



**OFFICE OF EQUITY**  
COUNTY OF SONOMA

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**County of Sonoma Office of Equity  
Community Engagement Plan**

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Community Engagement Plan**  
[sonomacounty.ca.gov/administrative-support-  
and-fiscal-services/office-of-equity](https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/administrative-support-and-fiscal-services/office-of-equity)  
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Prepared for:  
**County of Sonoma Office of Equity**

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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**Sonoma County and the County of Sonoma are located within the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary land relationships of the Kashia (also spelled Kashaya) Pomo and Southern Pomo, Wappo, and Coast Miwok Tribal Nations, which include the federally recognized Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, and Lytton Rancheria of California.**

**The Office of Equity has not adopted a land acknowledgment yet and recognizes that unless there is direction and subsequent allocation of resources for the County of Sonoma, as an institution, to authentically engage with Tribal Nations and members, a land acknowledgment standing alone can not replace the need for the creation of collaborative and meaningful relationships founded on respect, reciprocity, shared values and agreements, and a deep understanding of Tribal history and sovereignty, grounded in actions intended to heal past and present harm.**



# CALIFORNIA TRIBAL LANDS

California Native-American Pre-Contact Tribal Territories

Northern California Indian Development Council | [ncidc.org](http://ncidc.org)

# IN LAK'ECH

Tú eres mi otro yo.

You are my other me.

Si te hago daño a ti,

If I do harm to you,

Me hago daño a mi mismo

I do harm to myself.

Si te amo y respeto,

If I love and respect you,

Me amo y respeto yo.

Love and respect myself.

- Luis Valdez



Colorful Hands 1 of 3

George Fox Students Annabelle Wombacher, Jared Mar, Sierra Ratcliff and Benjamin Cahoon collaborated on the mural.

Photograph by Tim Mossholder

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Equity of the County of Sonoma and the County Administrator's Office commissioned Equity First Consulting to develop and implement an equity-driven community engagement process to develop a Community Engagement Plan, informed by County leadership, staff, and community 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.<sup>1</sup>

## KEY QUESTIONS

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

- *What is the County of Sonoma's (County) 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?*

The grounding frameworks for this community engagement process were (1) a design-to-the-margins framework, which focuses on identifying the communities whose experiences, knowledge, feedback and wisdom must be centered in order to build equitable systems and programs (see p.23); and (2) the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership (see illustration on p. 26), which charts a pathway to strengthen and transform local democracies through deep participation, particularly by communities commonly excluded from democratic processes and power structures. These frameworks operate together to assess and transform community engagement efforts so that they advance community-driven solutions.

## DESIGN TO THE MARGINS APPROACH

Community Engagement is defined as the bidirectional process by which the County can learn from local communities about their needs and visions and offer meaningful co-design spaces, programs, resources, services, and information flow. The word "community" is broadly defined as a group of people who share a commonality, such as living in Sonoma County or working for the County of Sonoma. However, traditional community engagement strategies and democratic processes are not designed to capture community wisdom equitably. Rather, their design prioritizes a small subsection of community members, regardless

<sup>1</sup> Language note: The County of Sonoma and Sonoma County: Throughout this report, the terms the County of Sonoma and the County (with a capital C) refer to the county's government (including electeds and staff). Sonoma County and the county (with a lowercase C) refer to the broader community of folks living within the county's borders, and the land on which they live.



of the intention of the people creating policy, allocating resources, or conducting the engagement. Shifting systems to mitigate the harm created by this inequitable distribution of power and to account for the wisdom and experiences of the entire community, therefore, requires prioritizing the people whose wisdom is not already included.

This community engagement process was designed to do just that, by prioritizing the Sonoma County communities, including staff, who are systemically excluded from authentic decision-making processes. Within the context of the United States in general, and Sonoma County is no exception, this prioritization begins with race, and includes a range of intersecting identities, such as language, documentation status, wealth and income, gender, etc., which impact the extent to which people are likely to have equitable access to decision-making power and/or experience harm at the hands of systems such as government.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this community engagement planning process was phased as follows:

### ● **Phase 1: Grounding and Exploration**

To assess current County community engagement and outreach practices, Equity First requested information from 29 Departments, Districts, and District Supervisor Offices and received documents from 24 Departments, Districts, and District Supervisor Offices across the County of Sonoma to create an inventory of current community engagement efforts. In addition, Equity First conducted a landscape analysis of community engagement efforts through a literature review across comparable jurisdictions, while the Office of Equity conducted a survey of Boards and Commissions within the County of Sonoma.

### ● **Phase 2a: Engagement with County Staff**

Equity First and the Office of Equity conducted a total of six focus groups with 47 County leaders and staff and 12 interviews with 16 County leaders and staff, totaling 63 participants in internal engagement activities, between April and August of 2023 as part of the internal engagement process.

### ● **Phase 2b: Engagement with community members and Community-Based Organizations**

Community-Based Leaders (CBLs), with support from Equity First, conducted 10 focus groups with community members. These included group sessions with a total of 89 people, representing a cross-section of Sonoma County residents, through a design-to-the-margins lens. Additionally, a total of 24 community members participated in 16 stakeholder interviews conducted by CBLs and Equity First. Finally, Equity First conducted seven partner interviews with 8 representatives of

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Overall, 121 community members participated in external engagement activities.

### ● **Demographic Survey**

Throughout Phases 2a and 2b, Equity First conducted a demographic survey with County Staff and community members (Participants). Key takeaways from the demographic survey included:

- *County staff have worked at the County and lived in Sonoma County for an average of 23.5 years. About half (52%) named that they had lived experience that was relevant to their work.*
- *Community members' self-identification in the survey indicated a broad range of racial, housing, linguistic, geographic, and knowledge representation as detailed specifically in the demographic survey section and appendix of the report.*

### ● **Phase 3: Reflection Sessions with community members and County staff**

Equity First conducted Reflection Sessions in order to further engage participants in the process of data analysis, refinement of findings and recommendations, and ultimately in a co-design process around Community Engagement Plan development.

Three Reflection Sessions with community members were held, with options to join in Spanish, English, In-Person, or on Zoom. A total of 25 community members participated. One Reflection Session was conducted with County leaders and staff via zoom, with five breakout rooms organized by job types so that staff members could feel safe[r] to speak freely without their supervisors present. A total of 35 staff across all roles participated. In all, a total of 60 people participated in the Reflection Session process.

### ● **Intergovernmental Tribal Relations**

The Office of Equity and Equity First recognize that the County of Sonoma holds a political and legal relationship with sovereign and Federally Recognized Tribes, which is distinct from the history and relationship that the County has with non-native Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. With guidance from a CBL, the County of Sonoma and Equity First reached out to Tribal Nations who share geography with Sonoma County, as well as consulted with community members who identify as California Indian, American Indian or Native American and County staff on the topic of government-to-government relations with Tribal Nations. A total of six interviews were conducted. The methodology and learnings about intergovernmental consultation are detailed in a separate Brief on Intergovernmental Relations with Native Nations in Sonoma County in order to respect the critical legal and political relationships among local government and leaders and members of sovereign Nations.

## KEY FINDINGS

Key findings from the community engagement planning process were:

- *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.*
- *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.*
- *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.*
- *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.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Move from Informing and Consulting toward Community Ownership by making key organizational structural changes that support community-driven decision making.*
- *Remove barriers by providing accessible, culturally-appropriate information and resources for community members furthest from access and opportunity both in times of stability and crisis.*
- *Design, implement, and evaluate policies and procedures that increase public participation by community members who have traditionally been excluded.*
- *Create internal programming for continuous training, learning, and collaboration across Departments in support of Community Engagement efforts.*
- *Assess and document progress on the planning and implementation of community engagement efforts.*

## STRATEGIES

Sub-strategies that are highlighted in yellow represent pillar strategies that are foundational for implementation of the rest of the plan. At the January 2024 Board Meeting, the Board of Supervisors requested that the Office of Equity focus on Board and Commissions, and that the plan be adapted to reflect this focus. For more information on the Racial Equity in Sonoma County Boards and Commissions, please see <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/administrative-support-and-fiscal-services/office-of-equity>.

Sub-strategies that are highlighted in yellow represent pillar strategies that are foundational for implementation of the rest of the plan.

Strategies that have been adapted for use in the Racial Equity in Sonoma County Boards and Commissions Plan are marked with an asterisk at the end. \*

### Strategy 1: Hiring and Professional Development

- 1.1 Hire a permanent Community Engagement Manager position (OOE) \*
- 1.2 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)
- 1.3 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, that came to the Board in March 2024) \*
- 1.4 Hire County navigator(s) to coordinate support for community members across departments (OOE, Safety Net Collaborative)
- 1.5 Develop a leadership pipeline with a focus on better serving underrepresented and underserved communities (OOE, HR)
- 1.6 Provide trainings to prepare staff for co-design with community (OOE) \*
- 1.7 Increase and clarify expectations for County staff related to Community Engagement practices (CAO, OOE) \*
- 1.8 Allocate and track community engagement resources (CAO, OOE) \*
- 1.9 Develop cross-departmental, centralized Community Engagement resources for County staff (OOE) \*

## Strategy 2: Policies and Procedures

- 2.1 Implement consistent stipend policies across County departments (ex: internal stipend policy, CBO MOU policy) (Auditor, CAO, OOE) \*
- 2.2 Implement consistent public meeting policies and approaches. (Ex: Childcare, food, language, location, and time) (OOE) \*
- 2.2 Apply existing Racial Equity Analysis policy to assess impact of community engagement work on communities most impacted by systemic inequities (CAO, OOE) \*

## Strategy 3: Training and Collaboration

- 3.1 Support CBOs with regular cross-training and resource navigation coordination (OOE, Safety Net Collaborative)
- 3.2 Conduct multilingual community education workshops on local government systems 101 (OOE) \*
- 3.3 Create cross- departmental peer learning cohorts for County staff who do Community Engagement (OOE) \*
- 3.4 Conduct training with leaders of public-facing committees on promoting equitable engagement (OOE) \*
- 3.5 Provide trainings for County staff on partnering with navigators and CBOs (OOE)

## Strategy 4: Accountability

- 4.1 Implement accountability mechanisms to ensure for equitable access and impact (OOE, Upstream, Safety Net Collaborative) \*
- 4.2 Assess language accessibility of County's public facing documents/communications and provide ongoing support (Included in Draft Language Access Plan, that came to the Board in March 2024) \*
- 4.3 Create and resource a community-led accountability body to measure the impact of community engagement on communities (CBL, OOE, Upstream)
- 4.4 Evaluate impact of each year of community engagement plan implementation (Community Engagement Manager, CBLs) \*
- 4.5 Integrate Racial Equity Analysis results into continued community engagement implementation work (CAO, OOE) \*
- 4.6 Update Racial Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan Pillar informed by the recommendations, strategies, and learnings of the community engagement implementation (CAO, OOE) \*

## Strategy 5: Opportunities for Equitable Community Governance

- 5.1** Strengthen existing governing bodies (Boards and Commissions) to better represent the community (BOS, CAO, OOE) \*
- 5.2** Conduct an assessment of Boards and Commissions processes around recruitment, selection, stipends and collection of demographic information (CAO, OOE) \*
- 5.3** Increase transparency and consistent practices for Boards and Commissions to improve equitable representation (CAO, OOE) \*
- 5.4** Lead and resource ongoing racial equity/community engagement training series for Board members (OOE) \*
- 5.5** Pilot and participatory budgeting process (CAO, OOE)



# BACKGROUND

## ABOUT SONOMA COUNTY

Sonoma County is a geographically dispersed, urban-suburban-rural county occupying 1,575 square miles. The county's total population is currently estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau to be 482,650 (US Census Bureau, 2022). Sonoma County is home to five federally-recognized Native American Tribes: Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians (Vol. 87 Federal Register Page 4636). The County also has tribal communities who are not currently federally recognized, such as the Mishewal Wappo Tribe. Sonoma County has a diverse economy that includes a world class wine region, is a globally significant "hotspot" for biodiversity, and offers dozens of tourist destinations and open space preserves.

Sonoma County's population is less diverse than that of California as a whole. However, this is changing. For example, Sonoma County's Latine/a/o population grew from 25.6% in 2010 to 28.9% in 2022. And while home-ownership rates, median home values, educational attainment rates, and both household and individual income levels are higher in Sonoma County than in California as a whole, when disaggregated by race or ethnicity, inequities within Sonoma County become evident. Additional disparities exist when looking at lifespan, lack of housing, rent burden, and documentation status. As documented in the Portrait of Sonoma County 2021 Update and by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, the inequities highlighted below are an important snapshot, but not the complete picture, of the lived experiences of the community members that community engagement efforts need to prioritize (Katz, 2017; Lewis, 2021; US Census Bureau, 2021a; US Census Bureau, 2021b, n.d.).

Black and Native American people are overrepresented among Sonoma County residents who experience houselessness. Black residents are about 1.5% of Sonoma's population, yet 6% of the houseless population; Native Americans make up less than 1% of Sonoma's population, yet 9% of the houseless population. LGBTQIA2S+ residents, too, are disproportionately likely to experience

Disparities in homeownership and home values in Sonoma County translate into a significant wealth gap between Asian and White<sup>2</sup> residents and Black, Latine/a/o, and Native American residents. 34% of Black households own their home as compared to 66% of White and Asian households; the median home value for Black homeowners is \$100,000 less than that of White homeowners.

<sup>2</sup>Language Note: The Office of Equity chooses to capitalize White as it does for all racial and ethnic identifiers, so as to disrupt the systemic assumption that Whiteness is the standard and norm, and to shine a spotlight on the way Whiteness functions in institutions and communities.

<p>houselessness. 16% of Sonoma County residents who are unhoused identified as LGBTQIA2S+. (Lewis, 2021)</p>	<p>Black renters face the highest housing burden in the County at 68% followed by Latine/a/o renters at 59%. (Lewis, 2021)</p>
<p>The lifespan of Black residents in Sonoma County is ten years shorter than any other race and ethnic group in the County. (Lewis, 2021)</p>	<p>Sonoma County is home to significant Indigenous farmworker populations, who face additional challenges over and above what other undocumented, low-wage workers experience in Sonoma. (Lewis, 2021)</p>
<p>11.8% of the total population of Sonoma County are “linguistically isolated,” meaning that they speak a language other than English at home and speak English less than “very well” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). An estimated 8% of the Sonoma County population in 2013 was undocumented immigrants. (Katz, 2017)</p>	<p>Latine/a/o, Native American, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) residents of Sonoma County have the lowest median personal earnings, about \$29,000, \$29,000, and \$26,000, respectively, compared to \$44,131 for White residents. (Lewis, 2021) 61% of White community members had annual household incomes above \$75,000, whereas only 54% of Latine/a/o community members did. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a)</p>

The nature of these inequities (namely that indicators such as health outcomes, housing stability, home ownership, rent burden, poverty rates, earnings, educational attainment and school enrollment are disparately distributed across racial, ethnic, and other demographic identities) are not unique to Sonoma County. Climate change intensified natural disasters are also not unique to Sonoma County. But the disasters experienced in the county over the last six years have laid bare these inequities and the extent of the devastation that disasters have on everyone, and especially on community members who are systematically excluded from benefits and programs that are designed to aid in recovery, or who are typically unrepresented or underserved in resource allocation or decision-making processes within the County.

For example, while the Tubbs Fire razed 5% of Santa Rosa’s housing stock, including entire neighborhoods, overnight, emergency alerts went out primarily in English, and the County was inundated with calls from Spanish speaking community members who did not understand the alerts (Vives, 2020). And while many people flocked to emergency shelters established by the County, many people living in mixed documentation households headed for the coast instead, for fear of making themselves vulnerable to law enforcement



at government-operated shelters, where they were asked for ID by volunteers who largely did not speak languages other than English and who were not able to provide culturally relevant and responsive services and assistance (Clark, 2017; Ho and Koran, 2019). During the Walbridge/LNU Lightning Complex fire, winery owners were granted exceptions to evacuation orders so that farmworkers - who do not have access to basic job protections - could enter evacuation zones to harvest grapes (Swindell, 2020). During the lockdown phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, community members of color were disproportionately represented in jobs deemed "essential" and were disproportionately diagnosed with COVID-19 (County of Sonoma, 2023).

The community members who participated in this community engagement process have been most disproportionately impacted by these disasters in recent years. They have experienced an increase in shelterlessness, housing instability, and economic stress. In addition, many immigrant community members also fear deportation and family separation during emergency procedures. A community member shared, "I'll feel safer if they do not separate us, families, in the shelters because sometimes they separate families, kids in one place, us in another, and our husbands in another." When asked about their biggest needs, communities shared many basic needs:

- *Safety (with mentions of neighbors drinking, violence, car racing, unsafe roads and accidents, and un-housed community being a source of police presence)*
- *Peacefulness (both quietude and sense of safety)*
- *In-home services (including access to utilities like electricity, washing machine, internet)*
- *Proximity to grocery stores and schools*
- *Access to parks and nature*
- *Access to available resources and services*
- *Transportation, especially for farmworkers who face many barriers to obtaining a driver's license, and for rural community members who must rely on the time-consuming, often overpriced, inefficient public transportation in the area.*

The "people who are closest to [the pain of] the problem are closest to the solution" (Martin, 2017), and they are often simultaneously furthest from institutional power. Asking them about the barriers they are experiencing is part of the process, but seeking their wisdom and leadership in solution generation is crucial too. While there are many forms of expertise, people are experts on their own lives and their own communities in ways that institutions may not be without some additional effort and intentionality. The overlay of ongoing disasters on top of systemic inequities illuminates the need for community engagement that takes these overlapping identities into account throughout the process, from outreach and relationship building, to barrier identification and mitigation, and to feedback integration, policy design, and resource allocation.

