



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-21-166
Meeting 21-34
December 9, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Recommendations to further Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy Goals

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *den*

Receive a presentation and provide feedback on recommended strategies and implementation action items to further Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy Goals. No Board action required.

SUMMARY

As part of the Strategic Planning Retreat and the Environmental Scan discussion, the Board of Directors (Board) will receive a presentation on the recommendations developed by two staff teams to further the goals of Board policy 6.08 - *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*. These recommendations focus on Community Outreach and Partnerships, and Staff Recruitment, Hiring, and Development. The General Manager plans to phase in the implementation of the recommendations over multiple fiscal years, with proposed actions and funding identified as part of the annual Budget and Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP) development process.

BACKGROUND

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Strategic Plan, first adopted by the Board in 2011, provides the policy framework for guiding the District in implementing its mission and guiding future decision-making. The Strategic Plan has long included goals focused on building and strengthening diverse partnerships, increasing public outreach, and engaging the whole agency to accomplish these goals. These goals stem from the Board's October 22, 2015 retreat, where they discussed initiatives to promote diversity, including reaching out to diverse groups who visit and utilize District preserves.

On March 23, 2016, the Board adopted policy 6.08 "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion", reflecting the commitment "to supporting equality, diversity, and inclusion of all facets of society, the principles of which include fairness of treatment, recognition of rights, acceptance of responsibilities, commitment to equality, and dedication to expanding opportunities for all."

On June 22, 2016, the Board formed a Diversity Outreach Ad Hoc Committee to enhance Board member involvement in increasing outreach to and participation of diverse communities. The Committee's Board-approved goals included:

- Goal 1. Promote the District and its interpretive programs through collaborative partnerships with diverse community organizations

- Goal 2. Engage with communities through public meetings and other means to increase awareness about the District and its projects.
- Goal 3. Reflect the diversity of the surrounding community in District activities and functions.
- Goal 4. Expand existing partnerships and enter into new, non-traditional partnerships to complete projects and improve programs that serve a diverse community.

The Committee provided guidance on several initiatives, including consideration of a citizen advisory committee, outreach training for the Board, a visitor use survey, development of a youth engagement plan, expansion of the Visitor Services department, expanded employee training and broader recruitment outreach, and creation of a Board policy on diversity (Attachment 1). The goal of the initiatives, now completed, was to emphasize the value of diversity and expand the District's own diversity awareness.

In the late spring and summer of 2020, as the nation was in the midst of a dramatic reckoning with race and systemic injustices, the District responded by reaffirming its stance on the value of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and adopting Resolution 21-11, upholding the District's "long-standing values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and condemning discrimination, hate, and bigotry in all forms." In addition, the General Manager formed two staff DEI teams, one focused on Community, Outreach, and Partnerships and the second focused on Hiring, Recruitment, and Staff Development to further the District's DEI work, consistent with the District's mission, Board policy, and Board-adopted Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives. The formation of these two teams provided the space necessary for staff to dive deeply into each topic area and identify new DEI actions and strategies for the District to advance within the workplace and throughout the communities we serve. Each team was composed of representatives from nearly all District departments to bring together diverse, multi-disciplinary perspectives, ideas, and solutions to the discussions. This structure also allowed all levels of the organization, from entry-level staff to department managers, to work together in exploring and refining the proposed strategies and implementation actions. Within these teams, staff held meaningful and critical DEI conversations, learned extensively from each other and gained new insights from outside trainings and seminars, and together strengthened their collective determination to champion and help lead the District's and their respective departments' DEI work into the future.

DISCUSSION

The following strategies and implementation actions were identified and prioritized based on various considerations, including anticipated level of beneficial impact; level of urgency; level of initial and long-term staffing resources needed; cost; implementation duration; and synergy with existing District programs and initiatives. Each strategy below includes a list of potential supporting implementation actions.

Community Outreach and Partnerships Recommendations

The first two strategies listed below are considered foundational in best positioning the District with the focus, additional understanding, and resources needed to sustain and effectively communicate its DEI efforts related to community outreach and partnerships over the long-term.

- Strategy 1: Further integrate DEI into all aspects of District culture and workflow*
- Inventory existing programs, processes, and practices; identify DEI gaps and opportunities.

