

Equity in Port of Seattle COVID-19 Response Principles and Potential Strategies

Port of Seattle
Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
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Background and Purpose

The COVID-19 global pandemic is an unprecedented public health emergency that is causing enormous economic and human costs and has significantly impacted the Port of Seattle. The Port has been fully engaged in crisis response, as the pandemic has caused and is anticipated to continue causing, extreme disruptions to Port operations and finance.

On April 1, 2020, the Port of Seattle Commission approved an immediate, short-term emergency financial relief package focused on airport businesses, that provided rent deferral and barred evictions of tenants due to inability to pay rent. Forthcoming measures will also provide financial relief for tenants and partners in the Port's maritime and real estate work. The Commission also approved a set of principles to guide a longer-term economic recovery plan, to be developed by the end of April 2020.¹

The Commission motions included directives that equity should be integrated into the Port's COVID-19 response and economic recovery plan, stating:

The Port commits to values of equity, justice and inclusion in the COVID-19 crisis response, from immediate response to longer-term recovery. In developing recovery plans, the Port will ensure that principles of equity, justice, inclusion, transparency, and accountability are embraced. The Port will engage communities who are most impacted to understand their needs.

The Port shall consider its fiscal, legal and equity responsibilities in all decisions made when applying these principles.²

These efforts shall also follow the Port's principles of supporting regional economic vitality, environmental stewardship, equity and inclusion.³

Guided by the Commission's directives, the purpose of this document is to provide a set of core principles and specific actions the Port can take to integrate equity into its COVID-19 response.

¹ Port of Seattle Motion 2020-06, "A Motion of the Port of Seattle Commission to provide guidance for Port leadership in prioritizing Port investments to assist local, regional, and statewide economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic." Port of Seattle Motion 2020-07, "A Motion of the Port of Seattle Commission to provide immediate relief and support to Port employees and Port tenants and concessionaires."

² Port of Seattle Motion 2020-06.

³ Port of Seattle Motion 2020-07.

Equity and Crisis Response

Communities of color and other marginalized communities tend to be more vulnerable throughout all phases of a large scale public crisis or disaster, from preparedness to immediate response to longer-term recovery. Inequities include:

- Pre-existing factors including environmental racism and economic inequality make marginalized communities more vulnerable to crises in the first place.
- Marginalized people tend to be less prepared and underrepresented in crisis response, and often face greater difficulties recovering.
- They face multiple barriers accessing resources and support, including access to accurate information, and difficulties navigating complex systems of public.
- Needs of communities with more political power and voice are often prioritized over those with less.
- Vulnerable families may be identified too late instead of planned for and accommodated in advance.
- Service providers may not be representative of the communities most in need of services, and/or are not culturally competent.
- Increased prices due to price gouging may make basic necessities inaccessible to people who cannot afford to pay the increased price.⁴

Recognizing these inequities, crisis response should “...account for the needs of all people. Emergency response and relief practices must benefit everyone while also accounting for the specific needs of vulnerable populations.”⁵

The response “...cannot just band-aid the immediate damage...or put things back to the way they were before...efforts must advance a long-term vision for our communities that puts justice at the core.”⁶

Just as crisis response can “...deepen inequality, [it] also provides an opportunity to improve the conditions that existed before the disaster occurred. This is a just recovery—one that accounts for and addresses the underlying problems.”⁷

⁴ “In the Eye of the Storm: A People’s Guide to Transforming Crisis & Advancing Equity in the Disaster Continuum”, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

Core Principles

The Port's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (OEDI) has developed the following set of core principles, intended to complement the Commission's directives on COVID-19 response, and to further elaborate on how equity can be integrated into the Port's response.⁸

1. Integrate Values of Equity and Inclusion

This principle includes explicitly committing to values of equity, justice and inclusion throughout the stages of crisis response, from immediate relief to longer-term recovery. The Commission's directives for COVID-19 establish a foundation for these values to be implemented throughout the response and into long-term planning for future crises.⁹

2. Prioritize the Most Vulnerable

An equitable response should engage those who are more adversely impacted and prioritize help to them. For the Port, vulnerable stakeholders are both internal (employees) and external (small businesses/vendors/contractors, and vulnerable communities).

3. Mitigate Economic Loss

Small businesses are being drastically affected by the pandemic, as they experience major loss of revenue, and risk loan defaults, evictions, laying off workers, and/or shutting down. The Port has expressed a strong interest in supporting the economic viability of its business partners. It can do so equitably by doing so with a priority on those owned by and/or with workers from disproportionately impacted communities.

