

Frequently Asked Questions

SECTION I: WHY

1) Why do we need this kind of human rights organization in our town?

From May 2017 through December 2018 the Town of Reading experienced a series of more than 30 anti-Semitic, racist, and anti-LGBTQ+ graffiti incidents. These events and growing national trend of marginalization, and discrimination are real and threaten to polarize neighbors, exclude new home buyers, and eat away at the fabric of our country. We read about it every day in the newspapers and we have experienced it here in Reading, our home. It is a public health emergency and needs to be prioritized in Reading.

2) Is there support for this initiative in the town?

As of December 2020, the Select Board, the Board of Library Trustees, and the Reading Public Schools have committed to building a more equitable and just community. Additionally, members of HRAC and the Ad Hoc Human Rights Committee fully support this initiative. Members of these committees represent the Reading Police Department, faith leaders, METCO families, the Town Manager, the Select Board, and community members.

3) Why the Library in particular?

The Reading Public Library has always strived to be a space of belonging and inclusion, an equitable public service open to all ages, abilities, interests, and cultures. This blends well with the values related to human rights, equity, and social justice. Moreover, this new division aligns with the Library's strategic plan, and will serve to help the Library fulfill its existing mission and core values, extending its reach and impact to more corners of the community.

Library Mission: The Reading Public Library is a center and resource for learning and civic engagement. We provide a place and platform of, by, and for the people who can benefit as individuals as well as contribute to the well-being of the community.

Library Core Values: Education and Equity, Accountability and Access

SECTION II: READING ALLIANCE FOR EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

4) How will this organization make a difference in our town?

Under the guidance of the Director for Equity and Social Justice, the RAESJ will provide education, programming, and reconnect our community. RAESJ will create a safe space and offer resources for problem-solving that will help build a stronger, more welcoming and inclusive, diverse, and enriched community in which we all live, learn, play, worship, and work.

5) How is RAESJ different from HRAC?

HRAC is a volunteer board appointed by the Select Board, may only be residents of Reading, and may only work under opening meeting law. RAESJ will be appointed by the Director for Equity and Social Justice, may include persons who live, learn (or whose children learn), work, or worship (or a member of the clergy whose congregants live) in the Reading community. RAESJ may meet in open session and provide minutes or other important public communications, but they may also advise and the Director on sensitive or issues outside of formal meetings.

6) Why utilize a structure falling within a municipal department like the Library, as opposed to a more traditional town committee structure?

Per the Reading Charter, traditional town committees and boards are restricted to Reading town residents only. To fully meet the needs of our community, it is important that this committee is inclusive and open:

- a. to families whose children are educated in our town whether through METCO or private education
- b. faith-based leaders whose houses or worship are outside of our town but whose parishioners live in our community. Finally, our community also
- c. business owners and individuals who work in Reading

Additionally, the purpose of RAESJ is education, programming, and connection, not to make or enforce policy as other appointed committees and elected boards do.

Therefore, this structure emulates that of the Reading Coalition for Prevention and Support (formerly known as RCASA), another Town organization with broad-based community support and one that reflects a community priority.

7) If this isn't a town committee and not subject to open meeting law, will it lack transparency?

No. RAESJ will include stakeholders from across the community, who will update and educate their own organizations, committees and networks on their work. The Director of Equity and Social Justice will also be responsible for traditional communications such as websites, social media, newspaper articles, as well as periodic reports to elected boards, town meeting, or other organizations as requested.

To be as inclusive as possible, RAESJ may choose to have public meetings, listening forums, or town halls. Also, all programs, classes, workshops will and open to the public to reduce barriers and provide equitable access to resources.

However, RAESJ will also work to potentially resolve or de-escalate community conflicts as appropriate. When applicable issues arise, RAESJ will also serve as a safe and confidentiality resource so people are comfortable coming forward.

8) Will RAESJ have the authority to make policy?

No.

9) Will RAESJ have the authority to enforce laws or regulations?

No.

10) Then what will the RAESJ actually do?

The REASJ will act as a community resource and provide support to the Director of Equity and Social Justice. Members will assist the Director in planning and carrying out events. Additionally, member will network with other groups and individuals, ensuring cross-community communication, collaboration, and engagement.

11) How will the RAESJ pay for programs and related expenses?

RAESJ and the Director of Equity and Social Justice may pursue grants, but may not actively raise funds. The Director may accept funds raised or donated by outside groups. All grants and donations will be managed by the town and clearly identified as Equity and Social Justice accounts.

SECTION II: DIRECTOR OF EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

12) Why have a paid Director?

This is a named priority and commitment for the Town. In order to be effective, the RAESJ needs professional leadership, expertise, and consistency to direct programs, strategize and plan, and manager the community volunteers who have an interest in building an equitable and more just community.

After researching and exploring a variety of ways to implement a human rights-based organization, the Ad Hoc Human Rights Committee recommended this position based on guidance from the United States Department of Justice <https://www.justice.gov/archive/crs/pubs/gehrc.htm>

13) How will the Director be accountable (and to whom)?

The Director would report to the Library Director, who reports to the Board of Library Trustees, who are directly accountable to the voters.

14) How will the position be funded?

The salary for this position will be put into the overall Library budget in a separate Division for Equity and Social Justice. Related benefits will be funded through accommodated costs.

15) Will Director have the authority to make policy?

No.

16) Will Director have the authority to enforce laws or regulations?

No.