

CITY PROFILE ON RACIAL EQUITY

Boston, Massachusetts



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REAL RACE, EQUITY AND LEADERSHIP

Boston City Profile

Early efforts to integrate financial capability strategies into youth employment programs have demonstrated some promising approaches for city leaders and practitioners to consider when designing or expanding programs.

Getting Started with Racial Equity in One Department

Before the city took on a centralized approach to racial equity, the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) developed a set of practices to examine its work through the lens of racial justice. Beginning in 2006, BPHC began examining racism as a key social determinant of health disparities for Boston residents, despite access to high quality health care. The staggering outcomes, representative of national trends playing out locally, led the BPHC to use this data and make the transition to talking about race explicitly as a frame within the department, with the community and with key partners in its work. Meanwhile, the Commission's [Anti-Racism Advisory Committee](#), started in 2008, slowly built up a base of knowledge to influence policy recommendations.

A number of efforts were simultaneously developed under [BPHC's Racial Justice and Boston Health Equity Initiative](#), including 22 hours of mandatory racial justice training for all staff, 5-year Health Equity Goals, a revised organizational mission and vision, and a language justice initiative. As a key part of this strategy, more than 400 staff were surveyed and more than 20 staff were trained as facilitators for internal racial justice workshops. After BPHC rolled out the training series in



Mayor Marty Walsh at a Community Conversation

2011, the department began to ask how it could embed a racial equity lens into all of its internal work and extend that lens to its policy work with other city departments.

Embedding Racial Equity Across Government

Under the leadership of Mayor Martin J. Walsh, the city developed the Mayor's Office of Resilience & Racial Equity (MORRE) in 2015, and appointed its first Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) and became one of the 100 Resilient Cities, an initiative by the Rockefeller Foundation. The inaugural CRO initially focused on leading "efforts to help Boston plan for and deal with catastrophes and slow-moving disasters — like

persistent racial and economic inequality — that have become part of 21st century life."

In June 2017, the city released its [Boston's Resilience Strategy](#), a wide-ranging resiliency plan that deals with how the city will address resiliency challenges like climate change adaptation; access to affordable and safe housing; and social, economic and transportation inequities. The plan focuses on disproportionately impacted communities, such as those of color, but ultimately makes recommendations and plans that will benefit all Bostonians.

The strategy explains Boston's resilience and racial equity lens when it states, "We have elevated equity as the core imperative to achieve citywide

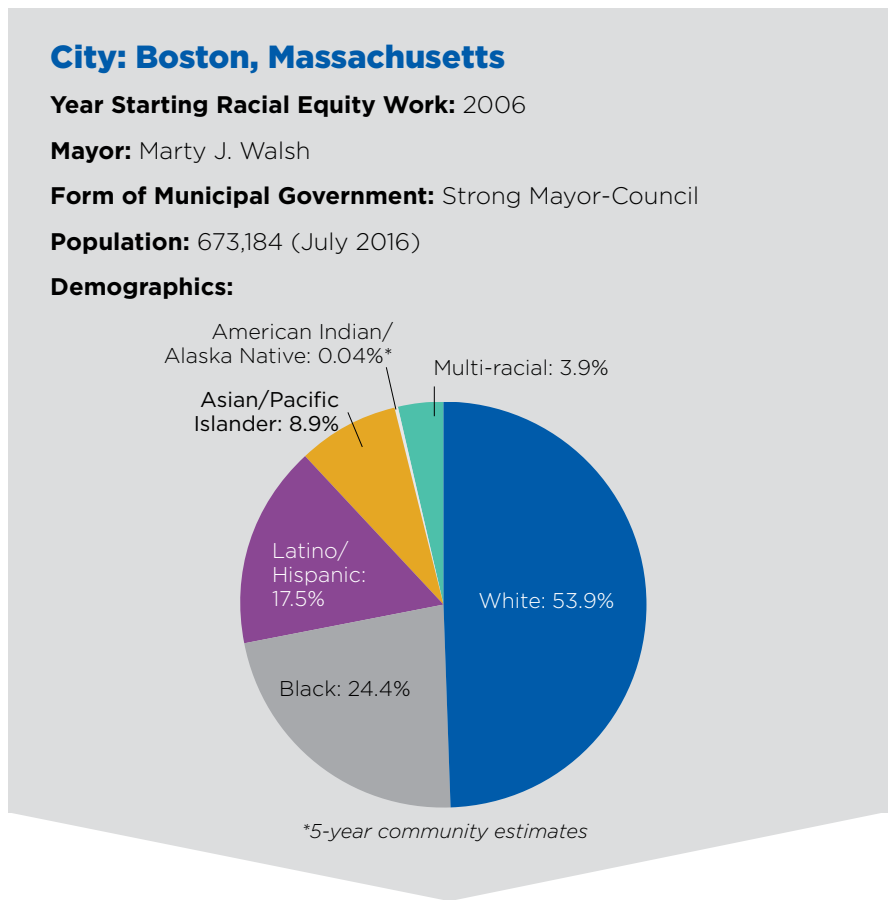
resilience. Equity is the fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; the fair, just and equitable distribution of public services and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy.” The plan uses outcomes, procedures, access and quality as criteria for evaluating equity.