4. Ensure Language and Cultural Competence

Language and cultural competence barriers are exacerbated in a crisis. When vulnerable communities cannot access timely and accurate information, they often are unable to voice their needs, avail themselves of public assistance, or follow directives from public agencies. The Port can address this for its stakeholders who experience these barriers.

5. Support Community-based Organizations

Trusted community-based organizations provide essential direct support to vulnerable communities and can be important partners in crisis response. The Port already has numerous community partnerships that can be leveraged to support equitable efforts.

⁸ Adapted from "Recommendations for Philanthropy and Policy Makers", National Coalition for Asian Pacific Islander American Community Development (CAPACD) and "Principles for Equitable Crisis Response", in Movement Generation's "Principles for A Just Recovery"

Strategies for an Equitable Response

Given the scope of its operations, the Port has a significant impact on vulnerable individuals and communities among its stakeholder groups that include small business owners, employees and Port-impacted communities. In its response to the pandemic, the Port has an opportunity and responsibility to ensure equitable impact for those most vulnerable.

The following section includes specific measures in the Port Commission’s directives and describes how each can be implemented equitably. The recommendations are grouped into two sections that align with the Commissions’s directives: 1. Immediate relief (Motion 2020-07), and 2. Longer-term recovery (Motion 2020-06).

Immediate Relief: Motion 2020-07	
Provisions in Port Commission Directive	Strategies for Equitable Implementation
<p>Port Tenants and Concessionaires – deferred rent and no evictions</p> <p><i>“...authorizes the Executive Director to implement immediate financial relief to Port tenants and concessionaires.”</i> <i>“...tenants and residents at Port of Seattle facilities shall not be evicted for inability to pay rent through June 30, 2020.”</i></p> <p>Two-month deferral of rent and fees for six groups of airport operators: airlines, airport dining and retail, rental cars, remote parking, ground transportation, and non-aeronautical properties.</p> <p>Evaluate for possible extension of two-month deferrals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize tenants who are disproportionately impacted economically and/or have disproportionately greater challenges, such as operators of color, first-time business operators or those with less business experience/capacity, those with less English proficiency, and/or those with less ability to navigate and secure other sources of financial assistance. • Focus especially on workers in airport dining and retail, and ground transportation. • Consider targeted strategies for the most vulnerable, such as longer deferrals or eviction bans.
<p>Port Employees – workplace support policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize employees who are most economically vulnerable, occupy the lowest tiers of pay, and/or have disproportionately

<p><i>“...review and enact workplace policies that enhance the ability of employees to care for themselves and their families while continuing to provide the work essential to Port operations. Priority shall be given to maintaining employment and benefits to the greatest extent possible.”</i></p>	<p>greater home/family challenges such as childcare, care for elderly family members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider targeted strategies for the most vulnerable, such as more support and/or for longer duration.
<p>Port Employees, Tenants, and Employees of Tenants - assistance finding relief from other sources</p> <p><i>“The Port will develop an outreach program for its tenants, their employees, and port employees, to facilitate their ability to access local, state and federal relief resources.”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize tenants who are disproportionately impacted economically and/or have disproportionately greater challenges, such as operators of color, first-time business operators or those with less business experience/capacity, those with less English proficiency, and/or those with less ability to navigate and secure other sources of financial assistance. • Prioritize employees who are most economically vulnerable, occupy the lowest tiers of pay, and/or have disproportionately greater home/family challenges such as childcare, care for elderly family members. • • Provide help throughout the process of applying for assistance, including understanding eligibility, navigating processes, collecting documentation and completing applications. • Ensure Port communication and services are linguistically and culturally competent, including use of plain English and avoiding technical terminology and jargon. • For translation and interpretation, provide relevant context and subject matter information to language professionals so they can translate and interpret accurately. • Employ multiple communication methods to reach diverse communities, including engaging trusted community leaders, community-based organizations and/or ethnic media.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When using technology for communication, consider who has access and who doesn't, and address barriers for those who lack access to technology.
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Longer-term Recovery: Motion 2020-07	
Principles in Port Commission Directive	Strategies for Equitable Implementation
<p>Port Tenants and Concessionaires</p> <p><i>“The Executive Director may consider proposing adjusted agreement terms in a manner that serves the financial interests of both the Port and its tenants and concessionaires. The Executive Director shall consider prioritizing:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Businesses that are directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that have been implemented to address it;</i> <i>Businesses that can commit to being available to provide services and generate revenue;</i> <i>Businesses who are not otherwise eligible for significant state or federal economic relief;</i> <i>Small and diverse businesses;</i> <i>Independent contractors, hourly-wage workers, “gig workers”, and artists and craftsman who do not otherwise have access to basic economic safety nets; and</i> <i>Non-profit organizations and not-for-profit tenants.”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize tenants who are disproportionately impacted economically and/or have disproportionately greater challenges, such as operators of color, first-time business operators or those with less business experience/capacity, those with less English proficiency, and/or those with less ability to navigate and secure other sources of financial assistance. Consider targeted strategies for the most vulnerable, such as more flexibility in adjustment of terms, targeted adjustments, and/or longer duration of special terms.
<p>Port Employees</p> <p><i>“The Port shall continue to protect the health, safety and well-being of our employees and will maximize teleworking policies and leave policies.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential inequities in telework and leave policies and address. If/when jobs need to be furloughed or eliminated, consider equity in decision making of who is impacted.