## **ABOUT THE COUNTY OF SONOMA**

The County of Sonoma is governed by five Supervisors who make up the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and comprises 25 departments as well as additional agencies and districts that provide a full range of services to the community through its 4,800+ employees.

In an effort to mitigate the harms of the inequities mentioned above, the County of Sonoma has taken a series of steps in the years since the Tubbs Fire, including the establishment of the Office of Recovery and Resilience in 2017 and Department of Emergency Management in July 2019. The Office of Recovery and Resilience created a Recovery and Resiliency Framework (2018), which included social equity as a core principle, and which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in December of 2018.

The County subsequently moved to create two new entities: the Communications Division, which was aimed at supporting departments in bridging the information gap between the County and the community it serves; and the Office of Equity, to support the County in embedding equity throughout the institution and in the community.



## **ABOUT THE OFFICE OF EQUITY (OOE)**

In the summer of 2020, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors created the Sonoma County Office of Equity, taking a meaningful step to recognize the County's powerful role in unseating racial inequity in local communities. Since then, the Office of Equity has gone through a strategic planning process, grown threefold in size and capacity to 5 full-time permanent staff and 4 full-time time-limited staff, and engaged in an ongoing way with department heads and staff from across the County to further equity work.

Grounded in initial assessment efforts with staff and leaders, the Office of Equity has created and stewarded a Core Team - a learning community of equity champions from County departments - to deepen the County's ability to identify and disrupt systemic harm through their work as liaisons between the Office of Equity and their departments. At the close of initial training, the Office of Equity made two other training cohort opportunities available: one to engage in deeper skills building related to a data collection, analysis, and reporting system called Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA), and another to engage in deeper skills building related to facilitation of race equity trainings and strategic conversations. This work aligns with the best practices recommended by the Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE), which supported the first equity champion cohorts at the County of Sonoma, and which identifies normalizing conversations about race equity and developing a shared understanding of foundational concepts as a requisite first steps towards achieving equity.

In 2023, this effort culminated in the creation of the Steering Committee, made up of a smaller leadership group from the larger Core Team to develop the County's first Racial Equity Action Plan, which will be presented for feedback and approval to the Board of Supervisors in 2024. The County's Racial Equity Action Plan will be a roadmap of action items, goals, measurable outcomes, and accountability mechanisms to implement institutional and structural changes within County government to achieve racial equity.

The work of the Office of Equity has been mostly internal; however, in line with the County's Racial Equity and Social Justice Pillar (Goal 4: Objective 1) to engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and to advance racial equity, the County Board of Supervisors invested American Rescue Plan Act resources to develop a Community Engagement Plan to provide clarity in expectations and responsibilities, as well as guidance on best practices on the County's community engagement efforts.

## **ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF EQUITY WORK AT THE COUNTY OF SONOMA**

In January 2021, the Board approved a five-year strategic plan, which included a Racial Equity and Social Justice pillar. The pillar is made up of specific goals and objectives that will lead to normalizing, organizing, and operationalizing a new way of seeing challenges, conducting analysis, and implementing new strategies to ensure a workforce reflective of the communities served and to achieve racial equity in County service provision.

That same year, the Board of Supervisors responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the federal funding that came via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) by creating a community work group (the ARPA Equity Work Group) to recommend priority areas and strategies to ensure that the intent of the legislations - to address and remedy the disproportional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic - was met. The Community Engagement Plan - among other investments - arose from the ARPA Equity Work Group's and community members' recommendations that the County invest in improving its cultural responsiveness.

This recommendation acknowledged that, even as the County has increased its ability to push information out through the Communications Division and to embed equity in its work via the Office of Equity, language access and community engagement remain County-wide challenges. Currently, many departments do not have the experience, capacity, or funding to engage with language communities beyond English (and, to some extent Spanish), nor to conduct culturally-responsive community engagement that results in equitable public participation in government processes and services. The Board of Supervisors continued their ongoing work of pushing equity forward, and approved critical investments in County cultural responsiveness.

The Language Access Plan efforts will focus on effectively communicating with and delivering services to residents who are monolingual, Indigenous language speakers, people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and to other linguistically diverse individuals who live or work in Sonoma County.

The County-wide Community Engagement Plan (which is the focus of this summary report) will provide guidance and best practices for engaging in a culturally responsive manner among County departments, community members, and Community-Based Organizations to break down the barriers to reciprocal, authentic engagement and participation in democratic decision-making processes in Sonoma County.

## **ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In this work, Community Engagement is defined as the bidirectional process by which the County can learn from local communities about their needs and visions and offer meaningful co-design spaces, programs, resources, services, and information flow.



One of the goals of the Racial Equity and Social Justice pillar is to engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and to advance racial equity, with a stated objective to establish a process for engagement and collaboration with community members and stakeholder groups, and launch a community engagement strategy with a focus on racial equity (Sonoma County Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2021). To this end, the Office of Equity engaged in an equity-driven planning and implementation process to study existing community engagement efforts at the County and in comparable jurisdictions, review models for County community engagement and partnerships, and aid in the development of a robust community engagement strategy for the County.

The recent disasters that residents of Sonoma County have faced, including wildfires, floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic, have deepened already existing inequities, and highlighted the imperative need to center communities, particularly people who are systematically marginalized by government systems, and their experiences in the way in which the County delivers services and creates policies. This work cannot be done without a clear roadmap of how to effectively and consistently eliminate institutional barriers that prevent communities of color and other historically marginalized communities from engaging with their local government. Fundamentally distinct from traditional one-way communications distributed through mainstream systems and methods, such as press releases and social media, the intent of a County-wide Community Engagement Plan is to provide guidance and best practices for facilitating culturally responsive, bidirectional processes for connection between and among County departments and the wisdom and lived experiences of community members, community-based organizational partners, and other institutional and sector partners to dismantle racial inequities in Sonoma County.

The Community Engagement Plan resulting from this community engagement planning process will be presented for the Board of Supervisors' consideration to increase equitable participation and access to County government services and resources for systemically underserved communities of color and other communities who have often been marginalized by government processes and services.

The Plan is being developed using a three-phase process, grounded in a culturally responsive approach that captures community expertise and responds to the lived experiences of the various communities for which Sonoma County is home. These three phases are (1) assessing the County's existing Community Engagement plans, processes, and capabilities through a series of focus groups and interviews with County leaders and staff as well as researching the engagement efforts of comparable jurisdictions; (2) conducting a series of focus groups and interviews with key community members, and Tribal Council members, within communities of focus and partner organizations servicing communities of focus, to understand experiences with engagement, and identify gaps and opportunities for improving the County's engagement processes with communities of color and others marginalized from government systems; and (3) presenting a draft of the plan to all Participants to seek further feedback and finalize a Community Engagement Plan. The final plan will include a set of standard community engagement operating guidelines or "best

practices,” resources that are culturally responsive and can be used by all County Departments to engage disproportionately impacted community members to learn how to close gaps in services, and corresponding fiscal impacts for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.



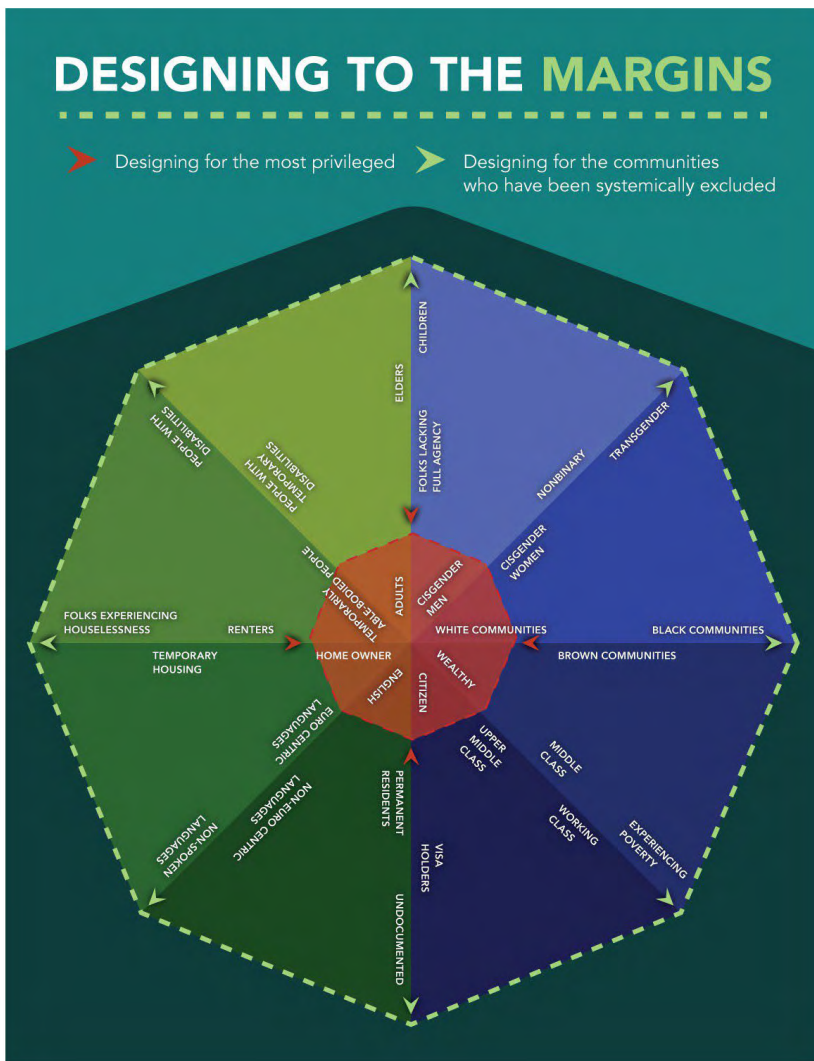
This community engagement planning process was developed to address the following **overarching questions**:

- 1** What is the County of Sonoma’s (County) current overall community engagement strategy?
  - *What are common practices or approaches?*
  - *Who is engaged and who is missed?*
  - *How, if at all, has community engagement changed over time?*
  
- 2** How impactful is community engagement from the perspectives of County staff and community members?
  - *What are key accomplishments or successes?*
  - *What are major challenges or barriers?*
  - *What have been some lessons learned?*
  
- 3** What are opportunities and recommendations for community engagement efforts in the development and implementation of a Community Engagement Plan?
  - *What structures, policies, and resources are needed to support meaningful community engagement?*
  - *How could the County of Sonoma hold itself accountable for success?*

# METHODOLOGY

## A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Developing a community engagement process that is responsive to the needs, wisdom, and ways of being and knowing of community members who are marginalized by traditional engagement processes necessitated the use of a design-to-the-margins framework. This framework is central to identifying the communities of focus, whose experiences, knowledge, feedback, and wisdom must be centered in order to build equitable systems and programs. Systems have historically been designed to focus on communities at the center, people whose identity markers grant them privilege in accessing, receiving, and demanding support from systems, while simultaneously excluding and harming people whose identity markers can place them at the margins. The design-to-the-margins framework focuses on assessing systems and



building policies and practices that can help expand these systems to support everyone equitably, by capturing the experiences, wisdom, needs, and solutions of and from the people who are most impacted by systemic inequities. Within the context of Sonoma County, this meant learning from community members who are people of color; people who experience food, housing, and/or financial insecurity; people who are or whose families include people born outside of the United States; people whose primary language is not English; and people who live at the intersection of these and other identify markers that place them at the margins of system design.

The community engagement strategies utilized in this planning process were designed to remove barriers for communities rendered most vulnerable by systemic inequities. Community-Based Leaders (CBLs) were engaged throughout the design process; stakeholder

conversations and interviews were conducted with leaders outside of Eurocentric power structures; and the community engagement process sought to center and honor the time and voices of community members themselves who have been sidelined and or rendered invisible during traditional engagement processes. Multiple intentional strategies were used to mitigate the often extractive nature of community engagement research, which can result in further harm. (1) Community members' time was honored through appropriate incentives, including stipends. (2) Feedback processes were planned for participants to affirm/shift the analysis of the information collected. (3) A CBL team reflective of a wide range of lived experiences and identities was convened, with intentional design to build trust and honor the wisdom, knowledge, and skills necessary to do this work in a healing manner. The project team included Equity First and the CBL Team, who came from the communities identified as communities of focus, and who had the role of co-creators, advisors, collaborators, outreach leaders, focus group facilitators and interviewers.

## SPOTLIGHT ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

*For this planning process, culturally responsive community engagement looked like:*

- *Making space for participant led opening of focus group session in a church with prayer.*
- *Holding sessions in community hubs and/or places where participants preferred to meet*
- *Moving beyond translation and interpretation to communicate in ways that resonate culturally for participants. (This was done primarily by working with CBLs who come from these communities.)*
- *Understanding the historical context of people immigrating to Sonoma, and any potential conflict that there may be due to political unrest in countries of origin.*
- *Connecting with community leaders before reaching out to other members of the community with invitations to participate in the project*
- *Proactively sharing with community members the value that the Office of Equity is placing on their lived expertise and the ways in which their feedback will be incorporated.*
- *Asking participants what they value about engagement and how they define community rather than assuming that they share the County's values and definitions.*



## THE SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP

The analysis and grounding framework for this work is the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership (“Spectrum”) developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, drawing on content from a number of public participation tools. The Spectrum charts a pathway to strengthen and transform local democracies through deep participation, particularly by communities commonly excluded from democratic processes and power, and to assess and transform community engagement efforts so that they advance community-driven solutions. The Spectrum can be used by local governments to facilitate community participation in solutions development and decision-making. The Spectrum is designed to:

- *Acknowledge marginalization as the status quo practice of current systems;*
- *Assert a clear vision for rebuilding local democracies as key to solving today’s toughest crises, through inclusion, racial justice, and community ownership;*
- *Articulate a developmental process for rebuilding local democracies that requires significant investment in the capacity to participate as well as the capacity to break-down systemic barriers to community participation; and,*
- *Assess community participation efforts and progress toward participation goals.*

The developmental stages of the Spectrum are sequenced as follows:

- **Ignore:** *Deny access to decision-making processes*
- **Inform:** *Provide the community with relevant information*
- **Consult:** *Gather input from the community*
- **Involve:** *Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into the process and inform planning*
- **Collaborate:** *Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in implementation of decisions*
- **Defer to:** *Foster democratic participation and equity through community-driven decision-making bridging the divide between community and governance*

The analysis of County staff and community member engagement information was grounded in this framework, including mapping and summarizing existing capabilities, current gaps, and future opportunities (see Figure 1).

# THE SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP

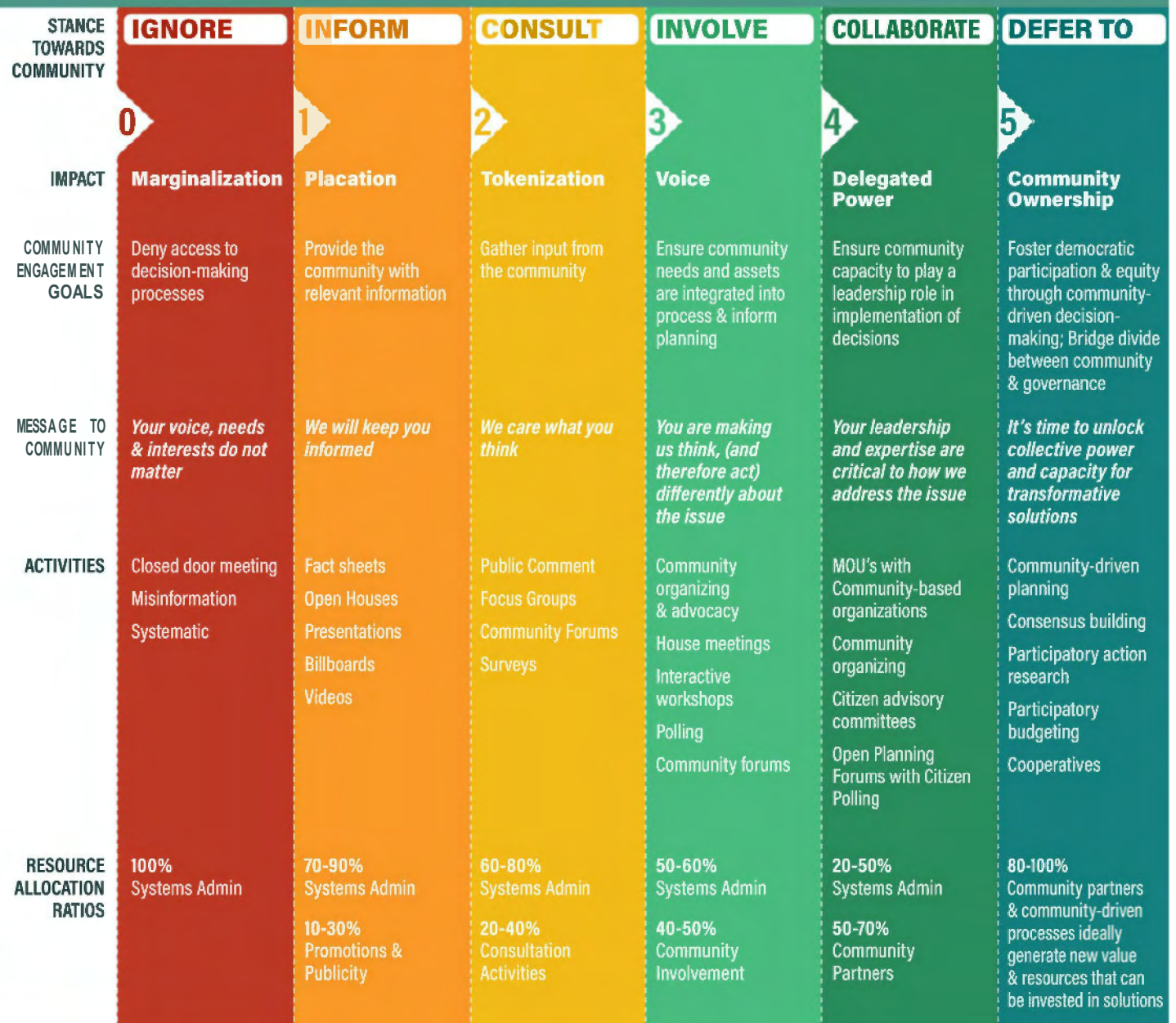


Figure 1: Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership  
<https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-to-Ownership.pdf>

## DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

### Phase 1: Grounding and Exploration

**Document review of existing efforts within the County:** To assess current County community engagement and outreach practices, information was requested from 29 Departments, Districts, and District Supervisor Offices and received from 24 Departments, Districts, and District Supervisor Offices across the County to create an inventory of community engagement efforts. The request was for any documents from each Department that were utilized for community engagement efforts in recent years, in all languages available. The time span of the documents requested was meant to capture both pre- and post-pandemic outreach and engagement efforts. Departments were asked to provide links to documents, as well as input data directly into a template document. The document request was separated into three parts to facilitate provision of data: outreach links, files representing outreach and engagement efforts, and files or information related to Boards and Commissions processes, if applicable. The primary document review found that:

- 1** **Departments were in the initial/early intermediate stages of Community Engagement.** Departments reported most activities in the Inform (24) category of Community Engagement as described in the Spectrum framework, followed by activities in the Ignore (21) and Consult (16) phases. Half of Departments reported activities in the Involve (13) phase of engagement, and about a third reported activities in the Collaborate (9) stage. None of the Departments reported activities in the Defer To (0) stage.
- 2** **Departments had existing assets and resources to leverage or build on,** such as current engagement strategies that included bulletins, newsletters, flyers, and social media, with limitations on accessibility in terms of language and mediums of getting information out to community members. Over half of departments indicated having some ways of soliciting and gathering community input through surveys, focus groups, and public comment.
- 3** **Departments faced a number of barriers to increasing participation in current community engagement activities,** such as stringent appointment and election criteria for boards and commissions, inconvenient meeting times for community members, limited or no bilingual communication provisions, and limited or no compensation for participation.

**Literature review of practices in comparable jurisdictions:** To get a lay of the landscape of community engagement efforts, a literature review was conducted that included a comparative analysis across comparable jurisdictions to the County. The following steps were taken as part of the landscape/comparative analysis research work with comparable County jurisdictions: (1) understand the research context in which the analysis is conducted; (2) identify a research goal and overarching research questions; (3) define jurisdictions and sources to review; (4) conduct discovery research and note trends or stand-out examples; (5) reach out to jurisdiction contacts to learn more that was not publicly available; (6) analyze and discuss emerging themes; (7) summarize findings; (8) begin to think about strategic mapping of promising activities. A total of fifteen jurisdictions were studied. This landscape literature review found that:

- 1** ***Defining community engagement is a critical and distinct component of anti-racist work.*** Many jurisdictions indicated engaging in community engagement efforts in response to the call for racial equity work, either in connection with being a part of a cohort with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), and/or in response to the racial reckonings of the early 2020s. However, many jurisdictions did not highlight a clear stance on the purpose of or need for community engagement, and used engagement strategies that fell largely in the ‘ignore’ or ‘inform’ stages of community engagement.
- 2** ***Collaboration across departments and/or with other jurisdictions is important in implementing specific community engagement objectives.*** The breadth and depth of community engagement among the jurisdictions analyzed was scattered fairly widely across the Spectrum framework. Many of the community engagement initiatives were located within specific departments, such as Equity Offices, or Departments of Public Health. And there was no corresponding program, framework, or collaboration point for their community engagement work.
- 3** ***There is a need to communicate the methods and impact of community engagement in an accessible, transparent, public-facing manner.*** Coherent, readily available communication and accessible participation mechanisms were hard to locate in many jurisdiction’s public-facing information. There was also very little reporting about the way community engagement was being incorporated into the decisions made within the jurisdictions.
- 4** ***There is little transparency about the cost of community engagement in many jurisdictions.*** Community engagement is rarely an independent line item in budgets, public facing documents rarely include fiscal impacts, and direct outreach does not produce more information in most instances.

## Phase 2a: Engagement with County Staff

Data collection activities conducted as part of this planning process' internal engagement efforts included virtual and in-person focus groups and individual interviews with County leaders and staff to learn about the strategies currently in place to engage the community, what is working, what is not working, what has been tried in the past, and what staff recommend moving forward. Participants included County front-facing staff, mid-management staff, and Department Heads. The process for conducting focus groups and interviews with staff began by connecting with Department Heads to identify a point of contact who then invited potential participants to focus groups or interviews. In addition to connecting with staff, interviews were conducted with other internal County stakeholders such as members of the Board of Supervisors.

A total of six focus groups with 47 people and 12 interviews with 16 individuals were conducted between April and August of 2023 as part of the internal engagement process with County leaders and staff, **totaling 63 participants in internal engagement activities.** Most interviews were individual one-on-one interviews, but a few were group interviews with 2-3 people. County staff data collection activities were led by Equity First's project team, who also developed focus group and interview questions in collaboration with the Office of Equity to address the overall questions of the project.

## Phase 2b: Engagement with community members and CBOs

Ten focus groups were conducted with community members, which included group sessions with 89 people representing the following communities: Fijian, broader Latine/a/o identities, Indigenous people from Latin America, American Indian, Black or African American, Cambodian, Filipino, Eritrean, Ethiopian, people who are immigrants and/or undocumented, people experiencing houselessness, regional (North County, South County, Sonoma Valley, West County), Boards and Commissions, and Community-Based Leaders (CBLs), who themselves held many of these identities, experiences and reflected regional representation. In addition, 24 community members participated in 16 stakeholder interviews; As was true in the County staff engagement process, many of these interviews were one-on-one interviews, but a few were group interviews with 2-4 people. An additional seven partner interviews were conducted with representatives of CBOs. **Overall, 121 people participated in community member engagement activities.** Focus group and interview questions were designed and updated by Equity First in close consultation with CBLs and the Office of Equity to address the overall questions of the project, and adapted based on the needs of different participant groups.

## SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY-BASED LEADER (CBL) MODEL

A critical and needed foundation for bidirectional community engagement, as identified by community members and County staff, is the need for trust building. Change can only occur at the speed of trust, and there is broad mistrust of government among communities who have been most disproportionately harmed by systemic inequities. To prioritize trust and relationship building, Equity First designed this Community Engagement plan around a “Community-Based Leader” (CBL) model, centering the wisdom of trusted community leaders on the ground throughout the entire process.

Embedding transparency, follow through, and intentionality into every step of the process (from onboarding to capacity building to implementation) helped to build and maintain that trust throughout. In this form of partnership, CBLs become the project spokespeople, outreach leads, co-creators and facilitators, having increasing ownership over core aspects of project implementation. This shift towards community ownership of the work and the narrative is the most important result of this approach to the work.



Community member engagement activities were led primarily by CBLs with support from members of Equity First. Recruitment of CBLs involved personal outreach to trusted community leaders within communities of focus to solicit nominations of people deeply involved and connected with their communities, but who are not already engaged with local government. A CBL team reflective of a wide range of lived experiences was selected through personal one-on-one conversations with Equity First, so that authentic relationships could be established, each party could get to know each other, have questions answered, and begin to build trust, before moving into the deliverables phase of work. In April, Equity First, the Office of Equity, and CBLs gathered in an intentional way that prioritized building relationships and trust first so as to do this work in a healing manner. During that meeting, community agreements were developed

based on core project values: that relationships come first, that the engagement experience needs to be healing and not extractive, and that the wisdom of communities of focus will be trusted and amplified. Equity First adapted meetings every 2-3 weeks to CBL availability and provided dinner, stipends, and created intentional opportunities to build individual and collective relationships. Communications, materials, and meetings all provided in both Spanish and English, were adapted based on CBL suggestions and changing needs. The Office of Equity and Equity First facilitated the onboarding process and ongoing work in a co-creative way with the CBLs, including soliciting and incorporating feedback on focus group, interview and demographic survey questions. Equity First provided training on outreach and facilitation and maintained ongoing support for each CBL based on individual communication preferences.

Once a strong foundation of trust was established, CBLs took the lead to plan, outreach, and conduct focus groups and interviews, averaging 1-2 focus groups per CBL and 2-3 interviews each. Equity First supported logistics, translation of materials to additional languages, and data analysis as well as prioritizing flexibility and adapting the project timeline to center the humanity of CBLs and the reality of complex lives. CBLs were also invited to participate in a focus group themselves to share their own experiences, perspectives and wisdom around engagement. In September, Equity First and the Office of Equity gathered to celebrate the completion of the focus groups and interviews, and paused to reflect on lessons learned from this process to inform the development of the community engagement plan, as well as the weight of responsibility taken on by conducting this outreach and the resulting importance of designing systems of accountability to the community members who trusted that change would happen and thus were willing to share their wisdom with the County. This closing meeting, six months after the first, made it clear: engagement does not happen without trust, and the extent of follow-through around next steps will be critical to maintain the threads of trust woven through this project.



### Phase 3: Reflection Sessions with community members and County staff

Reflection Sessions were conducted in order to further engage community members in the process of data analysis, refinement of findings and recommendations, and ultimately in a co-design process around Community Engagement Plan development. Equity First Consulting presented the learnings from the engagement sessions and requested feedback and what participants would like to see shifted, added, or removed in order to accurately represent their lived experiences as Sonoma County residents and/or County staff. Participants were then asked to reflect on the recommendations and provide specific strategies that would work within the current context to achieve the desired outcomes.

The feedback loop inherent to reflection sessions is a critical step in the engagement process for multiple reasons.

- 1** *It improves the accuracy of data analysis by providing an opportunity for refinement based on participant review which can mitigate the possibility that the researchers' or readers' misinterpretation of data might unintentionally skew the results.*
- 2** *It operationalized respect for, and accountability to, participants by ensuring that they are the first to see the results and that they have agency in the analysis.*
- 3** *It breaks with historical patterns of data extraction and harm, and in doing so, builds trust and relationships.*

Three Reflection Sessions with community members were held, with options to join in Spanish, English, In-Person, or on Zoom. Dinner was provided for In-Person sessions. All participants of earlier Focus Groups and Interviews were invited via email, text and personal phone call invitations. Participants were also invited to bring additional people from their community who may not have participated yet. A total of 25 community members participated in these Reflection Sessions. One Reflection Session was conducted with County leaders and staff via zoom, with five breakout rooms organized by job types so that staff members could feel safe[r] to speak freely without their bosses present. The five breakout rooms were organized for: Front-Facing staff (8 staff), Field Representatives (6 staff), Managers/Supervisors (9 staff), Department Heads (10 staff), and District Directors (2 staff). A total of 60 community members and County staff participated in the Reflection Sessions.



## DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

All participants in the community engagement data collection process, both County staff and community members, were asked to complete a brief demographic survey at the end of their focus group or interview sessions. This demographic survey was intentionally designed to reflect demographic identities that have not traditionally been accounted for in other efforts. The following tables summarize the responses from County staff and community member engagement participants by survey demographic area. Please note that not all percentages will add up to 100 due to rounding or questions designed for respondents to select more than one response option.

Key takeaways are summarized below.

### Participants:

- All participants, both County staff and community members, represented a wide range of zip codes across Sonoma County.

### County staff:

- 78% self-identified their role as Department leadership, supervisors, or managers and 22% selected either frontline staff (15%) or preferred to self-describe (7% entered field representative, administrative staff, or program manager).
- Nearly half (45%) have worked at the County for 10 years or more.
- Over three quarters (76%) have lived in the county for 10 years or more.

### Front-facing County staff:

- Nearly half (46%) of front facing staff indicated being renters.
- 54% had a four-year degree and 23% had a master's degree or higher.
- The racial/ethnic groups represented by front-facing staff were Latine/a/o (62%), White (23%), Black/African American (15%), and Asian (8%).
- 62% of front-facing staff indicated speaking Spanish.

### Supervisors/managers/lead County Staff:

- About two thirds of supervisors/managers (61%) and leadership (which included department heads and division managers) (67%) indicated being homeowners.

- Half of supervisors/managers and department leads (50% each) indicated having a master's degree or higher, followed by a four-year college degree (38% of department leads and 22% of supervisors/managers) and some college (28% of supervisors/managers).
- The largest racial/ethnic groups represented by supervisors/managers and department leads were White (61% and 79%, respectively) and Latine/a/o (33% and 13%, respectively).
- About a third indicated speaking Spanish (33% of supervisors/managers and 29% of department leads).

### Community members:

- About two thirds of community members (65%) indicated being renters. [This does not include a group of 15 external community focus group participants, who did not complete demographic surveys, all of whom were experiencing unsheltered homelessness or housing instability.]
- Community members had varied forms of community education, knowledge, and skills such as community organizing (57%), community learning (55%), cultural/traditional knowledge (47%), and lived experience (51%). 16% indicated having attained a four-year college degree and 13% a master's degree or higher.
- The largest racial/ethnic groups represented by community members were Latine/a/o (66%) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (10%).
- Two thirds (66%) indicated speaking Spanish.

Based on the demographic survey data collected, the community-engaged approach used in this planning process can reframe narratives for the County about 'hard to reach' populations in community engagement. Leveraging the relationships of CBLs yielded diverse representation across a number of groups in Sonoma County. Although the demographic survey was an important way to track these identities, there were accessibility issues regarding digital literacy (such as participants having issues accessing surveys via the use of QR codes or online platforms), and providing surveys primarily in English and Spanish, which posed issues for people speaking languages other than these two. In addition, some participants living in precarious housing situations or who were unsheltered expressed hesitance to complete surveys. Questions around gender identity and sexual orientation were also confusing or slightly uncomfortable for some respondents.

## Disaggregated Demographic Survey Results (select variables)

### Race/Ethnicity/Culture

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self -describe 9field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
<b>Asian</b>	8%	6%	0%	8%
<b>Black and/or African American</b>	15%	6%	4%	7%
<b>Hispanic, Latina/e/o/x and/or Spanish Origin</b>	62%	33%	13%	66%
<b>Middle Eastern and/or North African</b>	0%	6%	0%	2%
<b>Native Hawaiian and/or pacific Islander</b>	0%	0%	0%	10%
<b>White</b>	23%	61%	79%	1%
<b>Prefer Not to Say</b>	0%	6%	8%	1%
<b>Prefer to Self-Describe</b>	0%	0%	0%	1%

### Staff Tenure at County

		County Staff	
	Front facing or prefer to self -describe 9field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)
<b>Less than one year</b>	15%	0%	4%
<b>Between one and four years</b>	46%	33%	29%
<b>Between five and Nine Years</b>	15%	22%	8%
<b>Ten years or more</b>	23%	44%	58%

## Age

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe 9field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
18 – 24	0%	0%	0%	11%
25 – 34	46%	11%	0%	15%
35 – 44	15%	44%	25%	24%
45 – 54	31%	28%	29%	23%
55 – 64	8%	17%	42%	15%
65+	0%	0%	0%	14%
Prefer Not to Say	0%	0%	4%	0%

## Languages Spoken

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe 9field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
<b>Chinese</b>	0%	0%	0%	1%
<b>English*</b>	85%	100%	88%	66%
Indigenous Languages(s) (ex: Chatino, Mixteco Triqui)	0%	6%	0%	7%
<b>Fijian</b>	0%	0%	8%	10%
<b>Khmer-Cambodian</b>	0%	0%	0%	1%
<b>Spanish</b>	62%	33%	29%	66%
<b>Tagalog</b>	0%	0%	0%	3%
<b>Prefer not to Say</b>	0%	0%	4%	0%
<b>Prefer to Self-Describe</b>	8%	6%	0%	5%

\*While 15% of front-facing staff and 12% of leadership did not indicate that they speak English, interviews and focus groups with County staff and leadership were all conducted in English, and the survey was made available in English only. The question asked: What languages do you speak? (Select all that apply). The data indicate that the question may not have been fully understood.

## Housing Status

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
Renter	46%	39%	29%	65%
Homeowner	39%	61%	67%	23%
Communal Living (ex: multigenerational home, ADU, intentional living community)	23%	0%	4%	6%
Precariously Housed (ex: living in a motel, vehicle, temporarily with friends/family, or in some other temporary location)	0%	0%	0%	2%
Prefer to Self-Describe: (living with parents/family, live with homeowner, mobile home, do not own land, high rent)	0%	0%	0%	8%

## Formal/Western Education

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
Up to High School, but have not graduated	0%	0%	0%	14%
High School Degree or GED	0%	0%	0%	14%
Some College, but have not graduated	0%	28%	0%	19%
Two-Year College Degree	15%	0%	4%	12%
Four-Year College Degree	54%	22%	38%	16%
Master's Degree or Higher	23%	50%	50%	13%
Technical or Trade School	8%	0%	0%	3%
Prefer Not to Say	0%	0%	4%	1%
Prefer to Self-Describe	0%	0%	4%	9%



## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The qualitative data analysis process was methodical and multi-pronged to highlight the insights that surfaced across data collection sessions, while maintaining a nuanced description of areas specific to different communities.

