

Celebrating the difference professional local government management makes

## Building an Inclusive City • Renton, Washington

Jay Covington, chief administrative officer



**Covington**

With more than 97,000 residents, Renton is the fourth-largest city in King County and the eighth largest in the state. From 2000 to 2010, the city enjoyed

82 percent growth. Its minority population has grown by 165 percent, and non-white groups now account for over 50 percent of the population.

In recognition of the city's changing demographics, "Building an Inclusive City" was launched with full support from councilmembers and top officials. They made it a priority by (1) revising the city's strategic business plan to include inclusiveness and diversity as part of its mission statement and adding specific goals; (2) integrating diversity at every level of the organization and as part of every program and service; and (3) regularly scheduling open dialogues and conversations with community members. They also hired a consultant who is an expert on equity and social justice.

To achieve its goals, the program relies on a network of community liaisons representing 10 different ethnic, cultural, and diverse groups. Through this network it has facilitated civic engagement for all members of society (especially those who have not tradi-

tionally participated in local government), ensured equitable offerings of programs and services, and above all, promoted an understanding and appreciation of cultural differences through fun, celebration, and festivals. Among its many specific accomplishments, it has:

- Offered free workshops to facilitate conversations about race among city employees.
- Hosted community forums to educate residents about critical issues, such as crime prevention and emergency preparedness.
- Provided emergency preparedness training and workshops in four different languages, and distributed emergency preparedness kits to community leaders.
- Appointed members from community liaison groups to serve on key citizen task forces.
- Targeted ethnic media to provide key information to minority residents.
- Helped create Renton's Small Business Development Center to provide business assistance to nearly 115 businesses, almost half of which are minority owned.

Because community liaisons keep changing, the city has learned that



**Inclusion Task Force**

building and nurturing these relationships is an ongoing effort; there must be frequent and consistent communication between city staff and members of the community as well as with community liaisons, and employee training and workshops must be ongoing. It has also learned that each community group has its own needs and priorities, which must be addressed even when available resources to meet those needs are limited.

Above all, it has learned that because their goals are similar, their target groups are the same, and their resources are limited, working in coordination with the local school district, community college, chamber, and other organizations enables all partners to leverage resources rather than duplicate efforts and also enhances their credibility in the community. This is the key to success.