



Legislation Text

File #: 2020-0620, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Supervisors of the County of Sonoma, Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Water Agency, Board of Commissioners of the Community Development Commission, and Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Department or Agency Name(s): County Administrator's Office and Human Resources

Staff Name and Phone Number: Christel Querijero and Christina Cramer

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Office of Equity

Recommended Action:

- A) Review staff recommendations to establish an Office of Equity;
- B) Direct staff to return to the Board as decided to establish Office, positions and funding;
- C) Approve staff recommendation to appoint an Interim Equity Officer position.

Executive Summary:

This report discusses the Board's strategic priority of Racial Equity and Social Justice and provides recommendations on establishing an Office of Equity including program and support staff. Staff also recommends a process to appoint a current employee who can be an interim leader on urgent equity issues such as COVID-19's impacts to the Latinx community.

Discussion:

Sonoma County's collective well-being and prosperity are impacted by significant racial inequities. Government has long played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequity through policy, programs, and legislation regarding housing, social services, health services, justice, law enforcement, and even recreation. Structures and systems that cause inequities can go unnoticed and repeat patterns of exclusion without purposeful efforts to uncover these issues and make change. The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors as local policymakers can ensure change happens.

The Board and County leadership initiated strategic efforts to address racial inequities with a number of important actions. Health Action produced the 2014 Portrait of Sonoma report that confirmed significant disparities in basic health, education, and earning outcomes within small geographical areas where communities of color live, work and go to school. Additionally, the County developed Upstream Investments, a policy initiative to advance evidence-informed, prevention-focused practices across the County to improve education, health and economic wellness for all Sonoma County residents.

Recent natural disasters and the current pandemic have exposed both the disparate and disproportionate impacts to underprivileged communities of color, and the challenges these communities face accessing resources and assistance to ensure equitable recovery. Since 2018, the County has taken critical steps to

acknowledge and begin to address the need to dismantle the structures and systems that create and maintain these inequities.

Starting in 2018, staff from several departments initiated efforts to learn more about social and racial issues and to operationalize a social and racial equity lens to positively impact County policies, programs, and services. The County joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. Employees from Human Resources, Health Services, Human Services, Probation, Sheriff's Office, Regional Parks, Permit Sonoma, Community Development Commission, and Sonoma Water, attended a year-long training program to learn about policy and institutional strategies including racial equity frameworks and tools, and ways to build organizational capacity and community partnerships.

From the GARE learning experience, Human Resources began focusing efforts to increase workforce diversity and developed trainings on unconscious bias and cultural competency. Additionally, GARE participants from twelve County departments recognized the need to institutionalize and center the County's work to support individual, organizational, and systemic change and created the Sonoma County Racial Equity Alliance and Leadership (SoCoREAL) group. Concurrently and separately, County Latinx employees who were activated to address community needs during multiple disasters came together to form the Sonoma County Latinx Employee Resource Network (SoCoLERN) to elevate the skillset and expertise of bilingual and bicultural Latinx employees, and to identify and support leadership opportunities.

In January 2020, during the Board's strategic planning session, your Board included a Racial Equity and Social Justice pillar to mark the Board's commitment to address these issues. Current events and the alarming data that shows that the County's Latinx and indigenous language-speaking communities are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 underscore the urgency to address inequities in Sonoma County. In the aftermath of the recent tragic violence against BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), the nationwide movement to address social and racial inequities continues to gain momentum and has highlighted the need for the County to take decisive action now.

This report recommends that the Board establish an Office of Equity with immediate efforts to focus on addressing the issues facing the COVID-19 positive and at-risk Latinx and indigenous communities, and longer term options for the Board's consideration. The recommendation reflects a recognition that SoCoREAL, SoCoLERN and Human Resources efforts, coupled with significant community need, are best addressed in a holistic and coordinated manner. The creation of an Office of Equity would provide a home and a place for growth to support County staff and leadership.

Office of Equity Description

The Office of Equity would serve as the backbone entity to propel the County's equity efforts forward and the central hub to connect County departments and the County's overall efforts to evaluate its policies, programs, and services. This centralized approach would enable the County to effectively identify issues, improvements, and ways to operationalize equity into both strategic priorities and day-to-day operations.

Office of Equity responsibilities would include:

- Working cross-departmentally to identify policies and practices which may result in inequity and disparities.

- Making policy recommendations aimed at closing gaps related to disparities
- Building an infrastructure to ensure policy decisions are evaluated through a racial equity lens to create equitable access to County programs and services
- Providing leadership and vision to ensure the development and management of innovative and effective strategies to achieve racial equity for Sonoma County residents.
- Implementing institutional change management principles and practices around racial equity.