- **Transcription:** *Each focus group and interview session was audio-recorded, transcribed, reviewed for transcription accuracy, and translated (if needed).*
- **Coding:** *A dedicated research team developed ‘codes,’ or short thematic elements based on focus group and interview discussion guides and key questions of the community engagement planning process. Each transcript was thoroughly read by a researcher, coded or tagged using carefully crafted codes, reviewed by a secondary reader, and discussed among a team of researchers for emerging themes.*
- **Thematic analysis:** *The research team also conducted content analysis of the emerging themes, and shared key insights for discussion with team members who led the data collection efforts to create shared meaning.*

In addition, four reflection and collective sense-making sessions were conducted in November 2023 with community members and County leaders and staff to ensure that the findings and recommendations gathered were reflective of participants’ wisdom and experiences. These also served to solicit recommended strategies, aligned with the priorities of community members, for the Community Engagement Plan.

## INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS - METHODOLOGY AND LEARNINGS

The Office of Equity and Equity First recognize that the County of Sonoma holds a political and legal relationship with sovereign and Federally Recognized Tribes, which is distinct from the history and relations that the County has with non-native Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Because of this political and legal relationship, intergovernmental consultation with Native nations is not community engagement, and at the same time, any effort to improve the County’s community engagement would be incomplete without acknowledging the multifaceted forms of government-to-government relationship the County holds with Native nations.

It is for these reasons that Equity First sought consultation with the five federally-recognized Tribes who share Geography with Sonoma County. Included here is that methodology, including learnings specific to this process. Related findings and recommendations resulting from this will be detailed in a separate brief in order to honor the reflection process of soliciting feedback.



Consultation with Native nations and members of Native communities began with outreach through a trusted Community-Based Leader (CBL). The project team quickly learned that outreach was premature and inconsistent with culturally responsive best practices and government to government protocols, and undertook research into existing protocols for building intergovernmental relations with Native nations within the County and nationally. The Office of Equity and Equity First conducted interviews with County staff, including legal counsel, to learn about existing protocols and the extent to which these protocols are documented. The County's existing intergovernmental relations protocol guided subsequent steps of this process:

- **The Director of the Office of Equity worked through the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to formally request an interview with the Tribal Chairs of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians.**
- **The Chair of the Board of Supervisors made the initial invitation and approved ongoing communications through the Office of Equity to facilitate scheduling and communications.**
- **The Director of the Office of Equity and an Equity First Consulting staff member attended an interview with a Native Nation.**

One interview was conducted with a Native Nation and five were conducted with members of Native communities and County staff. It is imperative to stress that members of Native communities who we spoke with who identified as Native American or American Indian, only represented their perspective and experience and did not intend to speak for, or on behalf of, any Native Nation or Native American communities as a whole. These interviews provided powerful insights and important recommendations on the topic of government-to-government relations, which were supplemented by additional research. These conversations do not represent the breadth of perspectives from all five Native Nations, or a majority of Native community members, within Sonoma County. Much work remains for the County to develop and evolve intergovernmental relationships that can fully encompass respectful and culturally responsive exchanges between the County of Sonoma and Native Nations.



# KEY FINDINGS

## FINDING 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.**



### Focus is on pushing information out (informing), but the information is not reaching community members equitably

County staff across departments recognized that the current focus of their community engagement work has been on outreach and pushing needed information out to communities.

Community members identified a discrepancy between the amount of County information/ resources theoretically available and the amount that are effectively reaching people who need them most. Even with the focus on pushing information out, many community members expressed not knowing or having information about County resources, especially around housing. People indicated wanting access to information regarding public services, as well as essential and potentially life-saving or health-supportive information, to be equally accessible to all groups of people. External community members and partners mentioned that the community fears going to governmental offices. In many interviews with community members, participants also mentioned how their interactions with the County have been minimal to none because the County was not coming to them with information or making an effort to engage. It was also repeated that the

*“They create their [web] page, but we don’t know which web pages are there to be informed. They should advertise their events and share with us. They have their own webpages, and if you know someone who happens to know the page, you will get informed. Otherwise, how? How do you know? We don’t know what is happening in our own community. How do you get informed? Services, no, there are no advertisements. And if people know it, they don’t share it with you. They don’t send you a text telling you what service is available.”*  
— Community Member

comment. Simultaneously, community members noted that the types of formats of information shared this way is not always helpful. The County may consider adjusting its use of Facebook and other platforms identified by community members as channels for information-sharing. A County leader also alluded to this opportunity, “I actually think for the County as a whole, more assistance with figuring out how to use social media in a thoughtful way would be helpful, because I also feel the social media stuff I’ve seen in the past has been not useful. Like, there’s a whole lot of wasted time there too.”

*“Farmworkers... have to be in the cold weather or work in extremely hot conditions. They are giving their lives at their job... Farmworkers make the Sonoma county economy strong and it is not fair that...most of the time they don’t have health insurance...And there are some occasions when...sometimes the County also add barriers to that and that is when my heart breaks in little pieces.”*  
— Community Member

that there were too many barriers to qualify for services. Resources, help, and opportunities are perceived as scarce. For example, immigrant community members expressed that there were many employment opportunities that were not available to them due to documentation status, such as becoming care providers or obtaining child care support.

County should partner with local organizations, churches, and institutions like the library to provide information, and that this partnership should be proactive, not only in times of crisis.

Participants suggested that the County needs to lean into what works well for communities to communicate information more effectively. Facebook was mentioned a number of times by different people across communities as one of the primary information sources where people have heard about, seen, or come to be aware of County information, events, or opportunities for

There is recognition by all that getting information out is important, but participants want that approach to be mindful and supportive. For instance, some communities said they don’t interact with the County regularly and the one or few times they did, they didn’t qualify for services or were treated by County staff in ways that caused harm. This negative experience of receiving services, while distinct from community engagement, had the impact of dissuading them from trying to engage in other ways. Many community members indicated

*“In emergencies, we are affected negatively because they put obstacles or they give you a huge list to apply for something.*

*We work day by day and we don't have money to spare and it's not enough for all the expenses. We have to pay rent, food, clothing, everything.*

*In other words, we don't have too much, and medical insurance is expensive, depending on whether you qualify or not.”*

*– Community Member*

Even when resources were available, community members sensed that these resources were not adequately shared and the information wasn't made readily available to them. Community members felt that information and resources were gatekept. In addition, there's a sense that services provided and the help they receive is tentative and could be taken away at any moment. Application processes to receive services are often challenging due to language barriers and difficulty comprehending government wording even in one's own language. As such, community members who do qualify for services said they weren't able to receive them because they couldn't complete the applications. Community members that access support for services such as Medical, CalFresh, EDD, or a court case reported difficulty because there were not enough resources to staff phone helplines. In some cases, phone line wait times can require hours of being on hold, or messages are not returned in a timely fashion or at all.

## **There are few mechanisms in place for the County to move beyond informing and towards learning, incorporating feedback, and fostering community leadership**

County staff shared that some community engagement efforts were underway, such as committee work, community surveys, and planning projects, which indicated movement towards bidirectional communication. However, they shared that this learning occurs mostly within the parameters of a strategic planning process, and that their general focus on outreach still felt like “counting heads” or “marking off checkboxes” and that they lacked support to plan and create community engagement opportunities that looked different from their current efforts. This siloed approach to planning community engagement felt very fragmented to County staff, making it difficult to build new and meaningful relationships both within and outside of the County. One County leader shared, “going into public events, networking with organizations that already have expressed concern... there is an echo chamber effect... talking to the same people over [and over] again.” Also, because their outreach efforts were concentrated at the end stages (pushing information out about an opportunity or getting feedback on something already built), there have been few opportunities to co-design or build together with communities.

County staff and community members noted that mandated outreach, when it is not accompanied by implementation and accountability mechanisms, can be harmful and creates false expectations among communities of focus when not paired with accountability. County staff highlighted that

fellow staff either did not understand the difference between outreach/pushing information out and meaningful, bidirectional community engagement that informs policy, and/or stated that was not the focus of their work. According to communities, mandated outreach efforts by the County have created community expectations of change or support that have not been delivered on. For example, a local community partner supported County staff in gathering community members for a listening session as part of a needs assessment project. Many attendees shared with vulnerability about their mental health struggles and needs, and expected that the County would be available to follow-up with support, but that never happened. The result of that process felt extractive to community members. Other CBO partners also shared how harmful it has been to extract information and claim care when there is no followup and follow-through in bringing results to show care-in-action, not just in claims.

*“...It’s a dominant English, I guess, field. So that’s something where they, they kind of are a little apprehensive. However, in the times that we have brought in those key speakers, and they are Spanish speakers, I have seen them, you know, it’s like a shift. They’re super involved, and they actually want more and more and more. So definitely, something I feel like a representation plays a big part for them to actually, you know, open up essentially.”*  
— Community Member

*“Since I’ve been here, I’ve been very clear that we do not go ask people for their opinions, unless there is a pathway for making those, you know, the return on that investment by the public into policy, or programmatic change.”*  
— County Staff

Importantly, participants highlighted as a top need that most County information or outreach efforts have not been available in languages other than English, creating a barrier to meaningful interactions with Sonoma’s linguistically diverse communities. Community participants expressed that information or efforts were sometimes available in Spanish, but with limited staff capacity. There was little or no support offered in languages other than English or Spanish. County staff also shared that, when informing communities about engagement opportunities, short turnaround times make it hard for community members to participate. Community members are often alerted to a coming meeting only 72 hours in advance, which is what is legally required, but which does not give many people enough time to arrange for childcare and/or rearrange their schedule. Lastly, County staff share that they understood the importance of tracking the success of their efforts, but didn’t have the support they needed to measure impact (e.g., databases for constituent relationship management, surveys at events, feedback buttons on county webpages to gauge helpfulness) other than by “checking off” attendance boxes.

## The County's engagement efforts increase during times of crisis or stress

*“When there were the fires, the County had a spectacular webpage. It had resources for this, that, and that. But when everything was over, I tried to get to the webpage, but couldn't because it didn't exist any more.”*  
— Community Member

Participants noted that the County has engaged more deeply with community members mostly in times of crisis or stress, including during natural disasters or emergencies. Community members noted that they engaged more and more meaningfully during these times, offering resources during disasters that they took away right after.

The reactivity approach appears in less acute moments as well, when the County is perceived by County staff to be creating avoidable stress by not sufficiently alerting community members to big, upcoming decisions that can have widespread impacts on people's lives. When the County holds its first public meetings after policy has already been designed, and/or when the County publicizes meetings only 72 hours prior, community members are often left feeling undervalued, disengaged, and/or driven to engage only when they are furious (either because of the policy itself, or because of the short notice, or both). For example, a County leader said that this happens frequently to people living in rural communities, who are not consulted during planning processes, inciting rage amongst some community members. In addition, both County staff and community members noted that the County assesses community engagement as effective when there is a good turnout and people express positive experiences or emotions, but it backs away when community feedback is negative.

This has led to community members engaging more frequently with local Community-Based Organization (CBOs) and at times relying on these relationships to represent or mediate their concerns or interests with the County. However, that mediating relationship between the County and CBOs has not been well-supported. CBOs noted that not being provided enough notice about what's coming up has led to community members feeling “railroaded” or excluded. Community members also recommended that people will attend government meetings if they feel that their feedback will go somewhere: “There's two attitudes that exist within the community: we want to be engaged [...] we want there to be change... it's go time, let's go. And the other part... we've been through this before, we've given up hope, it's just not gonna work, like they're just going to ignore us. And that's that. And so I think that there are these two attitudes.”

## The COVID pandemic had a mixed, yet profound impact on community engagement

County staff said that much of the existing internal infrastructure supporting in-person community engagement fell apart during the COVID-19 pandemic and, for many departments, hadn't yet

*“But finally, during COVID, it actually materialized where our previous director made it pretty much a kind of rule that anything that came out of our department, press release or anything like that, that we that we produced, it had to be translated into Spanish.”*

*— County Staff*

noted that while virtual engagement was easier to deploy, some found it harder to track in terms of meaningful participation or engagement, and shared that there needed to be a lot of trust and relationship building for virtual engagement to work.

Some staff shared that their Departments did not have concrete plans for returning to in-person community engagement, which became a particularly acute problem in March of 2023, when some were no longer allowed to host virtual meetings.

## **The County does not yet fully own its role in designing supportive and meaningfully accessible spaces for engagement**

Community members expressed the importance of the County taking responsibility for its role in not adequately engaging with community members. For example, County meetings and presentations that take place during work hours, especially those exclusively in government buildings are difficult or impossible for most community members to access. Many called for the County to take ownership of its responsibility to increase the availability, accessibility, and efficacious communication of information, as the job of the County is to reach out successfully to the communities they serve. Many emphasized the importance and effectiveness of the County going to their neighborhoods, places of worship, schools, and trusted organizations that are already frequented, and of developing multiple pathways for engagement.

Central to a sense of belonging for many is creating spaces that take into account folks’ identities, experiences, and cultures. Some foundational practices include the offering of culturally-appropriate food, childcare, healing-informed practices, linguistically diverse materials, presentations in their languages, and making interpretation and translations available. They also emphasized the need to have County services accessible to them in their area and the challenge of having them located mainly in Santa Rosa, especially to communities in Sonoma Valley and Rural Areas like Annapolis. Some of this ownership may be structural, logistical, and involve considering the restructuring of current processes to facilitate engagement. As a community member said,

*"When we talk about participating with the Sonoma County government, we want to know which strategies work for you to be involved, right? Like, go to their meetings? Usually, Sonoma county government has its meetings on Tuesday mornings from 8:30am to 5, 6, 7 and sometimes midnight, right? They have a lot of committees, apart from the leadership there are a lot of committees which are from a variety of different things...for things related to children, for people with any kind of interest. Do you like to receive phone calls, text messages, social media? Those are some examples of how you would like to be involved. That they take us into account and bring you information. And I know that most of the time we stereotype people like, 'they don't care about it,' but the government has a responsibility to reach out to us wherever we are."*

*— Community Member*

## Key takeaways

- *The lack of policies in place for deeper community engagement means that County Departments focus on 'informing' or 'consulting' with the community, but the information is not reliably reaching the community members who are systemically marginalized by government processes.*
- *The County has difficulty moving into deeper stages of community engagement, which creates rifts in relationships when engagement does not result in changes. Specific guidance and protocols for the County to connect more with constituents as a shared community will allow for participation that unlocks benefits to operations and people.*
- *Moving toward greater community ownership does not mean dropping outreach and information sharing, but co-creating it. Many community members emphasized the need for strategic, intentional engagement rather than blanket outreach, as well as conducting mindful, culturally responsive outreach to meet people where they are with information and support.*
- *The County engages more deeply with community members during times of crisis, including during natural disasters, but also when issues that have a deep impact on people's lives arise.*
- *Some community members also trust the relay of resources through trusted CBOs where communities already go to receive support and information. In several interviews, community members mentioned that they have a strong connection to community organizations with whom they already have relationships.*

## SPOTLIGHT: WHAT DOES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE DURING A CRISIS? AND CAN THE COUNTY PROACTIVELY PLAN FOR AND SUSTAIN THE EMERGENCY PLANNING?



According to community members, there are important considerations for emergency planning that need to be prepared for prior to a crisis to minimize tokenization. For instance, the work of community health workers was pivotal to getting information and resources out to communities most in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants across the board expressed that the work of community health workers had been undermined either because the work was deemed no longer necessary after the pandemic response stabilized, largely due to the efforts of community members, or because the work was needed but not resourced and therefore not sustainable.

According to community members, another crisis is only a matter of time, and there needs to be (1) relationship building and community engagement in preparation for a disaster, and (2) a culturally-responsive activation strategy as part of disaster preparedness. A proactive approach, according to community members, would be to have dedicated staff to conduct community engagement with a core function of emergency preparedness.



Based on these findings, the following steps and roles could support implementation of community engagement work during times of crisis:

### **Roles for the County:**

- ◆ **Clarify the expected functions of a potential community engagement position to include emergency preparedness.**
- ◆ **Identify main functions and expected impacts of outreach workers in order to support a potential community engagement position with emergency preparedness.**
- ◆ **Identify the main functions and specialities of subject matter experts who will liaise with a potential community engagement position and outreach workers.**

### **Roles for Community Engagement Staff:**

- ◆ **Understand the kinds of partnership and collaboration within the community that is actively happening, including an asset mapping of organizations, groups, and places.**
- ◆ **Plan the frequency and types of community engagement.**
- ◆ **Plan the frequency, participants, and types of ongoing meetings with the community to report out as to how a particular project is doing and gather feedback from the community. Then, follow up soon after.**



## FINDING 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.

### Lack of resources to support culturally responsive, multilingual community engagement

Although a few departments have dedicated personnel, time, and/or resources for some form of community engagement, many express needing help from the County to plan, implement, and track success of community engagement efforts. There is a sense of scarcity of resources, whether a sense that current allocations are not enough or that the resources need to be re-distributed. For example, County departments expressed a huge need for translation, interpretation, and language capacity in general. Many shared that they were limited in their capacity to support Spanish speaking communities, and that support in languages other than Spanish was either extremely limited or non-existent. According to both staff and community members, the exclusion of Indigenous languages has resulted in these communities feeling neglected. Specifically, the farmworker community has just recently begun to be more included in engagement efforts, but without Indigenous language capacity, engagement is very limited and emergency/disaster communications are not reaching migrant farmworkers and others. Without appropriate resources or support, County staff also fear not being a good partner to undocumented and immigrant communities, by not meeting their language needs, because of a lack of cultural responsiveness, or by using language like “voters” rather than “residents.” The need for resources outweighs what is currently available for their Departments, and some staff recommended centralizing translation and community engagement staff in an office like the Office of Equity to provide support across departments.

