



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 5/17/2024

To: Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Office of Equity, Human Resources

Staff Name and Phone Number: Melissa Valle (707)565-8631, Janell Crane (707)565-2885

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Racial Equity Action Plan Presentation

Recommended Action:

- A) Accept a staff report on the Racial Equity Action Plan (Action Plan)
- B) Direct staff to implement the following County strategies in the Action Plan:
 - i) Create capacity for equity work and expanding pipelines for hiring and career advancement.
 - ii) Offer support and a structure for accountability for management at all levels to develop an understanding of racial equity principles and practices.
 - iii) Invest in data collection and reporting systems to drive change that is responsive to staff experiences.

Executive Summary:

On February 1, 2022, the Board of Supervisors allocated Strategic Plan funds to the Office of Equity (OOE) to continue building and supporting the County's Equity Core Team, through the creation of the Core Team Steering Committee (SC), made up of equity leaders across several County departments to create a Racial Equity Action Plan. On June 13, 2022, the Board approved a Professional Services Agreement with Equity First Consulting to support the Office of Equity with this work, and on December 6, 2022, the Office of Equity presented for the Board's approval its Mission, Vision, and Values and included an update on the specific strategy for achieving the Board's Strategic Plan goals and of the Racial Equity Action Plan (Action Plan).

Following the Board's approvals, the Steering Committee began the development of the Action Plan in January 2023. In the last year, the Committee work included a research phase followed by an employee engagement phase to refine the strategies put forward on this Action Plan.

The Action Plan sets forth a roadmap for achieving the goals and objectives in the Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Strategic Plan pillar, and, in the process, provides solutions for key County operational challenges such as hiring and staff retention. The outcome of this year-long strategic endeavor includes three main strategies that, if implemented intentionally, have the potential of helping achieve the following goal to become true: all County staff, especially staff of color, feel a sense of belonging and are supported to achieve their career goals within the County organization.

The recommended strategies include:

- Creating capacity for equity work and expanding pipelines for hiring and career advancement.

- Offering support and a structure for accountability for management at all levels to develop an understanding of racial equity principles and practices.
- Investing in data collection and reporting systems to drive change that is responsive to staff experiences.

Discussion:

In the summer of 2020, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors created the Office of Equity, taking a meaningful step to recognize and celebrate our local government’s powerful role in unseating racial inequity in our communities and within our internal systems. This decision was grounded in the work that led to the creation of the ‘County’s 5-year Strategic Plan Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Pillar <<https://socostrategicplan.org/racial-equity-and-social-justice/>>, adopted in 2021, through which the Board of Supervisors further recognized the County’s responsibility to take action against systemic racism. Working towards the achievement of the RESJ pillar goals and objectives, on June 13, 2022, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved a Professional Service Agreement with Equity First Consulting, LLC, for \$218,000, through June 2025 and on December 12, 2023 the Board approved an amendment to increase the current contract total of \$218,000 to a not-to-exceed amount of \$238,000, funded through Strategic Plan-Year 2, which enabled the Office of Equity to receive consulting support to facilitate the development a Countywide Racial Equity Action Plan with the Core Team Steering Committee. The work launched as a result of this investment has driven the creation of the Racial Equity Action Plan presented in this item.

The creation of a Racial Equity Action Plan (Action Plan) sets forth a roadmap for achieving the goals and objectives in the Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Strategic Plan pillar, and, in the process, provides solutions for key County operational challenges such as hiring and staff retention. Starting by taking an internal look at the operational challenges in the County workforce, recognizes that staff are integral members of the community, representing the broad spectrum of experiences and identities of the communities the County serves, and that when we foster employee wellbeing, our clients similarly benefit in their interactions with the County.

The Action Plan puts forward actionable and measurable goals and elevates the work that some County Departments are already implementing while mitigating for challenges encountered along the way. Through the Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) methodology, the Action Plan will ensure that, as an organization, we are able to track what we are doing, how well we are doing it, and who is better-off because of this work. It also supports collaborative partnerships between departments sharing similar racial equity implementation journeys, including the partnership between the Office of Equity and Human Resources in the development of this Plan.