- In concert with and informed by Strategy 2, identify success metrics and measure future progress; adapt success metrics as District experience and knowledge in DEI grow.
- Identify reporting tools and communicate results.
- Establish a standing DEI staff team to stay current on DEI best practices and provide feedback on relevant topics and review ongoing progress related to community outreach and partnerships.
- Maintain opportunities to allow both remote and in-person public engagement.
- More comprehensively integrate DEI in the CIAP/Budget process and expand existing DEI discussion section in the Budget Book.
- Explore opportunities to reduce barriers and further promote DEI in the District's Grantmaking Program; seek opportunities to engage underserved communities in project planning for projects that are eligible to receive outside grants funds.
- Establish a DEI checklist to seek opportunities to incorporate DEI in District programs, activities and public processes.
- Consider adding information in Board reports that communicates when and how an Agenda item promotes DEI goals.
- Establish an internal, online DEI resource site for staff.

Strategy 2: Confirm community DEI needs as they relate to the District's work

- Work with an outside consultant to conduct broad outreach and assess community needs to inform what programs, processes, and practices to continue and/or refine and what new ones to pursue for effectively and equitably engaging diverse communities. Identify success metrics and track performance.
- Compile existing known partners and stakeholders and conduct outreach/assessments to identify those who may be missing and best methods for their inclusion.
- Survey partner agencies to learn how they effectively promote greater inclusion.

Strategy 3: Connect more intentionally with DEI organizations and programs

- Maintain active, centralized lists of existing partnerships that promote DEI goals and to coordinate the District's own DEI efforts.
- Explore new beneficial partnerships with community-based/nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies with whom the District has not yet connected; connect with existing partners to learn and build momentum from their DEI efforts and seek enhanced partnership opportunities.

Strategy 4: Expand existing District programs

- Consider expanding the District's Grantmaking Program to further fund activities in underserved communities that connect people to District lands and/or support District goals and to enhance access to funds by disadvantaged or underserved groups with project funding needs.
- Implement strategies to diversify docent and volunteer recruitment and incorporate DEI concepts into docent and volunteer trainings.
- Identify gaps in other District programs and activities where DEI concepts can be better integrated.

- Consider expanding volunteer and interpretive/educational programs with emphasis on youth to broaden knowledge and appreciation of the District's mission.
- Evaluate potential expansion of the Daniels Nature Center school program to better serve underserved communities.
- Improve upon and formalize the Junior Ranger Program.

Strategy 5: Partner with schools and educational institutions

- Identify and prioritize education-focused partners and explore partnership and program enhancements.
- Formalize the District's paid internship program and include outreach to underserved communities.
- Reinitiate discussions with East Palo Alto on securing an operator for the Cooley Landing Education Center.

Strategy 6: Improve outreach strategies to better reach all communities, including underserved/underrepresented demographics

- Review public engagement practices and incorporate DEI strategies where needed.
- Conduct target community listening sessions to more deeply understand community needs and modify policies/practices accordingly; track and report on progress.
- Continue to foster partnerships to leverage capacity, resources, and communication channels in support of diverse community engagement.
- Continue co-hosting events with diverse partners that reach broad audiences.
- Consider a community academy, or other forum, that helps educate a diverse spectrum of the community about the District, its work, mission, and public service.

Staff Recruitment, Hiring, and Development

The first strategy listed below is considered foundational in supporting the effective implementation of the remaining strategies and action items listed under this topic.

Strategy 1 Form a standing DEI staff team

- Establish a standing DEI staff team to stay current on DEI best practices and provide feedback on relevant topics, and to review, support and lead ongoing progress/efforts related to staff recruitment, hiring and development.
- DEI team would assist the District in tracking and reporting metrics to ensure ongoing progress of DEI goals.

Strategy 2: Update Board Policy 6.08, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (2016)

- Revise to include new, updated language regarding DEI and to expand policy guidance on the goals for equity and inclusion; periodically review policy to determine if other new future updates are warranted.

Strategy 3: Establish more internships opportunities

- Formalize an entry-level employment gateway for positions in the Land & Facilities and Visitor Services departments through partnerships with the San

Jose Conservation Corps, Student Conservation Association, and other job training organizations.

- Expand internship opportunities in other District departments as a strategy for preparing the next generation of conservation professionals, providing another potential pipeline for new recruits, and developing first-time supervisory skills of existing employees.

Strategy 4: Train and expand guidance for hiring panels and seek diverse panel representation

- Develop and periodically administer a training to prepare staff when called to serve on hiring panels.
- Establish best practices for assembling diverse hiring panels.