*“Just found it mind boggling how difficult it is to translate. And that’s just for Spanish, like not talking about, you know, if I’m trying to get something translated to Vietnamese, or something or Cambodian.”*  
– County Staff

*“Using big...words for lack of a better term doesn’t work with all of our community members, even those that have education. Imagine those that don’t have an education. What is this document actually trying to say when you read a board item? I work for the county, and sometimes I read a board item [and go] what did I just read? I know it’s English. I understand that words in English, but I don’t understand what it’s saying.”*  
– County Staff

Some advocated for an increase in resources with the view that what is most needed is the prioritization of effective community engagement by the Board of Supervisors to infuse community engagement efforts into the core of all work both County-wide and within each department. Some County staff shared that their departments lacked the appropriate staffing for basic operations, so mandated services take priority. These staff emphasized the need for financial resources because they cannot afford to spend staff time on additional functions. Many County staff also spoke to the unfair burden that bilingual and bicultural County staff already carry in addition to their core functions, resulting in overburdening of staff of color.

Some also expressed that departments need help prioritizing how to spend money wisely; when language access is not systematized, and instead relies on individuals to anticipate and address, translations are often not culturally responsive nor accessible. Some suggested funneling resources through CBOs to “do it right.” Other County staff echoed this sentiment, alluding to the possibility that the County already has access to the resources needed to reallocate funding toward investment in community engagement, rather than being in great need of significantly more money. A County leader stated the goal this way: “Once we get to the place where this is in our DNA, the resources aren’t the problem anymore because it’s built in.”

The need to spend resources wisely resonates with community members. Community partners indicated that trusting relationships between CBOs and community members could be more intentionally built, cultivated, and leveraged by (1) prioritizing the trust that community members have in CBOs and ensuring that County practices do not harm these relationships (for example, by mandating that CBOs hand over data about community members who are most impacted by systemic inequities), and (2) by mindfully assessing when CBOs might be better positioned than the County to do lead community engagement work (such as when constituent’s documentation status might make engagement with government entities especially fraught).

### **Need for cross-department communication and collaboration**

A number of County staff highlighted the importance of and need for cross-departmental communication and collaboration. They were eager to learn from and with other departments across the County about what community engagement efforts looked like. They also saw the benefits three-fold: (1) helping them better understand each other’s offerings and being able to more effectively refer community members to appropriate places, increasing community trust, (2) learning about the promising practices and lessons learned from fellow County departments as they try different community engagement strategies, and (3) weeding out and streamlining the unnecessary duplication of efforts and costs that can happen when departments work in silos to implement similar ideas and activities.

## Need for training and professional development

County staff said that many of their departments either focused on interpersonal engagement (in other words, one-on-one between a community member and staff) and/or did not know how to go deeper with community engagement nor how to systematize it. Some staff may think they're doing a good job, and may not know more is needed. In part, this has led to community engagement in the form of outreach focused on the same people, mostly a small number of community leaders. County staff sensed high expectations from the County, but no accompanying clarity or guidance. In addition, some indicated that resources are divided equally across departments, rather than equitably based on need. Staff said that their departments needed specificity in policy, procedures, and integrated community engagement structurally to make it sustainable. Part of this included also providing training and professional development opportunities to understand passive versus active engagement, transcending divides in digital outreach, focused programming, needs and assets assessment, and adequate language translation/interpretation procedures.

*After experiencing a harmful, race-based assumption made by a County worker: "The County should train its workers...they should treat their customers better."  
— Community Member*

In addition, many County staff asked for support with professional development training opportunities to learn about how to more effectively plan for and implement community engagement strategies. Community members also called for training County staff about how to interface more respectfully with diverse community members.

## Key takeaways

- ◆ *Staff and community members shared that more dedicated and intentionally allocated resources, especially focused on culturally responsive and multilingual engagement, are needed to create greater access to engagement for community members and to lessen the burden on County staff of color.*
- ◆ *County staff reported that they need more support in prioritizing effective community engagement strategies so that they can devote the resources they do have appropriately.*
- ◆ *Resources may not necessarily need to be augmented, but they may need to be reallocated or reprioritized to focus on community engagement efforts.*
- ◆ *County staff are eager for increased cross-departmental collaboration and training, and community members agreed that County staff would benefit from professional development and training support.*

## SPOTLIGHT: SUPPORTING THE ROLE OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Participants honed in on the role of Boards and Commissions, as well as Municipal Advisory Councils, in supporting community engagement. Community members with experience on commissions indicated that commissioners are the ones doing on the ground outreach and building trust with the community, and recommended that the County hire or further incentivize individuals for that specific role.

County staff expressed that some commissioners do not receive sufficient direction from the County, and are not sure what the role of their commission (or their roles as commissioners) entail even after serving for some time. Community members with experience on Boards and Commissions shared that while they may want to use an equity lens in their work, they do not feel they have the support to do so (and in some cases are actively discouraged), or the concerns they raise go unaddressed.

Commissions also experience structural barriers to increasing the amount of community engagement they do. They struggle to get their information across to the community due to a lack of outreach channels available from the County. The locations of meetings and the lack of translation and interpretation also place a burden on the community, leading to decreased engagement. Importantly, because some commissions are appointed by the Board of Supervisors, some participants perceived that commissioners primarily come from a small subset of the community, and therefore often aren't reflective of the people who they are serving. There were also some concerns that the Board of Supervisors may not be appointing people who want to be on commissions and therefore there are some commission seats that go unfilled.

In addition to participant feedback, the Office of Equity sent a survey to the primary County staff contacts assigned to the 76 Boards, Commissions, Committees, Municipal Advisory Councils, Community Advisory Committees, and Task Forces, (referred to collectively as "governing bodies"), to solicit feedback from them as well as from the Chairs of each governing body on outreach and application processes. 11 commissioners and 13 County staff, each representing unique governing bodies, completed the survey, totaling 24 respondents.

Respondents expressed that barriers to participation on commissions include the difficulty of locating applications, inconsistency in recruitment processes ranging from no outreach to proactive outreach, inconsistency in selection criteria across the different bodies, and a lack of processes to collect race/ethnicity information from applicants and commissioners.

Other key takeaways from the engagement process with commissioners:

- **There is inconsistency in how some Commissions operate (ex: some receive stipends, including reimbursement for travel and childcare, others do not).**
- **Data information about application and recruitment processes, stipend policies, and demographic data about boards and commissions is not centrally located or easy (and in some cases, not possible) to obtain.**
- **Communication between commissioners and the Board of Supervisors needs improvement. Commissioners are perceived as not having influence over policy. There are discrepancies with how commissioners see their role and how the Board sees it, leading to lack of clarity around a commission's role and scope.**
- **Commissions need more budget/funding support from the County, especially as the budget doesn't allow for expenses such as food that could make their meetings more inviting and accessible. Commission roles can also be the equivalent of a full-time, unpaid job, which make them inaccessible to large subsets of the community.**
- **The current recruitment and appointment process, the timing of meetings, the requirement for in-person meetings, and amount of work (in addition to lack of funding for food and stipends mentioned above), skews the demographics of commissioners so that they are not representative of the broader community being served. While boards and commissions do not comprehensively collect demographic information, there is a perception among Commissioners that Board and commission members, as well as community members who speak at Board and Commission meetings, are Whiter, older, retired and better resourced than the community at large.**
- **There is recognition that Commissions could help fill community engagement gaps between the County and the community, but that requires more strategic direction for their roles. Some indicated that Boards and Commissions are underutilized as there is little or no information flow through them.**
- **Working with a staff person helps commissioners, and they need more support in hiring additional staff to support them. Staff who work with commissioners and the Board of Supervisors may have to negotiate difficult dynamics between the two, however.**
- **Participants desire more clarity. There is confusion about all the different commissions and under what authority they fall.**

### FINDING 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.

Authentic relationships built on trust are always at the core of successful community engagement. In order to be willing and able to put in the time and energy to engage with an institution, community members must believe that the institution knows them, trusts them, understands their needs, values their wisdom, and will be responsive to the feedback they give. This understanding can only stem from relationships built on reciprocity, rather than on one-directional information flow or extraction. Representation, defined here as having and seeing members of one's community present – and with decision-making power – within the institution itself, can support the development and maintenance of these relationships, lowering the likelihood of misunderstanding and erasure.

#### Lack of trust is bidirectional

County staff and community members alike talked about the current limitations of trust between the County and its constituents. County staff said that depending on where they are positioned within the County, they may be unwelcomed in certain community spaces, and they want to respect that. Departments that are related to law enforcement, for example, acknowledged the need to be invited in before entering a community space, in an effort to avoid inducing fear.

*“I feel that in order for me to feel compelled to engage with the Sonoma County government, I would need to see some kind of attempt towards acknowledging the harms that the Sonoma County government has been responsible for [and] complicit in. That includes [law enforcement]. I would need to see... some kind of reparations for the descendants of enslaved African people in Sonoma County. [There would need to be] an actual fulfillment of that, for someone like me to be interested or compelled to be involved in any other kind of action.”*  
— Community Member

But County staff also highlighted that a more broadly applicable basis for lack of trust is the way that the institution responds to and/or perceives community members who rely on County services. Community members who have relied on County services have experienced being treated negatively by County staff, which impacts trust and the desire to engage. One staff member described the way in which neighborhoods that experience systemic disinvestment are only highlighted when the County seeks funding, but then nothing changes, which promotes distrust. Another described the way in which the institution works to

protect itself, for example, by closing off an accessibility mechanism entirely after one person misuses that mechanism in a fraudulent way. And community members mentioned the way their communities have been treated by County entities as a foundation for distrust.

*“[As an indigenous Latina/o], I’m very interested in collaborating with the county directly and indirectly and represent my community and also be part of the community. I would like to get involved with the county to be able to get more information, to learn about the resources for our people and to have a valuable role and continue learning here in Santa Rosa and to be part of, or co-design a project.”*  
— Community Member

Community members and CBOs talked about the fear that prevents people from reaching out to the County and/or accessing services. They stressed that for undocumented people and folks living in mixed status households, there is a lot of fear, but also that this fear extends beyond the issue of documentation. One CBO representative described the bind that they are in as they try to dissuade people’s fears, because they cannot do so with certainty (that, say, a data breach will not happen), and do not want to lose the trust of the community themselves.

Community members who self-identified as part of immigrant communities expressed that the primary form of support people seek is from each other due to this lack of trust (as well as inaccessibility of information, ease of understanding, and lack of representation in government). When immigrant communities need more support than what their own communities can provide, many don’t know where to get information and/or don’t have access to reciprocal relationships outside of their immediate community to get information. Importantly, community members noted that misinformation is spread when there isn’t a way to receive reliable information. All of these barriers to information are compounded when there is a language barrier, rendering any English-only (and English/Spanish-only) information unusable unless an individual has access to interpretation. Community members did appreciate the County making an effort as perceived by the community engagement planning process. They expressed interest in being more involved in County affairs, and felt like they had the skills, background, and knowledge to meaningfully contribute, but saw a huge barrier to getting involved due to lack of proactive communication, information, or support, as the County’s marketing of services or opportunities for engagement or representation didn’t often reach them.

## Lack of proactive relationship building

County staff and community members affirmed that the primary key to building trust is relationship building, and that there are currently broad swaths of the population of Sonoma County that do not have meaningful relationships with the County. While there were a couple of voices from within the County who attributed this in part to community disinterest or lack



of knowledge, the overarching message both from inside the County structure and from the community was that the County can and should do more to build these relationships.

County staff said that the gaps they could identify include youth, Indigenous folks, communities of color (e.g., AAPI, Black folks, Eritrean, Ethiopia), people who are undocumented, people who live in rural, unincorporated areas, and people who speak languages other than English and Spanish.

Staff identified specific barriers that are getting in the way of doing better outreach. They said that there is a fear within the County that they may not be able to be good partners with community members. They do not want to invade people's private lives or trigger fear, so rather than reaching out directly, they publicize information about being a safe space and then wait for people to come to them. They mentioned that they don't have the staff or resources to move language access beyond English and Spanish. One strategy that is being attempted in various ways throughout the County is partnering with trusted Community-Based Organization (CBOs) and/or working out in the community on issues that are fundamental to community members' lives. One County staff member mentioned working with CBOs to put signage at emergency shelters explaining that folks do not need to worry about their documentation status, and one mentioned starting a task force to work with farmworkers on stolen wages.

*“Comfort comes from networking with people who represent shared life experience, especially that which is a source of challenge. They would go to a local community-based organization because they know about immigration and I'll be more comfortable to go where people have experienced on that topic.”*  
— Community Member

Community members and partners affirmed that the County needs to be more proactive in reaching out to communities that are not currently engaged, and agreed that partnering with local organizations, including CBOs but also faith-based groups and libraries and any place where community members congregate and get their information, is key. “I believe that only in one or two opportunities they

have called us,” one member of a faith-based community said. “They have invited us because someone from the church knew that outreach person. And that was the time we participated. But they have never called me... The County, the events that they host... they have not invited us.”

These partnerships are even more important to support community members who do not have access to a computer, as so many applications are online. When it comes to youth, community members said that the County needs to do more work to ensure that youth know what services are available to them, and that because youth will often feel embarrassed to ask, this information needs to be proactively supplied from the County's end. In relation to language, community members said that it's not just about translation and interpretation. County communications

include terms that are inaccessible and unintelligible to many community members, and when trying to access services, the number of buttons that folks have to press on the phone [or website] to get to the right place create a barrier that cannot be fixed by interpretation.

Community partners shared in the frustration that more folks from their communities do not attend important meetings where their voices are needed, and shared that it is the County's responsibility to ensure that these meetings are welcoming, scheduled in locations and at times that work for folks, and are culturally responsive.

## **Lack of representation and cultural responsiveness, both generally, and specifically in decision-making positions**

*"I also keep hearing more and more that visibility is really important to our community. A lot of people would like to be seen, a lot of people really want good representation, which, you know, well, well beyond reaches far beyond the bounds of the County. But I think that it's very clear that good representation is very necessary in order to create long lasting change."*

*— Community Member*

One of the barriers to relationship building that County staff and community members agreed upon was the lack of diverse cultural/racial/ethnic/lived experience representation among the staff doing engagement and the people making decisions. County staff recognized the importance of being out in the community that you come from, doing face-to-face engagement, leaning into and deepening relationships and creating new ones from a place of shared understanding, culture, and/or experience.

Staff mentioned that given the impact that representation has, the County should consider streamlining the process for local folks and students to get jobs at the County.

Community members emphasized that community is about "belonging" and requires "welcoming" spaces in order to feel safe and willing to participate. To fulfill their needs for connection and support, communities have formed close-knit relationships and connections with one another, especially to provide tangible, practical support to newcomer community members or folks facing hard times. For many, their small communities of people with similar backgrounds or similar struggles serve as "a pillar of strength." Community members defined community as cooperation, mutual support, and everyone working together toward similar goals, which are collectivistic and interdependent cultural values, as opposed to the individualistic cultural values of being independent, self-sustaining, self-reliant, and "self-made." Many community members reported being focused on meeting survival and basic needs, working multiple jobs to make ends meet in a high cost of living area.

Community members agreed that engagement is best done by members of the community itself, people who understand the nuances of both the services offered and the way that the community speaks and takes in information. Without this deep cultural and linguistic knowledge, County communication does not land because it is not understood, even when there is interpretation. In other words, translation is rarely a word-for-word enterprise, and messages must be delivered in culturally responsive ways. Language is contextual and laden with meaning and nuance beyond the specific words themselves, and that nuance gets lost in classic translation that does not account for this context.

This is not to minimize the importance of translation and interpretation themselves. For folks whose language needs are rarely met because they don't speak English or Spanish, such as the Fijian community, the lack of translation is a form of erasure. They mentioned that representation would address this, as would developing a relationship with embedded community liaisons who could communicate in both directions.