Additionally, on March 12, 2024, the [BOS adopted a resolution <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6563808&GUID=5F2D7991-06BF-4610-8DD9-C34C16BD3AC2&Options=&Search=>](https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6563808&GUID=5F2D7991-06BF-4610-8DD9-C34C16BD3AC2&Options=&Search=>), brought forward by the Department of Health Services, Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis in Sonoma County. The resolution provides that the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors supports “the development, adoption, and implementation, of a countywide Racial Equity Action Plan that acknowledges, confronts, mitigates, and creates accountability for creating solutions for the pervasive damage caused by institutional, systemic, structural, and interpersonal racism within the County of Sonoma.”

Development of the Racial Equity Action Plan

The OOE has taken several critical steps to do this work in collaboration with County employees and Department leadership. In January 2023, the OOE convened a Steering Committee (SC), made up of 13 Core Team members, to create a roadmap to operationalize the strategic guidance of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan pillar.

The Steering Committee conducted research and analyzed data found in County reports, department staff surveys, and other activities, and through the use of the AR-RBA methodology, identified key themes (inequities) emerging across departments. With this information, the SC planned an employee engagement process which would include conducting focus groups with County staff. To recruit participants, they presented at a Department Agency and Head Association (DAHA) meeting and asked department leaders for nominations for equity liaisons within each department, whose first assignment would be to help select participants for the focus groups. In late fall of 2023, the SC held seven focus groups with 60 staff members to seek feedback on their early findings and help fine-tune an early draft of actions.

Focus group participants racially identified in the following ways:

- Hispanic or Latine/x (40.70%),
- White (30.00%), Asian (9.30%),
- Prefer to self-describe (9.30%),
- Native American/Indigenous Peoples/First Peoples (American Indian) or Alaska Native (7.40%),
- Black or African American (7.40%),
- Middle Eastern or North African (3.70%),
- Prefer not to say (3.70%).

Roles in the County represented among focus group participants included:

- Supervisor or Manager (38.20%),
- Front-facing staff, client facing (30.90%),
- Administrative Staff, non-client facing, non-managerial (14.50%),
- Executive Leadership (10.90%),
- Prefer to self-describe (5.50%).

Additionally, the SC held two focus groups (one in Spanish and one in English) with a small group of community-based leaders to gather external community perspectives about the draft of the Racial Equity Action Plan. With this information the SC and OOE further refined our proposed solutions in the Action Plan.

In March 2024, the SC held two reflection sessions with prior focus groups invitees to present the refined Action Plan strategies and seek feedback on what would be needed to set the Action Plan up for success, receiving feedback from a total of 33 participants. The SC also gave presentations on the Action Plan to the Safety Net Collaborative, the Department Head and Agency Association, and offered all Department Heads optional 1:1 meetings to discuss the Plan. Simultaneously, the Office of Equity also sought feedback on the Plan from the County Administrator, the Human Resources Director, and County Counsel. In this process, the OOE and the Human Resources (HR) department established a strong partnership in recognition that the Action Plan proposed solutions to one of the County's key operational challenges around hiring and retention, which is also a focus and priority of the Human Resources department.

In February 2024, Human Resources Director, Janell Crane, presented a Sonoma County Recruitment and Workforce update to the Board of Supervisors. The update included data on turnover and vacancy trends, an overview of recruitment, hiring data, challenges and current and future strategies. Among the strategies presented in the HR report, five overlap with the strategies proposed on the Action Plan, including: continuing to develop the Employee Demographic Dashboard, dedicating resources to removing barriers to employment, increasing the hiring pipeline, increasing candidate and employee engagement, and conducting an Employee Engagement Survey. The Action Plan proposes additional solutions to critical Human Resources and County operational challenges and continues to strengthen the partnership between HR and the OOE.

To continue to support moving this critical work forward the OOE submitted a program change request form (PCR) through the FY 24-25 budget cycle requesting the allocation of a Department Analyst and \$100,000 for consultant support to facilitate the creation and work of a second Core Team cohort for the implementation of this Action Plan.

