

CITY PROFILE ON RACIAL EQUITY

# San Antonio, Texas



# Developing an Office of Equity

In 2017, San Antonio, Texas was ranked one of the most unequal cities in the country by the Economic Innovation Group. Recognizing the ranking and the history of segregationist policies that led to it, San Antonio's leaders are making an effort to reconcile their past with an equitable future for their residents through the San Antonio Office of Equity.

As City Manager Sheryl Sculley began her tenure in San Antonio 13 years ago, she engaged with residents, neighborhood associations, business owners, special interest organizations, and numerous individuals to get their perspective on city services and programs. She was surprised to hear from residents waiting for sidewalks and street repairs, despite the size of the city's budget. But a presentation by Dr. Christine Drennon, associate professor of sociology & anthropology and director of urban studies at Trinity University, helped her better understand why certain neighborhoods in her city were not receiving the same level of services as others. Drennon's presentation described the redlining and racially restrictive practices enacted by San Antonio in the 1930s and 1940s, relegating people of color to neighborhoods that were ignored and disinvested. The context helped Sculley understand why some residents could wait 20 or 30 years for their street or sidewalk to be fixed.

Under Sculley's leadership, the Diversity and Inclusion Office was created in 2015 and later rebranded as the Office of Equity to bolster its efforts to deliver quality and equitable city services. In order to help leadership and staff understand their role in creating and carrying out solutions to historical and present day inequities, the new Chief

Equity Officer initiated the city's participation in the Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE) in 2016, and, at the request of Sculley, gave trainings on racial equity and implicit bias to the top 100 city department leaders.

## Building Impact Assessments into the City's Processes

As part of its equity strategy, the Office of Equity began a pilot initiative in the spring of 2017, working with six departments to use an equity assessment: Human Resources, Human Services, Government and Public Affairs, San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, San Antonio Public Library and Solid Waste Management. These assessments were aligned with the city's process of developing the 2018 budget. When the budget was presented to the city council, Sculley worked with Drennon to show the council and the public how African-American and Latino residents had been historically restricted from living in certain parts of the city, making the connection between location and city regulations that were being addressed in the 2018 budget.

Sculley's approach focuses on helping more people in decision making roles understand the "dollars and cents aspects of equity," underscoring the need to put resources towards undoing inequities in the budget. She has worked with business leaders in

San Antonio to help them move past initial skepticism and see the value of leading with an equity lens, using the W.K. Kellogg Foundation report on The Business Case for Equity to make the case for increased investment in equity. To Sculley, it is clear that outcomes will not change without investment.

For Mayor Ron Nirenberg, most public servants start public service with the hope of serving all constituents, regardless of circumstances, location or race. The city's work on racial equity is simply an extension of this ambition. "San Antonio has had an undistinguished place on the list of cities with the most historic segregation and disparities caused by 100 year old racial politics and policies," said Mayor Nirenberg. "The country on paper has become a much fairer and equal place. But the nature of historic disparities is such that unless you work to build equity, you will never achieve equality, and you can sometimes further compound them."

As part of the 2017 pilot program, the city modified the equity assessment tool to develop an equity impact assessment process unique to San Antonio. The assessment includes five steps and an implementation section, embedding equity into a broader departmental strategic planning process. In order to help staff use these tools, the Office of Equity worked with SA2020 ,

a community-wide visioning effort, to conduct a series of trainings.

Launched as an independent non-governmental entity by former Mayor Julian Castro, SA2020 has played a critical role in supporting the city's ability to use and reflect data in its equity approaches. Much of the data it uses to evaluate progress comes from the city: among the 61 community indicators that SA2020 tracks on an annual basis, 22 of them, including police response time and crime rates, come from the City of San Antonio. As part of its work to support the city's progress in data-driven results, SA2020 has helped the city disaggregate data by each of the 10 council districts. This has been key to understanding the disparities across regions that correlate with the historical redlining policies and practices that divided the city beginning in the 1930s.

SA2020 is also working to expand its capacity to report and analyze data that are disaggregated by race, revealing inequities that might otherwise be hidden. Currently six of the indicators are now disaggregated by race—employment status, poverty, educational attainment, voter turnout, health insurance and per capita income.