## Key takeaways

- *Distrust pervades the relationship between the County of Sonoma and its constituents:*
  - *Many local communities do not trust the County of Sonoma and do not feel that the County trusts, knows, values them, or at times even recognizes their existence.*
  - *County staff acknowledge that community members may not trust their departments if they are adjacent to law enforcement.*
  - *Simultaneously, the County of Sonoma does not exhibit trust in community members who are accessing services or trying to engage.*
- *There are numerous communities that are not yet in meaningful, trusting relationship with the County of Sonoma, including youth, communities of color, people who are undocumented, people who live in rural areas, and people who speak languages other than English and Spanish as well as individuals who self identify as California Indian, American Indian and Native American.*
- *The County does not have the necessary culturally-responsive strategy or resources in place to do meaningful trust building with the communities listed above.*
- *Community members emphasized the need to co-create culturally diverse, heart-opening, healing-centered spaces for community engagement that are based on building authentic relationships and trust between County and communities, where people want to attend because the opportunities are enjoy-*

*able, purposeful, and relatable. Nontraditional healing-informed and culturally responsive practices can create atmospheres of belonging.*

- *The people who are engaging with communities on the margins are rarely from the community being engaged, and do not understand how to do engagement in culturally responsive ways. This representation gap extends to public-facing and decision-making positions (which are largely not one and the same), which exacerbates the barriers to engagement.*



## FINDING 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.

A successful community engagement strategy must honor the voices of community members being engaged. Without honoring time, community engagement work is extractive, taking from community without reciprocal offering. Honoring time can happen in two ways, both of which are critical. The first is to compensate folks for providing their wisdom via stipends, and the second is to hold the institution accountable to incorporating the feedback received into future actions; compensation without accountability continues to be harmful.

### Honoring community time via compensation is currently a nonstarter

*"The notion of like stipends or compensation or engagement, so I think most of us are probably aware that, you know, it's becoming common, more common to compensate members of the public for their input or their feedback. Especially for folks, you know, for whom that's a it's an economic hardship to volunteer their time in that way. But we haven't gotten any guidance about how to do that."*

— County Staff

*"If you're talking stipends for serving on boards and committees and commissions, I think there are probably reason for some, the reality is it's usually on those boards, committees or commissions that are less attractive. And even in the Bay Area, those committees that are less attractive, or have more work, are those committees that have a higher stipend in order to draw people into that work. So I think there's tactics one uses to try to make sure that you fill those seats."*

— County Leader

Among County staff, there was agreement on a lack of institutional alignment around the need for or the way to compensate folks. Some staff members said that they experienced pushback when seeking to offer stipends as an option, while some said that they understood it to simply not be allowed. Folks shared that they've tried partnering with CBOs to stipend community members indirectly. Others said they were told that they are not allowed to even provide food as a way to both make meetings more inviting and feasible and to demonstrate respect.

Community members mentioned that stipends would make them feel valued and also attract more attention and therefore more people to the process. For some folks, it would mean the difference between being able to engage and not being able to. "We cannot go and do it as volunteers... We need funds to be part of those organizations and go to help the community more. I believe that is the most important thing, funds, that there is support for people, so they can do the job; otherwise,

*A different jurisdiction] has a model of paying stipends to commissioners/ volunteers who are under a certain income level, would be interesting to copy."*

*— County Member*

how can we pay for rent, bills, and all our other expenses?" One community member highlighted a model they've seen in other jurisdictions, where stipends are paid to commissioners and volunteers under a certain income level, as one that would be interesting for the County of Sonoma to replicate.

## **The County does not currently have robust mechanisms or metrics to hold itself accountable to the community engagement process and to community members who engage.**

The success of community engagement is inherently linked to accountability. As addressed in Finding 3, community members need to see evidence that their feedback is being used in meaningful ways in order to continue to engage. Without accountability, engagement strays from its purpose, which is to

*"People say we're not listening, and I can understand that even if we're listening, if what they're saying is not being reflected in the outcomes and in our work... we might as well not be listening."*

*— County Staff*

incorporate the wisdom of community members and meet their stated needs in ways that feel affirming to them.

*"The traditional way of [measuring the success of community engagement] has been to do that in a very subjective way, based on the opinions of stakeholders who are already really invested in whatever the existing [department] oversight system was.*

*But I don't know that that actually generates any meaningful change in the lives of people who are on the other end of receiving [our department's] services. I would prefer us to be looking at how we can move to some more quantifiable metrics, change in outcome and our small number of examples of places where*

*community engagement programs lead to changes in policies, there were demonstrable changes in outcomes in the field."*

*— County Leadership*

Within the County of Sonoma, there are no deliverables attached to current community engagement work, and there are no measurements or evaluation metrics in place. When asked how they measure the success of their engagement efforts, some folks mentioned keeping track of the number of events held or attendees, but also mentioned that this did not seem to be enough because it wasn't resulting in positive outcomes. There's a sense among County staff that people feel out whether an event was a success or not, and specifically, that if an event was well-attended and seemed comfortable and congenial, then the event is deemed a success.

County staff shared that they did not have concrete ways of measuring whether what they were doing was actually working for the community, and community members shared frustration that they did not see the results of engagement in changed policies or

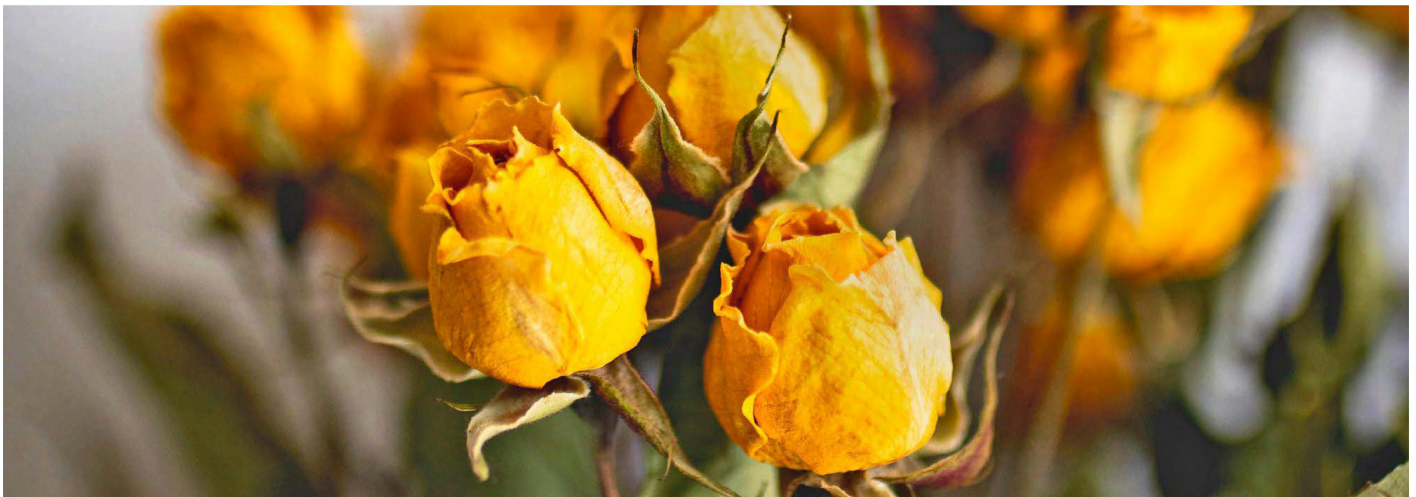
outcomes. One County staff shared, “People say we’re not listening, and I can understand that even if we’re listening, if what they’re saying is not being reflected in the outcomes and in our work...we might as well not be listening!”

*“I haven’t been able to really determine yet if our strategies are working [...] we’re just kind of opening our eyes now to this point in time to say, well, maybe we’re not engaging with the community enough in certain areas.”*  
— County Staff

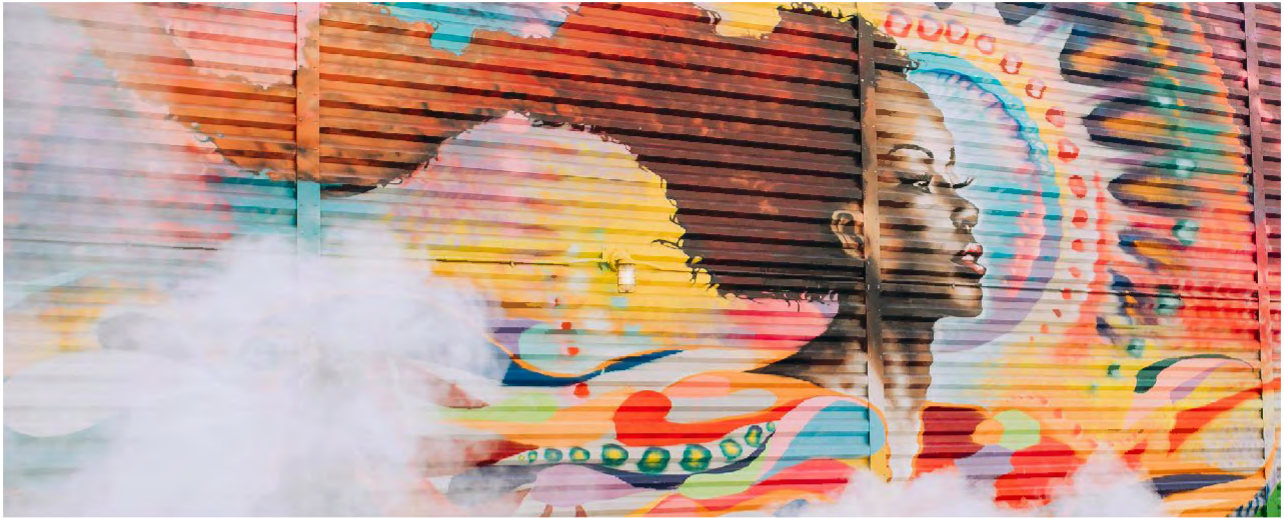
The range of resource allocation for community engagement varied widely. Some leaders shared that some departments are not investing in the work, others are not setting aside sufficient budget, and some departments simply don’t have the resources or staff to do the work that they know they need to do. This feedback highlights the lack of a County-wide impactful community engagement system and ownership of the complex web of roles required to resource and sustain such a system.

## Key takeaways

- *The County of Sonoma does not provide stipends for the vast majority of their community engagement work, which renders many community members unable to participate.*
- *When community members are asked to participate and/or volunteer time, emotional and intellectual labor without compensation and without a clear sense that their efforts are resulting in any concrete, lasting changes that beneficially impact outcomes for them or others, community burnout, or an unwillingness to engage, can occur.*
- *Current Community Engagement strategies do not have accountability mechanisms nor success metrics built into them.*



## SPOTLIGHT: EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS IN SONOMA COUNTY



- **One County department described partnering with NGOs, especially in “geographical deserts,” working with a variety of CBLs to get on their planning committee, and engaging in bidirectional learning while they updated their department plan. “We try not to talk at people.” Further, they assess their strategies based on impact, so if no Spanish-speakers showed up to an event, they refine their outreach strategy.**
- **Community members are seeking the County out, filling out online forms that used to go unused. One County department mentioned that they had recently been invited into conversation by community members, with whom they had historically had a tense relationship, and they were happy and willing to do the hard work to rebuild the relationship.**
- **County staff acknowledged the necessity of lengthening the time span and notification period for outreach, the importance of two-way engagement, learning from community, and being physically present and available where people gather.**
- **The Office of Equity was named as an asset, in that they build relational trust, are embedded in communities, and engage in bidirectional learning. Their limitation is that they are not empowered to make changes based on the engagement that they do, and so there is an opportunity to partner with them to ensure that engagement leads to meaningful change.**
- **The ARPA work group, and the Community-Based Leader model for the Community Engagement plans (including stipends, application/interview processes, etc.) are models that can be built out for future community engagement work.**



- **One County department spoke about wanting to implement more participatory town halls where the County only speaks for a little and there are breakout groups, real-time clicker voting, etc.**
- **One County leader mentioned that the County needs to spend 90% of engagement time reaching out to 10% of the population to create equity.**
- **Community members value the District 1 Charla Comunitaria as an important resource for information.**
- **Community members appreciate paid training opportunities from the County as well as County-led community events where people can come together to participate in trash or river clean-up.**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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County staff and community members were energized by the process and potential outcomes of this community engagement process. While they shared openly about the ways in which current community engagement efforts were not yet meeting their needs, they also shared their wisdom regarding the processes and investments necessary to strengthen the relationships between themselves, the broader community, and the County of Sonoma. The following recommendations reflect this wisdom, and lead the way from the key findings illuminated here towards what has become a robust, culturally- and community- responsive Community Engagement Plan.



## RECOMMENDATION 1

Move from “Informing” and “Consulting” toward Community Ownership by making key organizational structural changes that support community-driven decision making.

1

Invest in roles with dedicated Community Engagement functions, including ongoing planning, implementation, and evaluation of strategies and activities outlined in the Community Engagement plan.

2

Commit co-ownership, responsiveness, and accountability to community engagement.

3

Partner with a core group of Community-Based Leaders to engage community members in decisions related to governance, such as selecting representatives for Boards and Commissions and directing resources to community partners.



## RECOMMENDATION 2

Remove barriers by providing accessible, culturally-appropriate information and resources for community members furthest from access and opportunity both in times of stability and crisis.

- 1 Invest in funds for translation and interpretation in Spanish, as well as in languages other than Spanish.
- 2 Cultivate community capacity by partnering with and supporting Community-Based Organizations.
- 3 Increase accessibility of information and resources through engagement by community members (paid promotoras/es, representative County staff, community health workers), and diverse formats and sources of information (face-to-face, virtual, hybrid).



## RECOMMENDATION 3

Design, implement, and evaluate policies and procedures that increase public participation by community members who have traditionally been excluded.

- 1 Shift Boards and Commissions policies to be more representatives of the communities served.
- 2 Compensate people equitably for time and effort; update/standardize stipend and compensation policies to ensure community members are adequately paid.
- 3 Create opportunities to hire more people from local communities for County positions.
- 4 Democratize decision-making processes by opening up multiple pathways for constituents to observe, comment, and inform decision-making processes.



## RECOMMENDATION 4

Create internal programming for continuous training, learning, and collaboration across Departments in support of Community Engagement efforts.

1

Create a toolbox/toolkit with community engagement resources, reach, and engagement level.

2

Form internal collaboration/learning communities or peer cohorts that support learning, coordination, and referrals.

3

Provide individualized consultation and support for Department leads and staff.



## RECOMMENDATION 5

Assess and document progress on the planning and implementation of community engagement efforts.

1

Draft consistent measures/indicators to track the impact of community engagement work across the County.

2

Support Departments to create, implement, and track feedback from community members.

3

Support Departments to implement changes based on feedback.

4

Create a mechanism for transparent communication of feedback-accountability loops (ex: annual report to the Board, dashboards, community reports).

# STRATEGIES



Turning the recommendations from community members into a robust, strategic Community Engagement Plan required wrestling with two interrelated tensions.

Community Engagement work is primarily external, but without a robust internal system of resource allocation, capacity building, peer learning and support, and accountability mechanisms, public-facing community engagement may be under (or inequitably) resourced, and the people tasked with doing it report feeling isolated, unsure how to proceed, and without the tools necessary to measure success. Secondly, community engagement is often deeply localized work. While the County of Sonoma serves all Sonoma County residents, constituencies vary depending on the departments and programs in question, geographical location, identity, needs, program usage, etc. But leaving community engagement entirely in the hands of individuals spread throughout the County makes it challenging for County staff to leverage each other's successes and learn from each other's challenges. The results of this siloing may include staff overburdening some community members while unintentionally ignoring others and struggling with consistency and follow-through.

The strategies herein address these interrelated tensions by establishing an internal-facing Community Engagement Manager position (as well as a few centralized community-based leader roles), housed within the Office of Equity (an internal-facing department), to create resources and connect and support community engagement staff throughout the County, so that they have the tools and resources they need in order to do their localized, public-facing work. This framework provides a mechanism to shine a light on and spread the work that is already happening in pockets around the County and to support County staff in growing together towards more community ownership. Most importantly, it answers the call we heard throughout the community engagement process, from community engagement staff, Department Heads, and community members alike: ***The need for coordinated strategy and resources to fully support localized, meaningful engagement.***

Sub-strategies that are highlighted in yellow represent pillar strategies that are foundational for implementation of the rest of the plan. At the January 2024 Board Meeting, the Board of Supervisors requested that the Office of Equity focus on Board and Commissions, and that the plan be adapted to reflect this focus. For more information on the Racial Equity in Sonoma County Boards and Commissions Plan, please see <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/administrative-support-and-fiscal-services/office-of-equity>.

Sub-strategies that are highlighted in yellow represent pillar strategies that are foundational for implementation of the rest of the plan.