Office of Equity Organizational Structure Recommendation

County staff, including representatives from SoCo REAL, SoCo LERN, Human Resources, and the County Administrator's Office, have considered different government organizational structures and staffing options to recommend how best to institutionalize and elevate equity work in the County structure. The Board's Equity Office Ad Hoc Committee, comprised of Chair Gorin and Supervisor Gore, support staff's recommendations to:

- Establish an Office of Equity as a new, independent department with dedicated staff positions, and
- Implement a shared services model for administrative management.

New and Independent Office of Equity

The work of the Office of Equity is a critical strategic priority and will continue to be given the nature and time needed to effect systematic and institutional change. The influence and importance of this work warrant a dedicated department and a department head level position appointed by the Board. An independent Office of Equity would ensure that County equity work and initiatives maintain high visibility and priority.

Office of Equity Positions

The Office would be led by a County Equity Officer who would carry out the mission of the Office. The Equity Officer would be a department head, appointed by and reporting to the Board of Supervisors. With the Equity Officer reporting directly to the Board, the Board could assist and support the Equity Officer with holding all County departments and agencies accountable to County racial equity goals. In addition to the Equity Officer, staff recommends two additional positions: one (1) program support position and one (1) administrative support position.

Staff's recommendation is grounded in a high-level review of other county models that have independent Offices of Equity including King County (Seattle), San Francisco, and Multnomah County (Portland). Besides these three models, staff also reviewed Marin County's structure. The Marin Equity Officer is located in the County Administrator's Office and reports to the County Administrator but also has strong "dotted line" reporting relationship to the Director of the Health and Human Services Department. Santa Clara County does not have an Equity Officer, but a Deputy County Executive oversees a Division of Equity and Social Justice which includes an Office of Immigrant Relations that has recently expanded the Office's scope to include equity work.

Shared Administrative Management Services

The Equity Officer's job duties must be supported with sufficient resources. Small departments have the same administrative management responsibilities of a larger department including preparing annual budgets,

overseeing personnel matters and recruitments, ensuring department safety plans are up to date, and managing contracts and invoices. These administrative functions can subsume the attention of department heads and pull them away from their primary mission.

For these reasons, staff recommends a shared services model for administrative management functions. Under this model, an administrative manager position would be requested in the Board of Supervisors/County Administrator's Office budget to support administrative and general operations functions for three departments: Board of Supervisors/County Administrator's Office, Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach (IOLERO); and Office of Equity. The shared model would increase capacity for all three departments, and importantly, ensure that executive and program staff can focus more on mission-critical priorities, and less on administrative responsibilities. The Office of Equity could be co-located with another department, but staff would explore opportunities to leverage existing County space that meets operational needs.

Staff also considered the option of moving the Human Rights Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women under the new Office of Equity. The move could elevate the work of the Commissions, which aligns well with addressing inequities in the County as the Commissions have been actively engaging the community to promote better human relations and diversity and to address discrimination and prejudice. Ultimately, staff determined that it may be premature to move the two commissions over to the new Equity Office. This option could be considered over the course of the next 12 months after the permanent Equity Officer is appointed and has time to assess the opportunities.

Other Organizational Structure Options

Staff explored the option of having the Office of Equity housed within the County Administrator's Office, similar to the Office of Recovery and Resiliency. The Equity Officer would be appointed by the Board and managed by the County Administrator. Staff does not recommend this option, as it does not allow for the independence and nimbleness that is required to maximize success.

Interim Equity Needs

Given the need to address COVID-19 pandemic impacts on the Latinx community in particular, and the urgency and importance of beginning work to achieve racial equity for all Sonoma County residents, staff recommend the following:

- Board appoints an existing County employee as Interim Equity Officer until a permanent position is established;
- Interim Equity Officer should have experience planning and developing programs, managing program operations, and working on equity issues in the County;
- The appointed Interim Equity Officer is temporarily assigned to work on equity issues;
- County Administrator sends email to County staff announcing the opportunity;
- Interested County employees provide a cover letter and resume to the County Administrator to express interest in the position;

- County Administrator provides a list of candidates for the Board to consider and appoint as soon as at the July 14, 2020 Board meeting; and
- The Interim Equity Officer begins interim assignment by the end of July 2020.

Staff also recommends that in the short-term, the Interim Equity Officer prioritize the following activities:

- Providing input on strategies for COVID-19 response and recovery with an equity lens;
- Collaborating with and elevating the work of County COVID-19 equity-focused work groups (Department of Health Services Latinx work group, the Economic Development Board Reopening work group, Economic Development Board/Office of Recovery and Resiliency Economic Recovery work groups, and the weekly Latinx Community Recovery Liaison calls);
- Developing an equity-driven communications and community engagement strategy for COVID-19 impacts; and
- Recommending equity-based approaches to Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding application and utilization.

