative to incarceration. The curriculum teaches youth how to work as a team and leadership skills.

“The goal is to make better choices for themselves,” Lok said.



“ *There's room for improvement, however everyone across the board, is working together...* ”



# Hongda Sao

*success*

Hongda Sao is a case manager in the Pierce County Aging and Disability Resource Center. He is also legally blind. But don't think for one minute that visual impairment slows him down in any way.

Sao is the captain of the Tacoma Typhoons goal ball team, past president of the Pierce County Association of the Blind, and he runs marathons in his spare time.

Sao joined Pierce County as an intern in 2012. He felt so welcome by the staff, and so passionate about the work, that when he was offered a job at the end of his internship, there was no question he would take it.

**He has led the way  
for adaptive technology in the County,  
ensuring all staff have access  
to the tools that make them successful.**

He works to make sure visually impaired residents of Pierce County can be successful, too, by leading workshops and sharing his story. "Fear is normal," he says. "It's hard to know how to find a job, training or support." He is proud to use his experience to support others with visual impairment.

# Ivan Tudela *opportunity*

Ivan Tudela is the access and functional needs coordinator for the Pierce County Department of Emergency Management. This position was designed to address access for vulnerable communities.

Tudela has worked in a lot of government agencies, and he sees Pierce County as special in its commitment to DEI. He loves the access to mentors and the DEI work groups that are available.

“I’m very proud that there is an atmosphere of encouraging anything that supports diversity, equity and inclusion,” he said.

Tudela’s work demonstrates Pierce County’s commitment to DEI in the community as well.

He created a trusted voices group where bilingual caseworkers discuss needs in bilingual communities. He takes what he learns and collaborates with other departments to come up

with creative solutions. “We’re actively eliciting input from diverse communities,” he said. “It’s really rewarding work.”

He is pushing to expand communication with bilingual communities during the pandemic. But, he won’t stop when the pandemic ends. He plans to use the relationship he has created to build more resilient bilingual and vulnerable communities.



“ We’re actively eliciting input from diverse communities.

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# Sarah Grice

## *mentorship*

Sarah Grice is an engineering supervisor for Planning and Public Works, where she focuses on roads and infrastructure. She is a civil engineer, with many years of experience in government and construction. She is proud to serve as a mentor and role model for the women in her department.

**“I’m not just their supervisor,  
I help them develop and grow.”**

She makes it a point to share her experience with her team, and she’s seen a lot of growth over her tenure.

The ratio of men and women graduating from engineering schools has balanced out over the last 10 years, Grice said, but maintenance operations still isn’t as diverse. Grice and Pierce County are working to change that.

“We’ve done a lot more with our recruiting,” she said. By finding a balance between growing from within, and recruiting externally, they are working toward a team that reflects the diversity of Pierce County. “It’s going to be ongoing work, and we want to show people we have open arms and would like to help people grow and develop.”

Grice enjoys being part of the DEI work that Pierce County is doing. She looks forward to continued DEI collaboration with her colleagues, who she highly respects.

“They are professional, they want to do a great job, they put their all into every day,” Grice said. “Pierce County really is a great place to be.”

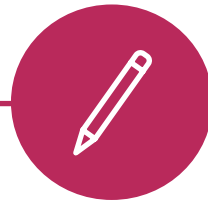
# making changes

## moving DEI initiatives forward

Pierce County is working hard to move DEI initiatives forward.  
Here are just a few things we've accomplished so far:



Created a **DEI video series** which has been **viewed more than 9,000 times**



Created **five DEI workgroups**



Implemented **DEI training** for all employees and **implicit bias training** for hiring managers



Hosted **career fairs** in underserved parts of the County



Building **government-to-government relationships** between the County and local tribes



Performed a **DEI survey of staff**, resulting in 978 responses

# what's next?

We recognize that diversity, equity and inclusion is ongoing work. We have made progress, but we have more to do. Moving forward, we plan to:

- Create a **manager's DEI toolkit**
- **Measure and report** on recruitment efforts
  - Develop a **DEI retention plan**
- Launch a 3-year, **comprehensive County-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion training plan**



*thank you to our workgroups leading change*

**SOCC** | *Chair: Judy Archer*

Brent Bomkamp, Brian Hardtke, Joseph Evans, Denise Greer, Gary Robinson, Misty Robison, Sarah Sotomish, TJ Bohl

**Training** | *Chair: Mary Ransier*

Mary Benton, Aaron Copado, Debi Ross, Karl Imlig, Wolf Opitz, Bo Welch, MaryBeth DiCarlo, Maura Maye,  
Abi McLane, Tyasha Green, Dea Finnigan, Kyle Ciolli

**Work-Base Programs** | *Chair: Kandace Thomas*

Aaron VanValkenburg, Kevin Clegg, Bruce Wagner, Carrie Frohlich, Dom Hardeman, Julie Anderson, Roxanne Miles

**Recruitment** | *Chair: Christina Roberts*

Joe McDonald, Gayle Robbins, Peter Asai, Janel Krillich, Jody Ferguson, Keturah Melton, Leticia Neal,  
Lindsay Derrick, Peter Barlow, Toby Rickman, Malissa Adame

**Communication & Branding** | *Chair: Lisa Hilligoss/Libby Catalinich*

Anthea Aasen, CJ Johnson, Lauren Wallin, Mary Schmidtke, Megan Hutton, Paulina Kura,  
John Barbee, Lillian Allred

*we look forward to continuing this journey.*