Strategies that have been adapted for use in the Racial Equity in Sonoma County Boards and Commissions Plan are marked with an asterisk at the end. \*

## Strategy 1: Hiring and Professional Development

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>1.1 - Hire a permanent Community Engagement Manager position (OOE) *</b></p> <p><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<p>Create a job description, hire, resource, and provide ongoing support to a Community Engagement Manager, CE Manager, who is based in the Office of Equity, and who works to support staff and departments throughout the County of Sonoma in deepening their community engagement work.</p> <p>The CE Manager’s job duties would include leading in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Internal staff support: Designing and implementing equity-centered Community Engagement training opportunities for County staff; provide 1:1 capacity building support; facilitating learning cohorts among staff from different departments engaging in CE.</i></li> <li>● <i>Bidirectional learning: Liaising with similar jurisdictions to learn what is working for them and to share what the County of Sonoma is doing.</i></li> <li>● <i>Policy development: Developing policies that support equitable CE, such as participation, transportation, and childcare stipends, and meeting protocols for culturally responsive meetings, including translation and interpretation.</i></li> <li>● <i>External government 101 training: Designing and implementing multilingual community education workshops on local government systems and structures.</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>1.2 - 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)</b></p> <p><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<p><i>Development of a CBL engagement program rests on a foundation of deep, intentional, long-term, culturally responsive relationship building. With facilitation, Community Engagement staff (whether within or across departments) who have demonstrated readiness to engage in co-design can learn the principles of this process as laid out in the provided Community Engagement Toolkit, and work to foster these relationships with CBLs. Some of these principles include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>CBLs are hired from within communities most impacted by systemic inequities and are paid for their work.</i></li> <li>● <i>The CBL job description includes working with County staff to co-design and implement engagement opportunities, and to make recommendations that impact policy, programs, etc.</i></li> <li>● <i>The County's commitment is to resource this process fully, engage in reciprocal relationships with CBLs and with community members they bring to the planning table, to communicate transparently, and to create mechanisms to respond to the needs and wisdom shared by community members with concrete actions.</i></li> <li>● <i>Promoting leadership opportunity developments: pathways, mentorship, and navigation to build skills and gain exposure/access. Creation, identification, and navigation of pathways for growth and development. Centering reciprocity.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>1.3 - 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) *</b></p>	<p><i>The approach the County can take to hiring and funding Language Access will be more fully laid out in the Language Access Plan. AND, equity-centered community engagement requires accessibility around language, and culturally responsive Language Access requires implementing the values and practices of community engagement. Once teams are in place to work on both areas, there should be regular coordination, so that policies, practices, and interactions with community are always informed by each other.</i></p>

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>1.4 - Hire County navigator(s) to coordinate support for community members across departments (OOE, Safety Net Collaborative)</b></p>	<p>Create a job description, hire, resource, and provide ongoing support to a team of County Navigators, who coordinate with departments throughout the County of Sonoma and support community members directly in gaining meaningful access to wrap-around services offered by the County. Process steps can include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Determine the specific needs and challenges faced by community members in navigating services, and design the County Navigator position around addressing these barriers. Job description, recruitment strategies, and hiring process should prioritize lived experience, culturally responsive communication and relationship building, bilingual/biculturalism, and experience working with diverse communities.</li> <li>● Couple the hiring process with comprehensive training and ongoing professional development opportunities for County navigators to enhance their skills and knowledge (communication skills, conflict resolution, community resources, cultural responsiveness, etc).</li> <li>● Create structures that support collaboration among County navigators and various departments, including regular meetings, joining planning sessions, and information sharing to facilitate seamless coordination, and to ensure that feedback from community is being integrated into service delivery.</li> <li>● Engage with community members to raise awareness of the County navigator program and promote access to support services.</li> <li>● Develop outreach strategies that reach underserved populations and prioritize language access and cultural responsiveness.</li> <li>● Implement systems for collecting and tracking data on the services provided by County navigators, including community member demographics, referrals made, outcomes achieved, and feedback from community members and partner agencies. Use this data to evaluate effectiveness, identify trends and gaps, and inform decision-making.</li> </ul>



Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>1.5 - Develop a leadership pipeline with a focus on better serving underrepresented and underserved communities (OOE, HR)</b></p>	<p><i>Create leadership pipelines that focus on better serving underrepresented communities. This pipeline should include recruitment from outside of current County infrastructure, access to leadership development programs and mentorship for public-facing staff, meaningful pathways for recognition and advancement, and a shifting of leadership culture to incorporate and reward lived experiences, perspectives and approaches of underrepresented and underserved community members. Suggested strategic actions include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Allocate resources and implement programs to identify and nurture talent from within the County (mentorship and coaching programs, leadership development initiatives, targeted recruitment efforts, networking opportunities), specifically people whose unique contributions are not yet fully recognized by retention, promotion, and compensation systems.</i></li> <li>● <i>Assess and broaden pathways to advancement, and provide support and guidance to help these staff members navigate organizational dynamics and overcome barriers to advancement.</i></li> <li>● <i>Conduct equity assessments to identify areas for improvement and monitor progress in developing a diverse and inclusive leadership pipeline. Engage with underrepresented communities and community members directly to understand needs, priorities, and aspirations. Establish metrics, benchmarks, and accountability mechanisms to track outcomes and hold leaders accountable for advancing equity goals.</i></li> <li>● <i>Adopt diverse recruitment and hiring practices, review job descriptions and qualifications to remove unnecessary barriers to entry, and shift manager and performance metrics to allow for nontraditional skills to be elevated and valued.</i></li> <li>● <i>Foster an inclusive leadership culture within County government that values diverse perspectives and experiences, and that prioritizes continuous learning and adaptation to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities. Encourage leaders to actively listen to and engage with underrepresented communities, prioritize equity in decision-making, and hold themselves accountable for creating positive change.</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>1.6 - Provide trainings to prepare staff for co-design with community (OOE) *</b></p>	<p>Offer capacity training to County staff that design for and/or engage with community members to equip staff with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for effective and equitable CE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offer a mix of in-person workshops, webinars, online courses, and self-paced modules to accommodate different learning styles and preferences.</li> <li>● Ensure shared understanding of the Spectrum of Community Engagement framework as a tool for building toward community ownership. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide County staff with a clear understanding of the transformative roles that community navigators, community leaders, promotoras, and CBOs (key functions as trusted intermediaries) can play within this framework.</li> <li>● Emphasize the importance of building trust, meaningful relationships, and transparent communication with community.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Provide workshops on topics such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Communication strategies, trust and relationship building skills, cultural responsiveness and humility, stakeholder engagement, conflict resolution, and using feedback to shift systems and programs.</li> <li>● Overview of local context and disaggregated Data of Sonoma County Demographics(ex: <a href="#">Portrait of Sonoma</a>, <a href="#">Bay Area Equity Atlas</a>, <a href="#">Racial Equity Index: Summary</a>, or <a href="#">Employee Demographic Dashboard</a>).</li> <li>● Provide training on the Community Engagement Toolkit that includes best practices from our Community Engagement Plan development process and reflection questions to consider in each staff member’s CE program. In addition,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<p><i>share available resources and tools to support language interpretation, translation, and cultural responsiveness in service delivery.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Provide space for self-assessment of readiness to co-design with community and opportunities for reflection throughout training opportunities.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>1.7 - Increase and clarify expectations for County staff related to Community Engagement practices (CAO, OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>Work with County Administrator’s Office to assess current CE priorities and expand, clarify, and communicate expectations for CE work.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Develop and implement required community engagement training for all County Staff that design for and/or engage with community members to support them in meeting these expanded expectations.</i></li> <li>● <i>Ensure consistent communication and alignment of expectations regarding CE practices across Departments and Divisions within the County.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>For example: Prioritize the implementation of the Board’s policy direction to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit in order to thoroughly complete the Racial Equity Analysis in all significant agenda items, including question four, “Who are the most affected community members who are concerned with or have experience related to this issue/program? How will you involve these community members in the development and implementation of this program?” In addition, ensure that:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Intentional community engagement efforts are completed in advance of an item coming to the Board.</i></li> <li>● <i>CAO analysts who review significant Board items hold department leads accountable to completing the Racial Equity Analysis as part of their Board item before going to the Board for a vote.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OOE Community Engagement Manager works closely with the OOE Strategic Plan Program Planning &amp; Evaluation Analyst to provide technical assistance support around question four as needed of Racial Equity Analysis.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.8 - Allocate and track community engagement resources (CAO, OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>Develop a clear resource allocation plan that outlines how CE resources will be distributed and prioritized based on identified needs and goals.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocate dedicated funding for CE initiatives within the County budget.</li> <li>Establish funding streams specifically earmarked for activities such as outreach, events, capacity building, and partnership development, AND offer flexible funding mechanisms to support a variety of CE approaches and activities.</li> <li>Publicly share information about funding opportunities, allocation decisions, and outcomes to promote trust and accountability.</li> <li>Create feedback loops to solicit input from community members and stakeholders on resource allocation decisions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.9 - Develop cross-departmental, centralized community engagement resources for County staff (OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>Create a centralized hub or resource center to provide County staff with access to tools, guidelines, templates, best practices, and other resources related to CE. This could be an online portal, intranet site, or physical resource library.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer training and capacity-building programs to equip County staff with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for effective CE. Provide workshops, seminars, webinars, and certification programs on topics such as communication strategies, cultural responsiveness, stakeholder engagement, and conflict resolution.</li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among County staff from different departments involved in CE efforts. Establish cross-departmental working groups, task forces, or committees to promote collaboration, coordination, and alignment of goals and strategies (ex: peer learning cohort).</i></li> <li>● <i>Develop standardized processes, tools, and templates to streamline CE efforts across departments. This may include guidelines for conducting outreach, collecting feedback, facilitating meetings, and evaluating outcomes.</i></li> <li>● <i>Offer technical assistance, coaching, and support to County staff engaged in CE activities. Assign dedicated staff or liaisons in each department (As applicable) to provide guidance, answer questions, and troubleshoot challenges as they arise. (ex: “office hours”).</i></li> </ul>

## Strategy 2: Policies and Procedures

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>2.1 - Implement consistent stipend policies across County departments (ex: internal stipend policy, CBO MOU policy) (Auditor, CAO, OOE) *</b></p> <p><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<p><i>Assess existing stipend policies, including their rationale, implementation, and impact. Coupled with research on best practices, including practices in place in other jurisdictions that are creating equitable outcomes, draft and bring to the Board for approval consistent stipend policies and processes for the County as a whole (including Boards and Commissions, CBLs, community members sharing their wisdom during engagement opportunities, and CBO MOU policy). The County can then support implementation of the stipend policies across County departments through technical assistance, budget allocations, and by adding a question about compensation to the Racial Equity Analysis process.</i></p>

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>2.2 - Implement consistent public meeting policies and approaches. (Ex: Childcare, food, language, location, and time) (OOE) *</b></p> <p><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<p>Assess existing public meeting policies (that address such practices as childcare, food, language access, time/place), including their rationale, implementation, and impact. Coupled with research on best practices, including practices in place in other jurisdictions that are creating equitable outcomes, the CE manager can draft and bring to the Board for approval consistent public meeting policies for the County as a whole (including Boards and Commissions, CBLs, and community members sharing their wisdom during engagement opportunities). The County can then support implementation through technical assistance, budget allocations, and by adding information to the Racial Equity Analysis.</p>
<p><b>2.3 - Apply existing Racial Equity Analysis policy to assess impact of community engagement work on communities most impacted by systemic inequities (CAO, OOE) *</b></p> <p><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<p>The County can support staff in applying the Racial Equity Analysis to prioritize and address potential impacts as previously directed by the Board in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensuring project timelines reflect time for meaningful analysis, including community engagement.</li> <li>● Prioritizing taking actions to address gaps.</li> <li>● Creating a dashboard to ensure transparency and including an annual report around impacts and growth at a public Board of Supervisors' meeting.</li> </ul>

## Strategy 3: Training and Collaboration

Strategies	Best Practices
<p data-bbox="152 306 522 464"><i>3.1 - Support CBOs with regular cross-training and resource navigation coordination (OOE, Safety Net Collaborative)</i></p> <p data-bbox="152 499 324 531"><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<ul data-bbox="621 317 1458 1724" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="621 317 1458 432">● <i>Work with CBOs to identify their training/coordination/collaboration needs and then be the bridge, creating co-learning spaces that strengthen the web of support holding communities.</i></li><li data-bbox="621 489 1458 772">● <i>Identify the training needs of CBOs (knowledge gaps, resource navigation, etc), and collaborate with a variety of experts (including County staff, consultants, and CBLs) to develop tailored training programs to address them in a variety of formats (in-person workshops, webinars, online courses, and self-paced modules, technical assistance) to accommodate different learning styles and preferences.</i></li><li data-bbox="621 829 1458 1161">● <i>Facilitate opportunities for CBOs to engage in peer learning and networking and to collaborate and partner with each other and with government agencies, creating spaces for mutual learning and reciprocity around language access and cultural responsiveness in service delivery. Organize forums, roundtable discussions, and community of practice groups where participants can share insights, exchange ideas, and learn from each other's experiences.</i></li><li data-bbox="621 1218 1458 1423">● <i>Monitor the progress and impact of cross-training and resource navigation coordination efforts. Track participation rates, knowledge acquisition, skill development, and changes in CBO capacity over time. Use feedback from participants and stakeholders to assess effectiveness and make adjustments as needed.</i></li><li data-bbox="621 1480 1458 1556">● <i>Allocate sustainable funding and resources to support ongoing cross-training and resource navigation coordination efforts.</i></li><li data-bbox="621 1612 1458 1724">● <i>Advocate for funding from government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and other sources to ensure long-term sustainability and impact.</i></li></ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>3.2 - Conduct multilingual community education workshops on local government systems 101 (OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>CE manager collaborates with a CBL team to co-design joyful, engaging, dialogue-focused workshop sessions for community members.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Ensure that the workshop goals, content, and outcomes connect to the priorities of intended community audience, and select the appropriate platform/s (in-person, virtual, or hybrid) that best meet the needs of the intended workshop audience(s).</i></li> <li>● <i>Work with a community partner (CBO, CBL) to co-lead the session(s), and share information about the workshop(s) via the trusted partners of your intended community participants.</i></li> <li>● <i>Conduct sessions in the primary language(s) of the intended community audience.</i></li> <li>● <i>Build reciprocity into the session and share the microphone/air time with participants.</i></li> <li>● <i>Collect feedback and evaluate sessions in ways that minimize burden to participants (brief oral or written feedback forms), and follow-up quickly on participants' questions raised during the workshop or in evaluation forms.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>3.3 - Create cross-departmental peer learning cohorts for County staff who do community engagement (OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>Create and convene a staff Learning Cohort for professional development training, cross-departmental peer learning, resource sharing, implementation support, and evaluation of impact can allow for internal collaboration, regular colleague feedback, increased accountability, and community (in this case staff) building support.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Set up structures that support the design and implementation of the peer learning cohorts, such as:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Hire a consultant to support designing the learning cohort and provide training support.</i></li> <li>● <i>Pilot CE work with 1-2 departments (ex: work with a couple of departments who are furthest along/in “collaborate” stage of the Spectrum of Community Engagement based on internal assessment to give them a CE boost). Followed by a full launch that includes a peer learning cohort with all departments.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Strategies	Best Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Work with the CAO office to set expectations regarding participation of each department in the learning cohort.</i></li> <li>● <i>Include training on relationship- and trust-building with community, facilitating co-design engagement processes, and impact evaluation.</i></li> <li>● <i>Incorporate practical application through exercises, case studies, or simulations.</i></li> <li>● <i>Foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within the County government to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities.</i></li> <li>● <i>Encourage experimentation, innovation, and reflection to refine strategies and practices over time.</i></li> <li>● <i>Promote networking and ongoing support among staff within and in between cohort sessions.</i></li> <li>● <i>Regularly gather feedback from County staff on the effectiveness of the learning cohort and use this feedback to continuously improve training materials, resources, and support for staff.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>3.4 - Conduct training with leaders of public-facing committees on promoting equitable engagement (OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>CE manager will implement a version of the internal capacity building that is responsive to the needs and duties of public-facing-committee leadership.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Ensure shared understanding of language/terminology and CE framework of building toward community ownership.</i></li> <li>● <i>Emphasize the importance of building trust, meaningful relationships, and transparent communication with community.</i></li> <li>● <i>Provide tools and strategies for addressing conflict in generative ways and navigating challenging conversations with empathy and respect.</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Encourage leaders to view equitable CE as an ongoing process rather than a one-time initiative, and support them in developing long-term plans.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>3.5 - Provide trainings for County staff on partnering with navigators and CBOs (OOE)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Provide County staff with a clear understanding of the roles of community navigators and CBOs (key functions as trusted intermediaries).</i></li> <li>● <i>Ensure County staff understand the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and needs of navigators, CBOs, and communities they represent.</i></li> <li>● <i>Provide strategies for establishing and maintaining positive, mutually beneficial partnerships based on trust, respect, and shared goals.</i></li> <li>● <i>Provide guidance on effective communication strategies, such as clear, respectful, and culturally appropriate communication.</i></li> <li>● <i>Clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations: ensure that County staff understand the specific services, resources, and support that community navigators and CBOs can provide, as well as their own roles in supporting these efforts.</i></li> <li>● <i>Familiarize County staff with relevant policies, procedures, and protocols related to partnering with community navigators and CBOs.</i></li> <li>● <i>Promote cultural humility and respect in interactions with community navigators and CBOs (approaching partnerships with humility, openness, and a willingness to learn from community partners' expertise and experiences).</i></li> <li>● <i>Emphasize the importance of sustainability and long-term engagement with community navigators and CBOs (partnerships</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<p>as ongoing relationships that require nurturing, investment, and commitment over time).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish feedback mechanisms to gather input from County staff, community navigators, and CBOs on the effectiveness of the partnership and use this feedback to continuously improve training materials, resources, and support for staff.</li> </ul>