Committing to Racial Healing and Structural Change

Boston’s community-facing racial healing work was supported by the Hyams Foundation, to help the city conduct a series of monthly race dialogues for the next six months throughout all the city’s neighborhoods. In addition to training facilitators and engaging thousands of residents in a broad series of dialogues, MORRE began to dig into the internal aspects of racial equity in city government through the Racism, Equity and Leadership (REAL) Resilience Program. The program, designed to address and correct implicit bias in individuals, focuses on organizational changes and culture shifts.

The CRO convenes a Resilience and Racial Equity working group with representatives from all departments to lead the REAL Resilience program, sharing what they are doing and building a plan for a 9,000-person city workforce to prepare for system changes — in hiring, procurement and education.

The six phase REAL Resilience program leads to the ultimate goal of building REAL action plans, embedding racial equity



and social justice in all basic functions of departments, and using metrics to measure impact. Key phases of the plan include surveying city departments to assess their current state, looking at all city staff as stakeholders, engaging them as a community and equipping them with the tools, skills and support to expand their leadership capacity and inspire an understanding how the city’s vision for racial equity relates to their day to day work.

“Modern racism really perpetuates implicit bias; what does it look like to adjust the process to remind people that we have these implicit biases. Before we go into a room to make an important decision, we’re giving people the tools to be aware of the bias and what the specific questions to be able

to manage it better are.” Chief Resilience Officer Atyia Martin says.

Creating a Diverse Staff Capacity to Advance Racial Equity

By building staff capacity, the city is looking at the concept of priming, which tries to understand how implicit bias shows up in small decisions and behaviors, and asks a series of questions to help people be more conscious and present in the moment to change the status quo. The concept is based on the work of Howard Ross and more commonly used in the private sector, but has broad use for city staff.



Summary: Boston

1 Boston's work began with a single city department using data disaggregated by race to start looking at racism as a cause of racial differences in outcomes.

2 Boston prioritized racial healing work across the city government and in communities throughout the city, in order to open up and heal old wounds related to the city's history of segregation, redlining and forced school busing.

3 Boston's Racial Equity work is deeply embedded in the city's resiliency work to address not only climate change but also "other slow-moving disasters like persistent racial and economic inequities."

4 Boston's work is attempting to build on equitable policy development by also addressing attitudes and behaviors related to implicit and explicit biases, specifically through race-based dialogues and community conversations.

In addition to the City's resilience work, the Chief Diversity Officer is leading an assessment on how changes to employment practices can increase the diversity of the city's staff. They are looking at promotion and retention rates, applicant data, how they advertise and post positions, so they can be more inclusive in hiring. The city now hosts a [spreadsheet dashboard](#) on their website where you can see the demographic breakdown for each department.

Simultaneously, other efforts in individual city departments continue to deepen Boston's racial equity work:

- BPHC continues evaluating the impacts of policy decisions and via the department's new Community Engagement plan, which is focused on inclusive and equitable community.

- As a result of the Office of Fair Housing and Equity's work to understand the discriminatory impacts of housing in Boston, the city passed an ordinance in February 2017 to prevent small landlords from receiving subsidies if they used certain criminal offender record information for non-convictions or that is more than five years old to deny housing to tenants.
- Under the city's goals for economic mobility, Mayor Walsh's team undertook a project with the NLC Equitable Economic Development Fellowship with the goal of addressing the major racial wealth gap in Boston, by supporting the development of worker owned co-operative businesses in the city.

"True resilience requires us to go beyond treating the symptoms of inequality, to changing the structures that produce it," said **Mayor Walsh**. *"To be a strong*

city, we must learn to understand one another, break down the systemic racism of our history, and advocate for the rights of every Bostonian. We will build a resilient Boston – prepared to confront the many challenges of the 21st century – upon a foundation that protects equal opportunity for everyone."



REAL RACE, EQUITY AND LEADERSHIP

NLC's Race, Equity and Leadership (REAL) initiative serves to strengthen local elected officials' knowledge and capacity to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions, and build more equitable communities. Learn more at www.nlc.org/REAL

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