<p><i>The Executive Director shall consider steps to keep our workforce employed such as deferring hiring of new and replacement positions, flexible leave without pay options, and reduced hours over reduction in the workforce.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, the Executive Director shall determine whether new skill-building and educational resources for employees are necessary to transition employees to new career pathways. The Executive Director shall take into consideration the Port’s represented employees and their unique needs.</i></p> <p><i>Youth employment: The Executive Director shall offer youth internships to provide to the extent possible a short-term boost to the economy, support the most vulnerable and underserved communities, and continue its strategic investment in the Port’s workforce of the future. Where possible, the Port should consider youth whose parents have lost employment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If/when new jobs or assignments are identified, consider equity in decision making of who is selected. ● In identifying needs for new skill-building and educational resources for new career pathways, prioritize employees who are most economically vulnerable, occupy the lowest tiers of pay, and/or have disproportionately greater home/family challenges such as childcare, care for elderly family members.
<p>Capital Programs</p> <p><i>“The Executive Director shall evaluate project assumptions for all capital projects approved prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Executive Director shall determine which projects shall be postponed, accelerated or phased, and consider the following principles when making decisions:</i></p> <p><i>Maximize economic impact: Prioritize projects that generate significant economic activity – not only construction-related employment and spend, but also projects that, once completed, will facilitate key drivers of regional economic activity such as trade, fishing, tourism and travel.</i></p> <p><i>Diversity in Contracting: Prioritize capital programs that have high utilization rates for woman and minority owned businesses consistent with the Diversity in Contracting Policy Directive.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If/when criteria for economic impact and equity impact are applied, weight equity impact at least equal to economic impact. ● Within the prioritization of small businesses and WMBEs, consider prioritizing those who are disproportionately impacted economically and/or have disproportionately greater challenges, such as first-time business operators or those with less business experience/capacity, those with less English proficiency, and/or those with less ability to navigate and secure other sources of financial assistance.

<p><i>Small Business Enterprises: Prioritize projects that provide opportunities for small business.”</i></p>	
<p>Economic Development and Community Investment Programs</p> <p><i>“The Executive Director shall consider the following principles when making decisions about economic development and community investment programs:</i></p> <p><i>Existing Grant and Community Benefit Programs: Prioritize community investments using existing programs such as the Economic Development Partnership Program, Tourism Marketing Support Program, Duwamish Valley Community Equity Program, the South King County Fund and others.</i></p> <p><i>Partnerships to Maximize Funding Impact: Identify partnerships and coordinate efforts to create multiplier effects of Port funding. For example, the Executive Director can leverage Washington Department of Commerce economic recovery investments that create near-term economic activity; expand on regional transportation investments that support the region’s trade and travel needs; leverage city and statewide tourism promotional programs; and address long-term infrastructure needs.”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When identifying “partnerships to maximize funding impact”, look at not only those focused on economic development, but also those that create equitable impacts, such as funding collaborations like the COVID-19 Response Fund led by the Seattle Foundation or other local relief funds. • Continue work to integrate equity into existing community benefit programs such as the South King County Fund. • Fund and enlist community organizations the Port has partnered with to engage in crisis response support, with a priority to those that are in and serve communities of color.
<p>Long-term Preparedness</p> <p><i>“The Port of Seattle Commission is focused on the Port’s responsibility to plan strategically and proactively for how to help our region during this crisis and guide its recovery once it is over. As a public agency that provides essential services to facilitate our economy, the Port is uniquely positioned to be a key driver of economic recovery. The Port’s roles in the transportation of people and goods, economic development, tourism promotion, workforce development, trade and travel facilitation, environmental remediation, youth employment and equitable inclusion are</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the COVID-19 experience to build policy and operational mechanisms for future crisis responses, including templates for policy directives, tools for equitable rapid-response, and tools for monitoring effectiveness of response and equity impacts.

<i>all essential tools that are needed to help workers, businesses, local residents and the overall economy.”</i>	
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