## Strategy 4: Accountability

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>4.1 - Implement accountability mechanisms to ensure for equitable access and impact (OOE, Upstream, Safety Net Collaborative) *</b></p> <p><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encourage Department leads to seek feedback from community, evaluate the effectiveness of CE efforts, and adjust strategies accordingly.</li> <li>● Stress the importance of accountability and transparency in all interactions with the community.</li> <li>● Provide training to staff on anti-racist results based accountability for application to staff's own programs.</li> <li>● Apply anti-racist results based accountability to the County's overall CE workplan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.2 - Assess language accessibility of County's public facing documents/ communications and provide ongoing support (Included in Draft Language Access Plan, came to Board in March, 2024) *</b></p>	<p>Per the Draft Language Access Plan, assess and shift County's public facing documents and communication to reflect the language diversity of Sonoma County.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Start by reviewing a sample of the County's public-facing documents, including official websites, newsletters, brochures, forms, and notices.</li> <li>● Convene an independent community-led review panel (ex:</li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<p><i>CBLs) distinct from the teams conducting the translations of documents/comms, to assess the availability, quality, clarity, readability, and accessibility of currently translated documents/communications (complexity, technical terms, etc.) and to seek and incorporate community and CBO feedback.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Consider the visual design of the documents (well-organized, visually appealing, easy to navigate, visuals to enhance comprehension).</i></li> <li>● <i>Establish processes for ongoing monitoring and improvement of language accessibility (regular reviews/updates, demographic changes, emerging best practices).</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>4.3 - Create and resource a community-led accountability body to measure the impact of community engagement on communities (CBL, OOE, Upstream)</b></p>	<p><i>Create and resource a community-led accountability body to create and implement accountability process as outlined in Strategy 4.4</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Ensure that the accountability body is representative of the communities impacted by CE efforts.</i></li> <li>● <i>Empower the accountability body to take ownership of the evaluation process (decision-making, goal-setting, and defining evaluation criteria), and provide training (such as anti-racist results based accountability), resources, and support to build the capacity of members of the accountability body (evaluation methods, data analysis, etc.).</i></li> <li>● <i>Support the work of the accountability body by securing sustainable funding and fostering partnerships, collaboration, and diverse expertise from CBOs.</i></li> <li>● <i>Foster a culture of adaptive learning within the accountability body to continuously improve evaluation practices and outcomes.</i></li> <li>● <i>Create mechanisms to integrate the results of the accountability</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<p><i>process so that CE strategies are flexible in response to changing community needs and priorities.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Ensure that community members have access to information about the evaluation process and findings to promote accountability and trust.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>4.4 - Evaluate impact of each year of community engagement plan implementation (Community Engagement Manager, CBLs) *</b></p>	<p><i>Community-led accountability body (see Strategy 4.3) will design and lead an evaluation process of County-wide community engagement strategies and outcomes.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Define clear, measurable objectives and identify specific outcomes (ex: increased participation, improved trust levels, tangible policy changes).</i></li> <li>● <i>Use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data (attendance rates, survey response rates, changes in demographic representation). Qualitative data can be collected through interviews, focus groups, or open-ended survey questions.</i></li> <li>● <i>Engage community members and local CBOs, as well as internal community members (staff, elected officials) on the design of evaluation methods, interpretation of findings, and recommendations for improvement.</i></li> <li>● <i>Compare data from multiple years to track changes in CE indicators over time (ex: trends, patterns, or shifts in community priorities).</i></li> <li>● <i>Highlight success stories and lessons learned from the implementation of your CE plan (case studies, testimonials, anecdotes) that illustrate the impact of engagement activities on individuals, communities, or policy outcomes. Share these stories internally and externally to inform future planning efforts.</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Prepare and share an annual report summarizing the findings of your CE evaluation efforts with stakeholders, decision-makers, and the broader community to promote transparency, accountability, and learning.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>4.5 - Integrate Racial Equity Analysis results into continued community engagement implementation work (CAO, OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>CE Manager can work with department liaisons and/or CBL table to analyze Racial Equity Analysis (REA) data and identify themes and priorities for action that transcend individual departments and programs. This, in turn, can inform training, technical assistance, and other forms of CE support.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Establish mechanisms for ongoing CE monitoring and evaluation to track progress and outcomes related to racial equity goals.</i></li> <li>● <i>Involve community members in interpreting REA results in culturally responsive ways and identifying priorities for action to ensure CE implementation work reflects the needs and perspectives of those most impacted by racial disparities.</i></li> <li>● <i>Establish mechanisms for CE implementation transparency and accountability to ensure that commitments to racial equity are upheld, regularly report progress to the community and to interest holders, and be transparent about challenges and areas needing improvement.</i></li> <li>● <i>Use REA results to build staff capacity, inform decision-making processes at every stage of CE implementation, and advocate for policy changes that address systemic barriers to equitable community engagement.</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>4.6 - Update Racial Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan Pillar informed by the recommendations, strategies, and learnings of the community engagement implementation (CAO, OOE) *</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide annual updates on CE work as it relates to Racial Equity and Social Justice: Goal 4 as part of CE manager role (see strategy related to CE Manager).</li> <li>● Track and share recommendations, strategies, and learnings of CE implementation that are relevant to departments leading each goal and objective.</li> <li>● Provide opportunities for meaningful engagement with the projects outlined in each strategic pillar and identify opportunities to incorporate community input to address concerns and needs.</li> <li>● Incorporate the learnings from the implementation of the CE plan into the next iteration of the Strategic Plan.</li> </ul>

## Strategy 5: Opportunities for Equitable Community Governance

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>5.1 - Strengthen existing governing bodies (Boards and Commissions) to better represent the community (BOS, CAO, OOE) *</b></p> <p><b>Pillar Strategy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use assessment (Linked to strategy 5.2) to inform and improve applications, outreach, and accessibility including translation, hybrid meetings, food, stipends. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create and conduct trainings for County staff assigned to support departments on the topics listed above as well as protocols for how to hold culturally responsive Board and Commission meetings.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Develop and deliver informational sessions for community members on how to serve on Boards and Commissions as well as the role of Boards and Commissions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Publicly display contact information for each Board and Commission.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Identify platform(s) to share more information about the role of Boards and commissions and opportunities to apply.</i></li> <li>○ <i>Ex: Radio Bilingue KBBF 89.1 fm, NAACP Meetings, County Facebook, department social media and or websites.</i></li> <li>○ <i>Publicly display/share Boards and Commissions open vacancies in pertaining County departments and at County center and on online landing page for each department.</i></li> <li>○ <i>Establish a process for collecting race/ethnicity information from applicants and commissioners.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>5.2 - Conduct an assessment of Boards and Commissions processes around recruitment, selection, stipends and collection of demographic information (CAO,OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>Hire a consultant to conduct an assessment on Boards and Commissions which will inform opportunities to strengthen existing governing bodies to better represent the community. The consultant will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Evaluate all existing recruitment practices, selection criteria and processes, stipend policies, and demographic information collection.</i></li> <li>○ <i>Design recommendations and an implementation plan to inform and improve Board and commission community member recruitment and selection, implement consistent public meeting approaches, as well as connectivity to County priorities.</i></li> <li>○ <i>Create a stipend policy for all Boards and commissions, for the Board's consideration, to ensure the County is providing consistent compensation for Boards and commissions and honoring the expertise of all Boards and commission members (most of whom are currently volunteers).</i></li> </ul>



Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>5.3 - Increase transparency and consistent practices for Boards and Commissions to improve equitable representation (CAO, OOE) *</b></p>	<p><i>Use assessment to inform and improve transparency and consistent practices for Boards and Commissions.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Ensure all information on Granicus platform is updated with correct contact information, consistent application core questions, and accurate criteria to serve on each Board or Commission.</i></li> <li>● <i>Identify opportunities to add additional support staff to support Boards and Commissions.</i></li> <li>● <i>Establish a consistent process for onboarding each Board and commission member that includes clear roles and responsibilities.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Develop an onboarding orientation for Boards and Commissions that requires OOE racial equity training.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>● <i>Develop consistent recruitment protocols and selection criteria for all Board/ Commission seats appointed by the Board of Supervisors. Publish stipend, reimbursement for travel and childcare, etc on the Granicus platform.</i></li> <li>● <i>Establish funding streams specifically and publicly earmarked for outreach, translation, interpretation, and food.</i></li> <li>● <i>Create a feedback loop to solicit and respond to input from community members as it relates to boards and commissions.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>5.4 - Lead and resource ongoing racial equity/ community engagement training series for Board members (OOE) *</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Tailor OOE racial equity training for boards and commission members as well as assigned support staff.</i></li> <li>● <i>Require mandatory racial equity training for all current Board members and when onboarding new board members or commissioners.</i></li> <li>● <i>Collect feedback from boards and commissions members who participate in racial equity training.</i></li> </ul>

Strategies	Best Practices
<p><b>5.5 - Pilot a participatory budgeting process (CAO, OOE)</b></p>	<p><i>Develop an intentional process that centers community members who are most impacted by systemic inequities throughout. One example of such a process was piloted in Marin last year. An overview of the process includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Creating a County budget line to devote to initiatives identified in the participatory budgeting process.</i></li> <li>● <i>Opening up idea generation processes to the public. People could participate online, and there were in-person sessions created in priority communities, often attached to well-attended events.</i></li> <li>● <i>These ideas were opened up to the public to “like” and comment on.</i></li> <li>● <i>Based on these initial rounds of engagement, community members were invited to partner with CBOs to submit proposals to turn these ideas into reality. Grant writers were made available to support community members for free.</i></li> <li>● <i>A participatory budgeting committee reviewed the applications to ensure alignment with an equity-centered matrix that they had developed.</i></li> <li>● <i>All of the winners (of which there were many) were funded. Runner ups were granted 10,000 to get started.</i></li> </ul>



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# CONCLUSION

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Sonoma County is home to a diverse population of residents who care deeply about their home and about their communities, many of whom want to engage more deeply with the County. The County of Sonoma is staffed by members of the broader community who are deeply committed to providing services in ways that are responsive to the needs of community members at large and are seeking more information on how to do so. This is a promising foundation on which a robust Community Engagement Plan has been built to bridge the gaps that exist between community members who are marginalized by current policies from participation and the institution that serves them.

If implemented, the Community Engagement Plan found here will support the County of Sonoma in building on its communications infrastructure to engage in bidirectional learning, in capacity building around culturally responsive engagement and relationship-building, and in properly resourcing the work and building meaningful accountability mechanisms. A great deal of thanks is owed to all of the community members, community partners, County staff and leadership, who opened themselves up, with vulnerability and with hope, to move this process forward towards building (more) authentic, reciprocal relationships with each other.

# APPENDIX: SURVEY DATA TABLES

## Race/Ethnicity/Culture

	County Staff			Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self -describe 9field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
<b>Asian</b>	8%	6%	0%	8%
<b>Black and/or African American</b>	15%	6%	4%	7%
<b>Hispanic, Latina/e/o,x and/or Spanish Origin</b>	62%	33%	13%	66%
<b>Middle Eastern and/or North African</b>	0%	6%	0%	2%
<b>Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander</b>	0%	0%	0%	10%
<b>White</b>	23%	61%	79%	1%
<b>Prefer Not to Say</b>	0%	6%	8%	1%
<b>Prefer to Self-Describe</b>	0%	0%	0%	1%

## Staff Tenure at County

	County Staff		
	Front facing or prefer to self -describe 9field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)
<b>Less than one year</b>	15%	0%	4%
<b>Between one and four years</b>	46%	33%	29%
<b>Between five and nine years</b>	15%	22%	8%
<b>Ten years or more</b>	23%	44%	58%

## Age

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
18-24	0%	0%	0%	11%
25-34	46%	11%	0%	15%
35-44	15%	44%	25%	24%
45-54	31%	28%	29%	23%
55-64	8%	17%	42%	15%
65+	0%	0%	0%	14%
Prefer Not to Say	0%	0%	4%	0/0

## Languages Spoken

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
Chinese	0/0	0/0	0/0	1%
English*	85%	100%	88%	66%
Indigenous Language(s) (ex: Chatino, Mixteco, Triqui)	0%	6%	0%	7%
Fijian	0%	0%	8%	10/0
Khmer-Cambodian	0/0	0/0	0/0	1%
Spanish	62%	33%	29%	66%
Tagalog	0%	0%	0%	3%
Prefer Not to Say	0%	0%	4%	0/0
Prefer to Self-Describe	8%	6%	0/0	5%

\*While 15% of front-facing staff and 12% of leadership did not indicate that they speak English, interviews and focus groups with County staff and leadership were all conducted in English, and the survey was made available in English only. The question asked: What languages do you speak? (Select all that apply). The data indicate that the question may not have been fully understood.

## Housing Status

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
Renter	46%	39%	29%	65%
Homeowner	39%	61%	67%	23%
Communal Living (ex: multigenerational home, ADU, intentional living community)	23%	0%	4%	6%
Precariously Housed (ex: living in a motel, vehicle, temporarily with friends/family, or in some other temporary location)	0%	0%	0%	2%
Prefer to Self-Describe: (living with parents/family, live with homeowner, mobile home, do not own land, high rent)	0%	0%	0%	8%

## Formal/Western Education

		County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
Up to High School, but have not graduated	0%	0%	0%	14%
High School Degree or GED	0%	0%	0%	14%
Some College, but have not graduated	0%	28%	0%	19%
Two-Year College Degree	15%	0%	4%	12%
Four-Year College Degree	54%	22%	38%	16%
Master's Degree or Higher	23%	50%	50%	13%
Technical or Trade School	8%	0%	0%	3%
Prefer Not to Say	0%	0%	4%	1%
Prefer to Self-Describe	0%	0%	4%	9%

## Role within County

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
15%	Front-facing/client facing staff	N/A
33%	Supervisor or Manager	
45%	Leadership (Department Head, Division Manager)	
7%	Prefer to self-describe (field representative, administrative staff, program manager)	

## Geographic Areas Served by County Department

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities
16%	A specific area (regional, district, worldwide, issue-based)	N/A
88%	Supervisor or Manager	

## Currently Living in Sonoma County

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities	
95%	Yes	98%	Yes
5%	No	2%	No







## Time Lived in Sonoma County

County Staff (average 23.5 years)		Sonoma County Communities (average 21.25 years)	
24%	Less than 10 years	27%	Less than 10 years
13%	Between 10 and 20 years	32%	Between 10 and 20 years
63%	More than 20 years	40%	More than 20 years

## Community Education, Knowledge, and Skills (Informal Education)

		County Staff	Leadership	Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
Apprenticeships	15%	6%	21%	16%
Community learning/Education	69%	72%	46%	55%
Community organizing	54%	33%	33%	57%

## Community Education, Knowledge, and Skills (Informal Education) cont'd

	County Staff			Sonoma County Communities
	Front facing or prefer to self-describe (field rep, admin, program manager) (n=13)	Supervisor or Manager (n=18)	Leadership (n=24)	
<b>Cultural/Traditional knowledge (Ex: attending or participating in ceremonies, speaking your native language, cultural/tribal social gatherings, traditional plants and medicine, cultural/traditional healing practices, cultural arts)</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>47%</b>
<b>Entrepreneurial skills</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Faith-based learning/Education</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Lived experience</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Mentor/Mentee</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Storytelling/Oral history</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Prefer to self-describe</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>

## Community Education, Knowledge, and Skills (Informal Education)

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities	
14%	Apprenticeships	16%	Apprenticeships
62%	Community learning/Education	55%	Community learning/Education
38%	Community learning/Education	57%	Community learning/Education
29%	Cultural/Traditional knowledge (Ex: attending or participating in ceremonies, speaking your native language, cultural/tribal social gatherings, traditional plants and medicine, cultural/traditional healing practices, cultural arts)	47%	Cultural/Traditional knowledge (Ex: attending or participating in ceremonies, speaking your native language, cultural/tribal social gatherings, traditional plants and medicine, cultural/traditional healing practices, cultural arts)
24%	Entrepreneurial skills	16%	Entrepreneurial skills
16%	Faith-based learning/Education	25%	Faith-based learning/Education
52%	Lived experience	51%	Lived experience
43%	Mentor/Mentee	22%	Mentor/Mentee
28%	Storytelling/Oral history	21%	Storytelling/Oral history
7%	Prefer not to say	1%	Prefer not to say
3%	Prefer to self-describe (college, training members of the public)	3%	Prefer to self-describe (animal welfare, governance and funding measures)

## Experience of Participation in County programs

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities	
28%	Very positive	27%	Very positive
10%	Somewhat positive	20%	Somewhat positive
17%	Neutral	27%	Neutral
5%	Somewhat negative	8%	Somewhat negative
0%	Very negative	2%	Very negative
38%	Not applicable; have never participated in County programs	18%	Not applicable; have never participated in County programs
2%	Prefer not to say	0%	Prefer not to say

## Gender Identity

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities	
60%	Female	77%	Female
38%	Male	20%	Male
3%	Non-binary	0%	Non-binary
2%	Transgender	0%	Transgender
2%	Prefer not to say	1%	Prefer not to say
2%	Prefer to self-describe (genderqueer)	2%	Prefer to self-describe (neutrois)

## Sexual Orientation

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities	
7%	Bisexual	3%	Bisexual
7%	Gay or Lesbian	7%	Gay or Lesbian
79%	Heterosexual	80%	Heterosexual
3%	Queer	5%	Queer
2%	Unsure/Questioning	0%	Unsure/Questioning
3%	Prefer not to say	5%	Prefer not to say
0%	Prefer to self-describe	4%	Prefer to self-describe (did not provide description)

## Additional Identity Groups

County Staff		Sonoma County Communities	
4%	Current or former participation in a 12-step recovery program	9%	Current or former participation in a 12-step recovery program
5%	Disabled, differently-abled, and/or neurodiverse communities	2%	Disabled, differently-abled, and/or neurodiverse communities
14%	Immigrant and/or undocumented communities	65%	Immigrant and/or undocumented communities
2%	Impacted by the foster care and/or child protective systems	1%	Impacted by the foster care and/or child protective systems
80%	None of the above	29%	None of the above
0%	Prefer to self-describe	2%	Prefer to self-describe an additional identity (Settler, Transgender)

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