The Racial Equity Action Plan

The goal of the Racial Equity Action Plan is that: ***All County Staff, especially staff of color, feel a sense of belonging and are supported to achieve their career goals within the County organization.***

Through the AR-RBA methodology, the SC identified key barriers preventing all County staff members from experiencing the conditions proposed in the result statement. Key barriers include: 1) County management is not representative of the racial demographics of Sonoma County, and 2) Staff of color report disproportionate dissatisfaction levels with management practices. Staff surveys show that staff of color disproportionately report considering leaving their departments and/or the County as a whole due to feeling undervalued, experiencing burnout (especially bilingual staff), having fewer opportunities for advancement, and in some cases experiencing racial microaggressions and overt racism. With these findings in mind, the SC developed solutions to address the reasons why these barriers exist, hence creating the Racial Equity Action Plan. The Plan is made up of three Headline Strategies and a total of 10 sub-strategies. A visual of this Plan is included as Attachment B as part of this item.

Headline Strategy 1: County creates capacity for equity work and expands pipelines for hiring and career advancement.

Sub-Strategies

1-A. Department Heads create staff capacity to operationalize equity work by:

- 1) Designating a Core Team 2.0 Liaison, and
- 2) Creating equity positions, or
- 3) Redirecting FTE allocations of existing staff.

1-B. OOE creates and convenes Core Team 2.0 to lead the implementation of the Plan across departments.

1-C. Department Heads support and include in annual operational budgets resources to support professional and leadership development opportunities to reach all staff, especially staff of color.

1-D. Central HR conducts an assessment of County job descriptions and hiring practices, and engages in a codesign process to remove barriers and elevate the value of lived experience.

Headline Strategy 2: County offers support and creates accountability for management at all levels to develop an understanding of racial equity principles and practices.

Sub-Strategies

2-A. All managers actively participate in learning and training spaces about racial equity principles and practices.

2-B. Department Heads, supervisors, and managers are evaluated on their competencies on racial equity principles and practices.

Headline Strategy 3: County invests in data collection and reporting systems to drive change that is responsive to staff experiences.

Sub-Strategies

3-A. Central HR publishes disaggregated data on recruitment, hiring, promotions, and turnover rates of employees.

3-B. Central HR conducts a standard employee survey that consistently collects data on staff experiences, in particular around belonging and career advancement.

3-C. All Managers learn how to apply Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) methodology to address racial inequities from survey data.

3-D. County institutionalizes spaces for healing, belonging, and connection.

Accountability Measures

A Racial Equity Action Plan is only as effective as the accountability mechanisms and institutional commitments that support its implementation. Funding, evaluation, reflection, and the dedication to long-term refinement and implementation are all key to success. The Office of Equity cannot take on this charge alone. It is imperative that there is County-wide support and that department leaders take ownership over the assigned pieces of this Action Plan in order to effectively implement these transformative practices.

This Action Plan includes the following accountability mechanisms to hold ourselves accountable to this work and to the people most impacted by it:

- **Data collection and Analysis:** Through the use of AR-RBA, the Action Plan attaches performance measures to strategies and action steps to track progress in the short and longer term.
- **Transparency and Public Reporting:** In alignment with the County Strategic Plan, this Action Plan sets processes in place to establish regular and publicly available reports on racial equity (RESJ Goal 3/Objective 2).
- **Funding prioritization:** The Action Plan identifies three key investment areas, reflected by the proposed strategies, where prioritization of funding and resources will be necessary for successful implementation.
- **Stewardship and Oversight:** The Action Plan identifies parties responsible for the completion of the actions under any given strategy.

Lastly, the Office of Equity carries forward the principle that we must be “soft on people and hard on systems” (Dr. John A. Powell, Othering and Belonging Institute) and, therefore, also recognize that the Racial Equity Action Plan is a living document. This level of flexibility is responsive to the evolving needs of the organization and staff, and to the reality that change initiatives like this one may result in unintended consequences that may need addressing. When a pivot becomes necessary, this Action Plan should continue to center the wisdom of staff members.

Strategic Plan:

This item works in direct support of the Racial Equity and Social Justice pillar Goal 1, Objectives 2, 3, and 4, Pillar Goal 2, Objectives 1 and 2, Pillar Goal 3, Objective 3. The item also supports the Organizational Excellence Pillar Goal 3, Objectives 1, 2 and 3.

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

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 1: Foster a County organizational culture that supports the commitment to achieving racial equity.

Objective: Objective 2: Invest in an ongoing and continually developing racial equity learning program, including understanding the distinction between institutional, structural, interpersonal, and individual racism, for County leadership and staff by end of 2021.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 1: Foster a County organizational culture that supports the commitment to achieving racial equity.

Objective: Objective 3: Conduct a baseline assessment by mid-2022 of racial equity awareness and understanding among County staff and develop a process to assess progress annually.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 1: Foster a County organizational culture that supports the commitment to achieving racial equity.

Objective: Objective 4: Develop a shared understanding of key racial equity concepts across the County and its leadership.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 2: Implement strategies to make the County workforce reflect County demographic across all levels.

Objective: Objective 1: Identify opportunities to enhance recruitment, hiring, employee development, and promotional processes to reflect the value of having the perspectives of people of color represented at all levels in the County workforce.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 2: Implement strategies to make the County workforce reflect County demographic across all levels.

Objective: Objective 2: Implement countywide strategies to recruit, hire, develop, promote and retain

County employees of color, produce an annual report card assessing progress, and update strategies as needed.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice

Goal: Goal 3: Ensure racial equity throughout all County policy decisions and service delivery.

Objective: Objective 2: Establish regular and publicly available reports on racial equity in County policies, programs, and services.

Pillar: Organizational Excellence

Goal: Goal 3: Become an employer of choice with a diverse workforce that reflects our community, and an employer with a positive work culture that builds engaged and developed employees.

Objective: Objective 1: Implement programs and identify opportunities to support employee work-life balance and a positive work environment, including a Telework Policy.

Pillar: Organizational Excellence

Goal: Goal 3: Become an employer of choice with a diverse workforce that reflects our community, and an employer with a positive work culture that builds engaged and developed employees.

Objective: Objective 2: Conduct an employee engagement survey by mid-2022, and based on survey data, develop and implement strategies to incorporate survey outcomes into future operational planning.

Pillar: Organizational Excellence

Goal: Goal 3: Become an employer of choice with a diverse workforce that reflects our community, and an employer with a positive work culture that builds engaged and developed employees.

Objective: Objective 3: Support employee professional growth and retention by investing in high quality training, development, and leadership programs.

Racial Equity:

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

Yes

See attachment.

Prior Board Actions:

- August 18, 2020: Established the Office of Equity.
- March 2, 2021: Approval of Sonoma County Five-Year Strategic Plan resulting in the creation of a Racial Equity and Social Justice Pilar.
- June 8, 2021: Approval of Professional Services agreement with Equity and Results, LLC for \$391,900 for consulting services, over 3 years, for the development of Racial Equity Learning Program and competencies on Anti-racist Results-Based Accountability methodology. Agreement was later amended to increase the current contract total of a not-to-exceed amount of \$431, 275 and extend the term of the agreement to June 30, 2024.

- February 1, 2022: Received a Strategic Plan update, accepted Objective Implementation Plans, and approved Strategic Plan Funding recommendations which included \$240,000 for OOE RESJ goal 1.
- June 13, 2022: Approval of professional services agreement with Equity First Consulting, LLC, for \$218,000 for a 3-year term ending on June 30, 2025 to provide facilitation and strategic planning support for Office of Equity, Core Team and Steering Committee in the creation of a Racial Equity Action Plan.
- December 6, 2022: Approval of Office of Equity Vision Mission, and Values and update on the Racial Equity Learning Program, Close of Phase 1 and Phase 2 Core Team Steering Committee work.
- February 6, 2024: Received presentation from Human Resources regarding the status of recruitment efforts within the county.
- March 12, 2024: Adopted a Resolution Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis in Sonoma County which included a commitment to support the development, adoption, and implementation, of a countywide Racial Equity Action Plan that acknowledges, confronts, mitigates, and creates accountability for creating solutions for the pervasive damage caused by institutional, systemic, structural, and interpersonal racism within the County of Sonoma.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

N/A

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment A: Draft Racial Equity Action Plan
Attachment B: Racial Equity Action Plan Framework
Attachment C: Racial Equity Analysis
Attachment D: Draft Racial Equity Action Plan_Spanish
Attachment E: Racial Equity Action Plan Framework_Spanish
Attachment F: Racial Equity Analysis_Spanish
Attachment G: Summary Report_Spanish
Attachment H: PowerPoint_Spanish
PowerPoint

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

None.