Strategy 5 Provide cultural competency training for staff

- Bring in consultant support to conduct a needs assessment on the cultural competency of the organization to understand strengths, weaknesses, and gaps.
- Based on findings, work with consultant to outline cultural competency training topics and materials for the District.
- Schedule periodic cultural competency training for staff.

Strategy 6 Consider a recruitment specialist position in Human Resources focused on DEI

- Consider piloting a limited term position with expertise in DEI-focused outreach and recruitment to support all District recruitment efforts.
- Position would develop and build relationships and potential partnerships with a broad spectrum of professional career and trade associations, academic institutions, and other pipeline organizations.
- Position would allocate significant time to proactive outreach and attract qualified prospective candidates prior to issuing recruitment announcements.
- Position would support recruitments for all levels of the organization: internships, entry-level, mid-career, senior-level, and management positions.

A sustained commitment and effort involving all levels of the organization to pursue the strategies and implementation actions listed above will further District efforts in advancing its DEI goals. Many of these strategies and implementation actions can be folded into current operations, while others will require additional funding and allocated resources. As this work continues, the expectation is that DEI goals will be infused in all aspects of District practices, procedures, workflow, and culture and will evolve as the District's knowledge in DEI work expands. Recent actions that reflect how these goals are being further internalized and integrated throughout the District include the addition of new DEI criteria in the evaluation of partnership/conservation grazing proposals, the addition of a more streamlined second tier application process in the Grantmaking Program, development of a bilingual compensation policy and securing on-call translation services, and development of the introductory Stewardship 101 Program that will focus on new preserve users and volunteers (scheduled to be launched in the spring). All of this work, coupled with the tracking and reporting of accomplishments will serve to keep the Board, public, docents and volunteers, and staff informed of how the District is making continual beneficial strides in furthering its DEI work to best serve its diverse communities.

FISCAL IMPACT

This item does not result in a direct fiscal impact. Implementation of the recommended strategies and action items will require an allocation of staff capacity and potentially funding. The first phase of recommended action items will be included in the proposed Fiscal Year 2022-23 (FY23) Budget, and Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP), which will be considered by the Action Plan and Budget Committee (ABC) and full Board starting in the spring of 2022. Subsequent phases will be programmed in later fiscal year as funding and capacity allow.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

None

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

The General Manager will work with staff to identify the recommended first phase of DEI action items to include in the proposed FY23 Budget and CIAP. A high-level overview of the FY23 CIAP will first be introduced to the Board at the spring Priority Setting Retreat, with project details discussed at subsequent ABC meetings, and final recommendations presented to the Board at public hearings in May and June of 2022.

Attachment:

1. Board Policy 6.08 – *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion* (March 23, 2016)

Responsible Department Head / Contact Person:

Ana Ruiz, General Manager

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Board Policy Manual

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Policy 6.08 Chapter 6 – General
Effective Date: 3/23/16	Revised Date: N/A
Prior Versions: N/A	

Policy

The District is committed to supporting equality, diversity, and inclusion of all facets of society, the principles of which include fairness of treatment, recognition of rights, acceptance of responsibilities, commitment to equality, and dedication to expanding opportunities for all. Valuing diversity is a core District principle that will be practiced and communicated at all levels of the organization.

Purpose

Members of our community face opportunities and challenges related to diversity pertaining to race, religion, gender, ethnicity, language, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic background, diverse abilities, and disabilities. It is important for members of our community and the District as a whole to assume the responsibility of seizing the opportunities and facing the challenges created by diversity.

Inclusion and equality is not about ‘treating everyone the same’, but recognizing that everyone is different, that there are strengths inherent in those differences, and that people’s needs are met in different ways. This can be as a constituent, District visitor, District Board Director, or employee. Diversity awareness is about understanding that each individual is unique, which then engenders recognition, respect, and celebration of the added value that differences bring.

District Board, Staff, and Volunteers

We want our workforce culture to promote and embrace equality, diversity, and inclusion, and we recognize that each individual adds value to a team. We know our strength comes from building on and valuing our staff and visitors’ differences and similarities. By practicing inclusion, we encourage staff from all backgrounds to bring and share their own unique perspectives to their work here at the District. We recognize that we need to draw on talent from the entire population to be innovative, creative, and effective in service delivery. We are committed to supporting our workforce to develop and to commission or deliver high quality services.

Nothing in this policy is intended to supplant, replace or supersede existing local, state or federal law, or District policies in conformance with those laws.