Supporting the use of the equity impact assessment by as many departments and programs as possible, training was offered for eight departments and six “high-impact initiatives.” One hundred staff received eighteen hours of training. The second round of training brought four additional departments into the equity work, including Neighborhood and Housing Services, Planning, Innovation and Information Technology Services as well as the city's budget office. More than

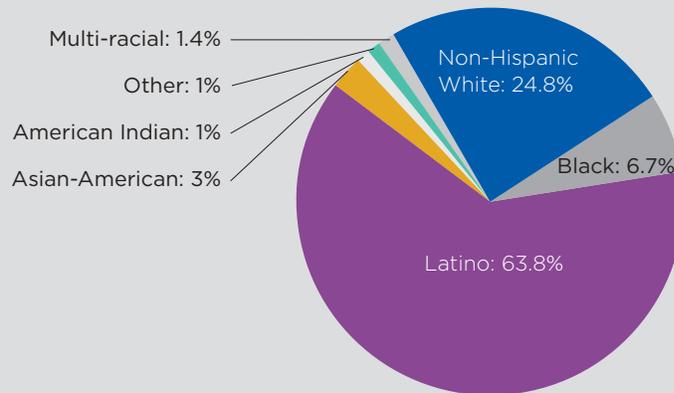
## City: San Antonio, Texas

**Mayor:** Ron Nirenberg

**Form of Municipal Government:** Mayor-Council

**Population:** 1.5 million (2017 estimate)

### Demographics:



400 staff were given an overview of the equity assessment process in preparation for their budget development work.

One application of the equity impact assessment has been evident in the Office of Equity's work on San Antonio's Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) initiative, through the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network. The Office of Equity staff members conducted equity trainings for their Parks and Recreation colleagues and for other agency and community partners serving on the CCCN team, as part of a 2018 planning phase aimed at developing strategies for creating more equitable connections between children and nature. This helped the core team better define equity outcomes like increasing awareness of public green spaces and parks available to communities of color.

San Antonio is prioritizing plans to develop a “train the trainer” initiative so that all 37 departments—including 8,000 civilians and 4,400 employees in police and fire—will be equipped with equity tools. The city manager and the Office of Equity are also working to “normalize” the centering of race within the city internally, using information like the historical policies presented by Drennon to make staff and the public more comfortable talking about race and racial inequities. To build these capacities, the City Council approved two additional positions in the Office of Equity, bringing it to a total of five staff for 2019.

### Assessing Equity Impact Yields Systemic Change

Some innovative system changes in the city's budget investments have resulted from the equity impact assessments. In particular,

the city's street maintenance program, a top priority for the community, Mayor and Council, underwent major changes to its funding formula to yield more equity. Prior to that, a system of "rough proportionality" had been used to distribute street maintenance dollars equally across all 10 council districts, regardless of the condition of the streets or needs of the community. It became clear that earlier decisions based on race had impacted San Antonio's current day infrastructure.

Through in-depth analysis of the history of each area and using a best practice rating scale, the city changed its allocation of funds to distribute a higher portion of the funding to parts of the city where street conditions needed more investment. The rating scale was used to ensure that each council district had an average road condition score of at least 70 out of 100. As a result, more resources were allocated to fixing older streets in neighborhoods most in need. In September 2017, the mayor and council approved a fiscal year budget that included \$35 million distributed to five council districts based on the histories, challenges and needs of the population. All of the changes in allocation were from additional funds, so no district lost money for street maintenance. In the 2019 budget, an additional \$11M was added so that the equitable distribution of funds would continue to support areas with the greatest need.

There have been other significant changes resulting from using the equity assessment, including:

- In 2017, the city restructured the spending strategy for the \$21 million investments in human services through a consolidated funding process that recognized the role the city plays in the broader San Antonio human services funding ecosystem. By using disaggregated data to examine the broader funding context, the city shifted its funding priorities to help fill gaps and targeting request for proposals more specifically where the gaps were.
- In the area of workforce, the equity initiative yielded changes in job posting language, where language around physical requirements had been dissuading people with physical disabilities to apply for many positions.
- Outreach strategies for the City's annual budget community input campaign were modified to promote resident participation that more accurately reflects the city's population by race, gender, age, and Council District. New strategies used in 2018 include mailing surveys in English and Spanish with return postage to ensure community members without access to the Internet can participate, and creating street teams to distribute surveys at grocery stores in areas historically under-engaged. The timeline for the campaign was also modified to allow staff to incorporate the resident feedback before presenting budget recommendations to city council.
- Specific strategies were identified to promote more applications from women

## Highlights

**1 Structure and Accountability:** City leaders have taken steps to recognize the way neighborhoods have been shaped through exclusionary policies based on race. They have developed an Office of Equity and are working with city departments to utilize an Equity Impact Assessment for budget decisions.

**2 Partnerships:** The city has embraced a partnership with SA2020, a non-governmental organization developed out of a community visioning process, which has helped the city to develop and track metrics, to both extend the local government's capacity and hold it accountable.

**3 System Change:** The use of an Equity Impact Assessment, including historical context, has led the Mayor and City Council to approve a new allocation of street maintenance funds that account for historic inequities while distributing resources equitably amongst all council districts.

and people of color to serve on boards and commissions. Among those strategies are making presentations to stakeholder groups that primarily serve women and people of color, surveying current and prospective board members to identify and address barriers to participation, and redesigning the application process increase awareness of opportunities to serve.

*\*Photo courtesy of the city of San Antonio*



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](http://www.nlc.org/REAL)

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