Office of Equity Proposed Budget

On June 9, 2020, the Board set aside \$500,000 from contingency funds to support establishing a County program focused on equity work. The table below shows estimated program, support, and services and supply costs for staff and the Equity Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations to establish an Office of Equity. Any additional costs would also come out of contingency funds for FY 2020-2021.

	FY 20-21 Prorated Cost	FY 20-21 Annualized	FY 21-22 Projected	FY 22-23 Projected
Equity Officer	10/6/20 start \$206,462	\$279,833	\$288,228	\$296,874
Program Support Manager	11/3/20 start \$106,454	\$162,980	\$167,870	\$172,906
Administrative Aide	11/3/20 start \$87,316	\$133,331	\$137,331	\$141,451
20% of Admin Manager	10/6/20 start \$30,701	\$41,971	\$43,230	\$44,527
Sub-Total	\$430,933	\$618,115	\$636,659	\$655,758
Leased Office Space	9 mos + rel \$64,663	\$37,950	\$37,950	\$37,950
Services & Supplies	\$75,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Sub-Total	\$139,663	\$137,950	\$137,950	\$137,950
TOTAL	\$570,596	\$756,065	\$774,609	\$793,708

Cost estimates assume the following:

- Position costs include salary and benefits. It is anticipated that the Equity Officer annual salary would be in the range of \$136,100 to \$165,000.
- FY 2020-2021 prorated costs reflect potential start dates;

- Future year salary and benefit costs assume a 3% increase over the FY 2020-2021 annualized cost each year;
- The cost of the proposed Administrative Manager position in the CAO/BOS would be shared by the Office of Equity (20%), IOLERO (20%), and the CAO/BOS (60%); and
- The Administrative Manager position will be included in the CAO/BOS FY 2020-2021 recommended budget for consideration during budget hearings in September. The total cost of the Administrative Manager position including benefits is \$209,850.

If appointed, the internal Interim Equity Officer's current position will likely be backfilled, so no salary savings are assumed even though the permanent position is not expected to be filled until early October. The new positions will also take several months to fill. Some administrative support may be needed, though existing staff, either full-time or extra help, may be redirected to support the Interim Equity Officer.

Alternative Transition Option

The staffing model recommended exceeds the \$500,000 the Board set aside for a County equity program. The estimated costs reflect what staff believe would be the appropriate type and level of resources needed for a new Office of Equity to be successful and to begin supporting the Board's priority to achieve racial equity in County government and the community. Creating sufficient capacity for this work is critical given the urgency to mitigate COVID-19 impacts in the Latinx community. Given the significant budget challenges the County is facing due to COVID-19 fiscal impacts, the CAO recognizes the need to weigh additional funding requests among the other Board priorities. While not recommended by staff, a transition approach more in line with the amount of funds set aside could be to add only the Equity Officer and program support positions at this time. The Equity Officer would still be appointed by the Board, but both positions would work out of the CAO until funding could be identified to allow for an independent Office of Equity.

The estimated costs of this model are shown below.

	FY 20-21 Prorated Cost	FY 20-21 Annualized	FY 21-22 Projected	FY 22-23 Projected
Equity Officer	10/6/20 staff \$206,462	\$279,833	\$288,228	\$296,874
Program Support Manager	11/3/20 staff \$106,454	\$162,980	\$167,870	\$172,906
Sub-Total	\$312,916	\$442,813	\$456,098	\$469,780
Other Services & Supplies	\$50,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000
Sub-Total	\$50,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000
TOTAL	\$362,916	\$512,813	\$526,098	\$539,780

The transition approach assumes the following:

- One Board-appointed Equity Officer and one program support manager;
- Administrative support provided by existing CAO administrative staff person;

- Equity Officer is responsible for administrative management activities;
- FY 2020-2021 prorated costs reflect potential start dates; and
- Future year salary and benefit costs assume a 3% increase over the FY 2020-2021 annualized cost each year.

Establishing the Office of Equity is a milestone for the cross-departmental County staff who have passionately and intentionally pursued racial equity discussion and issues over many years. These employees, including staff from Human Resources, Health Services, Human Services, Regional Parks, Sonoma Water, and County Counsel, with representation from GARE cohorts, SoCo REAL and SoCo LERN groups, will continue to be engaged and work in alignment towards the Board's racial equity priorities. Their support for the Office of Equity and ongoing commitment to achieve racial equity will continue to provide the momentum and capacity to advance this work.

Next Steps

If directed by the Board, staff will return to the Board at the end of July or early August to establish the new job classification for the Equity Officer, outline a recruitment plan, prepare a resolution establishing the Office, provide more specificity on program support positions and Office location, and share a more detailed budget for program needs.

Prior Board Actions:

On June 9, 2020, the Board set aside \$500,000 from contingency funds to support establishing a County program focused on equity work.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 19-20 Adopted	FY20-21 Projected	FY 21-22 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

Click or tap here to enter text.

Attachments:

None

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board: