



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 1/30/2024

To: Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Office of Equity

Staff Name and Phone Number: Alegría De La Cruz, 565-8980

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

2023 Community Engagement Plan Workshop: Findings, Recommendations, and Strategies for Consideration

Recommended Action:

- A) Receive an update on the development of the County's Community Engagement Plan.
- B) Provide direction on the implementation approach and actions/strategies to include in the Final Plan

Executive Summary:

On December 14, 2021, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved the distribution of \$1.16 million APRA funds for investments in building and strengthening the County's cultural responsiveness. The BOS granted the Office of Equity (OOE) \$710,000 from these funds to develop a Language Access Policy and Plan and a Community Engagement Plan. Subsequently, on September 20, 2022 the Board delegated authority to the Director of the Office of Equity to execute a Professional Services Agreement with Equity First Consulting, LLC for community engagement consulting services for a not-to-exceed amount of \$450,000. The agreement's intended product is the creation of a Community Engagement Plan to achieve equitable participation and access to County government services and resources for underserved communities of color and other communities that have traditionally experienced marginalization from government processes and services. Both the Community Engagement Plan and the Language Access Plan (scheduled to come to come forward for initial Board review on March 15, 2024) are designed to provide an actionable roadmap to implementation of the Strategic Plan Pillar Racial Equity and Social Justice Goal 4 (Engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and advance racial equity). Specifically, the Community Engagement Plan will satisfy the following objectives:

- Objective 1) Establish a process for engagement and collaboration with community members and stakeholder groups and launch a community engagement strategy by the end of 2022 with a focus on racial equity.
- Objective 3) Begin implementing strategies for regular community engagement to guide racial equity efforts.

This item provides an update to your Board related to the investment made in the County's development of a Community Engagement Plan.

Furthermore, with this item, staff seeks direction from your Board on the implementation approach and proposed strategies that will make up the Final Community Engagement Plan to come to your Board in June 2024.

Discussion:

Background

In March 2021, the Board approved a 5-year Strategic Plan, which includes a Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) pillar <<<https://socostrategicplan.org/racial-equity-and-social-justice/>>>. The Office of Equity (OOE) is currently the lead department in the implementation of the pillar's specific goals and objectives, which reflect your Board's commitment to institutionalize equity-centered principles in the County's processes and service delivery to address racial inequities both in our organization and in the community. Goal 4 of the RESJ pillar is to engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and to advance racial equity. Through the creation of both the Community Engagement Plan and Language Access Plan and Policy, the Office of Equity will have an actionable roadmap to launch the development and implementation of three Strategic Plan Objectives (Goal 4/Objectives 1, 3, and 4). While centering equity will achieve critical changes impacting communities who have experienced marginalization, these improvements will be felt across the County as a whole.

On December 14, 2021, the Board approved the distribution of \$96 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds on a set of departmental proposals, including \$1.16 million for investments in cultural responsiveness for the County of Sonoma. The investments in cultural responsiveness included three projects that were identified as critically important to the County's better understanding and service to the different culturally and linguistically diverse communities living in Sonoma County. The Board granted \$710,000 of the total \$1.16 million invested in Cultural Responsiveness to the OOE to engage consultants in the development of a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy, and a Community Engagement Plan.

These two deliverables had been identified by community members disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through their contributions and feedback as the Equity Work Group, as well as from Town Halls, Community Surveys, and other community engagement efforts as critically important to the County's addressing and healing the harms caused by the underservice and underrepresentation experienced during the pandemic.

On September 20, 2022, the Board of Supervisors approved <<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/board-of-supervisors-approve-community-engagement-and-language-access-agreements>> a contract with Equity First Consulting, to support the development of the Community Engagement Plan (Plan) and implementation of a community engagement process, in the amount of \$450,000 through March, 2024. The Plan is informed by community, staff, and County leadership's input to provide guidance and best practices for engaging in a culturally responsive manner between County departments and community members and to break down barriers to meaningful engagement in Sonoma County. Below is an outline of the engagement process used to arrive at the proposed strategies to include in the final Community Engagement Plan. The detailed community engagement process and assessment can be found in the report, County of Sonoma, Office of Equity Community Engagement Findings (Attachment 2).

Key Questions

The key questions that guided both the community engagement process and the subsequent plan included:

- What is the County of Sonoma's current overall community engagement strategy?
- How impactful is community engagement from the perspectives of County staff and community

members?

- What are opportunities to strengthen community engagement efforts through the development and implementation of a Community Engagement Plan?

Methodology

The key questions that guided both the community engagement process and the subsequent plan included:

- What is the County of Sonoma’s current overall community engagement strategy?
- How impactful is community engagement from the perspectives of County staff and community members?
- What are opportunities to strengthen community engagement efforts through the development and implementation of a Community Engagement Plan?

Key Findings

Key findings from the community engagement planning process were:

1. The County of Sonoma is primarily in the “Inform” stage on the spectrum of community engagement, with demonstrated capacity to move towards “Consult” levels of engagement in times of crisis.
2. Staff and community members stated that the County does not have sufficient resources or the intentional resource allocation - including funding, adequate and equitable staffing, and training - needed to operationalize impactful community engagement strategies.
3. Staff and community members expressed a bidirectional lack of trust between the County and communities most impacted by systemic inequities, and stressed that the lack of representation and cultural responsiveness within the County gets in the way of essential, responsive, and reciprocal relationships.
4. Staff and community members agree that there are no effective accountability mechanisms currently in place to support the County in measuring success, holding itself accountable for community engagement outcomes, or honoring the time of community members who engage.

