

# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

*giving  
everyone  
a seat at  
the table*

2021 annual report



# words from a few Pierce County employees...

*connection*

Aaron Copado, pg. 6

*respect*

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*belonging*

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*a message from  
Pierce County's Executive*

It is my honor to share with you the County's 2021 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion report. We began this work in earnest several years ago and I'm pleased to outline some of the highlights of the work we've done this year.

Through the work of our managers and supervisors, we have made strides in reaching our goal to have our work force reflect the diversity of our community. In 2019, diverse employees (self-reported) made up 24.2% of our employee base.

**In 2021, that total increased to 29.9%.**

Part of the reason for this success was due to an important change we made to create a more equitable process for those hiring "extra hire" or temporary employees. We now require hiring managers to hold an open, competitive selection process for those positions. Before this change was made it was not uncommon for hiring managers to bring on acquaintances, children of colleagues or others in their network for these roles. The challenge was these are often a "foot in the door" role that allows those hired a faster inside track to gain full-time employment with the County. With that in mind, an open, merit-based hiring process gives everyone an opportunity to compete for those roles.

We continue to bring an equity lens to our work to support our community. For example, about 65% of the County residents that received COVID-related rental assistance in 2021 were people of color, and several hundred were military veterans. In addition, millions in support for small business relief loans and grants, and commercial rental and mortgage assistance was provided to business owners of color.



*Bruce Dammeier, Pierce County Executive*



Ronald Atkins, Pierce County  
Business Accelerator graduate

*continued...*

In response to the pandemic and the devastating impact on underserved communities in Pierce County, the County Council allocated \$5 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to launch the Pierce County Business Accelerator (PCBA) last fall. The goal of the program is to foster innovation and create wealth-building opportunities in Pierce County with a focus on communities of color. The original idea for the accelerator came from The Black Collective and was activated by the County's Economic Development department.

We recently celebrated the first 68 local business owners who graduated from the PCBA program.

**96% of whom are business owners of color  
and 69% are women**

These business owners completed a rigorous six-week course of instruction taught by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) instructors that covered areas that are key to business success. In addition, cohort three received instruction in Korean and Vietnamese.

The PCBA graduates are now equipped to raise external funding, are financially resourced, professionally coached and empowered to accelerate their businesses. Thanks to ARPA funding, they are also eligible to apply for a matching grant up to \$10,000, and a commercial lease stipend reimbursement grant for up to \$6,000 for one year.

In total, the PCBA will train 200 business owners with an emphasis on BIPOC, veteran, and women entrepreneurs through July 2022.

Thanks to the Asia Pacific Cultural Center, The Black Collective, Tacoma Urban League, Mi Centro, and the Korean Women's Association who help us reach out to Pierce County communities of color.

We've made important progress in creating a more diverse, equitable and inclusive Pierce County over the last year and we look forward to moving this work forward in 2022. I invite you to learn more in this report.

Thank you,

Bruce F. Dammeier  
Pierce County Executive



# Striving for change

## AWARENESS

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**86.7%** Employee awareness  
of DEI efforts  
Up from 60.2% in 2017

## CHANGES

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**74** Racially diverse  
County managers  
Up from 51 in 2019

**22.9%** Diverse  
employees  
Up from 20.5% in 2017

**15.8%** Veteran  
employees  
Exceeding our goal of 10%

## GOALS

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**50%** Female  
employees  
Currently at 48%

# Aaron Copado *connection*

As a Latino with a rich Hispanic heritage, Aaron is very passionate about his roots and family. Being part of a vibrant community has shaped how he contributes to his County role and his untiring commitment to DEI work.

Currently, he is a Public Information Specialist and is working on translating public resources into all of the diverse languages spoken across Pierce County.

“We constantly talk about stormwater best practices but it’s predominantly in English so we miss out on helping a vast amount of other communities... We’re working on making public information more accessible,” he says.

At a young age, Aaron’s great-grandmother taught him, “Camina en la línea recta!” (walk the straight path). He continues honoring

her lessons by uplifting others, and helping Pierce County build stepping stones on the path to an equitable future for all.

“We’re so much stronger as a community when we’re hearing every voice and recognizing that we ALL have something to gain from the community and contribute to the community,” says Aaron.



“ We all have something to gain and something to contribute to the community.”

” 6



# Dominique Hardeman *redefine*

Twenty years ago, Dominique saw a huge problem within the probation process of the criminal justice system—it wasn't working. The same folks were being arrested. There were no changes and people who needed help weren't being helped.

This relentless cycle went against why he initially joined this field—to make the community a better, safer place.

“Research has shown that strict monitoring and incarceration without offering supportive services doesn't improve reincarceration rates, it makes it worse. I knew there had to be a better way,” he says.

Enter, ‘The SNU’: The Special Needs Unit was a successful resource program created and led by Dominique at his previous probation agency.

“We immediately saw better results. Instead of punishing people who are mostly trying to fulfill a basic need we connect them to resources that address those core human needs first.”

When Pierce County wanted to start a similar program, Dominique jumped at the opportunity to bring his invaluable experience to the role of Probation Manager. He's since started a Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) that partners with community support organizations. This partnership has led to the creation of the Pierce County District Resource Center where a variety of supportive services can be accessed by anyone in one centralized location.

**We have to redefine what success looks like.**

**The secret is partnering with**

**supportive services in the community.**

**We ALL benefit from having a supportive network.**

# Jenn Sergent *adapt*



Growing up the older sister of a sibling with learning and developmental disabilities gave Jenn unique insight into how folks with special needs were consistently being excluded from living as full a life as anyone else.

“There’s a lot of misconceptions out there about what opportunities folks with disabilities should have. I think that we as a public tend to pigeonhole this community when they can and should have access to the same, or as close to the same, opportunities that are afforded to everyone else,” Jenn says.

As one of Pierce County’s Recreation Coordinators in Specialized Recreation, Jenn is determined to provide folks with special needs and their families inclusive spaces to network, attend events and develop resources and opportunities.

“We get to connect to individuals with disabilities on a one-to-one basis. We get to watch these amazing people grow from going to activities as children with their families to attending activities on their own... and that’s not something typical recreation departments get to do.”



*They can and should have access to the same or close to the same opportunities that are afforded to everyone else.*





# John Jolibois

*respect*

John Jolibois is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, father of four tribal members and married to Jennifer Keating, an enrolled member of the Puyallup Tribe.

John's journey and interest in government started from a young age and was heavily influenced by his mother and his father, a Native American belonging to the same tribe as him.

When John's father moved to Tacoma from North Dakota he left behind the constant discrimination and adversity that John was not privy to growing up. His father instead focused on encouraging John to work hard, get educated, take care of his family and give back to the community.

The most impactful way John felt he could make a difference for local Natives and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) community was through politics.

The diversity, equity and inclusion work he focuses on isn't just important for his role in government but for his roles as a father, husband, and as a tribal member. As a County Council Assistant, John works to ensure actionable steps are taken towards creating stronger relationships with people of color, including respecting Native lands, culture, and people.

"We have to acknowledge that we are living on the ancestral homelands of Native people. My goal is to ensure meaningful respect for local tribes and their treaties because we have a responsibility to protect their sovereignty and preserve Native culture," he says.

**"The County is making a lot of progress,  
but there's still work to be done  
and that's where I put my focus."**

# Maura Maye *belonging*

Maura has had a long career in HR leading diversity training. While she's always strived to create inclusive spaces for others, she knows what it's like to feel excluded and it's not an experience she wishes for anyone.

"Being excluded is not just physical isolation, it's an isolation of ideas, creativity, and performance. No one wants to work where they don't feel they belong... that's why people don't quit their jobs, they quit their bosses," she says.

As an Employee Development Specialist for Pierce County, Maura has seen an improvement in the inclusivity of diverse employees and works to continue focusing on DEI being at the forefront of hiring and training.

"I want you to come to work every day feeling good about who you are and what you do."

Maura feels a strong sense of belonging at Pierce County. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer earlier this year she was touched by the outpouring of support and love from her County family.



“ *The greatest human need  
is to experience a sense of belonging* ”



# Navi Phay *access*

Tacoma is home and has been since the day Navi's family arrived after fleeing from the genocide of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Born in a refugee camp, Navi is a second-generation Cambodian who carries equally strong ties to her Cambodian culture and roots, as well as her Tacoma community and home.

As a Victim Services Specialist, Navi works to support survivors of domestic violence through her diverse lens and place of understanding.

"We have a great model of incorporating community members to make it feel more comfortable for survivors to have access to government resources. We have our Sister's House, a Spanish-speaking advocacy service, and strong community partnerships with supportive services like the Korean Women's Association," she says.

Navi advocates for members of underrepresented communities who need to be heard but is also adamant changes need to be made on a systemic level to truly open doors for equitable access and support.

"The challenges lay in systemic barriers that prevent access to certain programs. For many survivors, it's economic hardships in retaining a lawyer and not being able to get their full story heard."

# TJ Bohl *action*

For over twenty years, TJ witnessed the effects racial disparities and inequities had on Pierce County's young people and their families while working in the Juvenile Court.

TJ himself had run-ins with the law in his youth, but later learned that his journey as a white male looked a lot different than that of young people of color.

"I started to become more aware of the privileges I, and people who look like me, are afforded... With this knowledge, I've

focused on how I can use my power in this position to create positive changes in the system for all," he says.

As the Court Administrator, TJ acknowledged his department needed to bring DEI awareness, education, and accountability to their internal operations. Doing so reduced the number of young people in custody and redirected funds from the Court into community programs that created positive environments and opportunities for young people in our community.

TJ, alongside the Court's Equity Team and subgroups, continues to empower Pierce County's growth and advance DEI initiatives by strongly declaring and living out their mission to become an anti-racist, multicultural, and inclusive organization.

"We're creating a culture where it's normal to talk and learn about race, inclusion, white supremacy, and belonging... So far most of our growth has come from listening and acting on what we are hearing to create meaningful change."



“ *most of our growth has come from listening and acting...* ”

”



# Julie Anderson

*empathy*

Julie has worked with marginalized communities facing the greatest barriers and stigmas in many different capacities.

Years working in public service, community building, and criminal justice have given her a broad understanding of the DEI concepts she carries through to her role as Pierce County Auditor.

“In some ways, being in this office doing administrative services rather than crisis outreach provides us with a soft opportunity to make a difference,” she says.

She applies a DEI framework towards having an educated, empathetic and effective customer service team and running equitable and accessible elections.

“Every adult in Pierce County has to interact with our office. All the diversity, all the challenges, and all the privilege walk through our doors needing help with important legal matters. It’s our job to treat them with compassion and make them feel welcomed, respected, and comfortable.”

Julie trains her staff to have IDEAs; Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Access.

**“Bringing humanity to government,  
and treating people with compassion  
is what IDEA is all about.”**

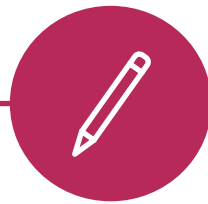
# making changes

moving DEI initiatives forward

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



Partnered with Dementia Friends to **host 8 cognitive impairments trainings** for 249 attendees



More than 270 people attended **7 LGBTQ+ classes**



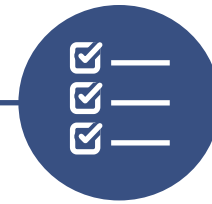
**30 Book Club participants** met throughout the year



Held **12 DEI Lunch & Learn** events for employees



Facilitated **12 Attitudes Towards Differences basic bias courses** for 232 trainees



Provided **5 Racial Equity Institute Groundwater classes** for 422 employees

# continued growth

We recognize that diversity, equity and inclusion is ongoing work.

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We have made progress, but we have more to do.



*thank you to our workgroups leading change*

**Strategic Oversight & Coordination Committee** | *Chair: Judy Archer*

TJ Bohl, Brent Bomkamp, Brian Hardtke, Nelly Mbajah, Michael Kawamura, Heather Moss, Jen Tetatzin, Gary Robinson, Sarah Colleen Sotomish, Constance White

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

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

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

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

**Recruitment** | *Chair: Kelly Lewis*

Peter Barlow, Lindsay Derrick, Jody Ferguson, Janel Krilich, Joe McDonald, Keturah Melton, Leticia Neal, Toby Rickman, Gayle Robbins

**Communication & Branding** | *Co-chairs: Lisa Hilligoss and Libby Catalinich*

Anthea Aasen, Lillian Allred, John Barbee, Megan Hutton, CJ Johnson, Mary Schmidtke, Lauren Wallin, Jeremy Acree

*the journey continues!*