The proposed strategies that follow are based on both the initial data collection and the reflection session insights.

Strategies

All strategies are represented under five categories including, hiring/development, policies and procedures, training and collaboration, accountability, and opportunities for equitable community governance. Staff has identified nine critical strategies that are foundational for the success of the Community Engagement Plan for implementation and outlined them below. The nine strategies are based on strategies prioritized by community and/or County staff, impact multiple key areas, and leverage existing County efforts.

Summary of Key Pillars for Implementation in Final Plan

Hiring/Development	1. Hire a permanent Community Engagement Manager position (OOE)
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	2. Create a Community-Based Leader (CBL) engagement program, creating a pathway for staff and/or consultant opportunities for CBLs moving towards staff positions for CBLs (OOE)
	3. Designate new funds for multilingual translation and create/hire a translation and interpretation team to support all Departments, Boards, and Commissions (Included in Draft Language Access Plan, coming to Board in March, 2024)
Policies and Procedures	4. Implement consistent stipend policies across County departments (Ex.: internal stipend policy, CBO MOU policy) (Auditor, County Administrator’s Office - CAO, OOE)
	5. Implement consistent public meeting policies and approaches. (Ex: Childcare, food, language, location, and time) (OOE)
	6. Apply existing Racial Equity Impact Analysis policy to assess impact of community engagement work on communities most impacted by systemic inequities (CAO, OOE)
Training & Collaboration	7. Support CBOs with regular cross-training and resource navigation coordination (OOE, Safety Net Collaborative)
Accountability	8. Implement accountability mechanisms to ensure for equitable access and impact (OOE, Upstream, Safety Net Collaborative)
Opportunities for Equitable Community Governance	9. Strengthen existing governing bodies (Boards and Commissions) to better represent the community (BOS, CAO, OOE)

Staff has also identified additional proposed strategies that build on these foundational strategies for the Community Engagement Plan for discussion during this item and outlined below.

Strategies for Board Consideration

Hiring/Development	1. Hire County navigator(s) to coordinate support for community members across departments (OOE, Safety Net Collaborative)
	2. Develop a leadership pipeline with a focus on better serving underrepresented and underserved communities (OOE, HR)
	3. Provide trainings to prepare staff for co-design with community (OOE)
	4. Increase & clarify expectations for County staff re: Community Engagement practices (CAO, OOE)
	5. Allocate and track community engagement resources (CAO, OOE)
	6. Develop cross-departmental, centralized Community Engagement resources for County staff (OOE)
Training & Collaboration	1. Conduct multilingual community education workshops on local government systems 101 (OOE)

	2. Create cross- departmental peer learning cohorts for County staff who do Community Engagement (OOE)
	3. Conduct training with leaders of public-facing committees on promoting equitable engagement (OOE)
	4. Provide trainings for County staff on partnering with navigators and CBOs (OOE)
Accountability	1. Assess language accessibility of County’s public facing documents/communications and provide ongoing support (Included in Draft Language Access Plan, coming to Board in March, 2024)
	2. Evaluate impact of each year of community engagement plan implementation (Community Engagement Manager, CBLs)
	3. Integrate Racial Equity Impact Analysis results into continued community engagement implementation work (CAO, OOE)
	4. Create and resource a community- accountability body to measure impact of community engagement on communities (CBL, OOE, Upstream)
	5. Update Race Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan Pillar informed by the recommendations, strategies, and learnings of the community engagement implementation (CAO, OOE)
Opportunities for Equitable Community Governance	1. Conduct an assessment of Boards and Commissions processes around recruitment, selection, stipends and demographic information collection (CAO,OOE)
	2. Increase transparency and consistent practices for Boards and Commissions to improve equitable representation (CAO, OOE)
	3. Lead and resource ongoing racial equity/community engagement training series for Board members (OOE)
	4. Pilot a participatory budgeting process (CAO, OOE)

Next Steps

At the end of today’s Workshop, direction received from your Board on 1.) the identification of department(s) with leadership responsibility for this work; and 2) preferred strategies and approach will inform and will be integrated into the Final Community Engagement Plan. Staff will use this direction to prioritize strategies, fiscal impacts, and to finalize the Community Engagement Plan for your Board’s review and approval in June 2024.

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County’s Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 4: Engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and to advance racial equity.

Objective: Objective 1: Establish a process for engagement and collaboration with community members and stakeholder groups, and launch a community engagement strategy by the end of 2022 with a focus on racial equity.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 4: Engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and to advance racial equity.

Objective: Objective 3: Begin implementing strategies for regular community engagement to guide racial equity efforts.

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

This item was not identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit until the finalized Community Engagement Plan for the Board’s review and approval in June 2024.

However, staff completed the Racial Equity Toolkit Analysis as part of this item to identify how equity was embedded into the process used to arrive at the strategies listed above.

Prior Board Actions:

- July 27, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act Funding Plan
- September 14, 2021: Approval to add a 1.0 FTE Bilingual Community Engagement Analyst through December 31, 2024, to support American Rescue Plan Act Funding Plan
- December 14, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Update - Response, Implementation, and Community Funding Approach
- Sept 20, 2022, Professional Services Agreements for the Development of a Community Engagement Plan and a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Resources impacts are expected. Thus, a fiscal analysis will be completed and is expected to be presented to the Board with the Community Engagement Plan in June 2024.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

NA

Attachments:

1. PowerPoint, 2023 Community Engagement Plan Workshop: Findings, Recommendations, and Strategies for consideration

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2. Report, County of Sonoma, Office of Equity Community Engagement Findings
3. Racial Equity Toolkit Analysis of the Development of the Community Engagement Plan

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

None