



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 2022-0893, **Version:** 1

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**To:** Board of Supervisors, County of Sonoma

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Office of Equity and County Administrator's Office

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Alegría De La Cruz, 565-8709, Sheryl Bratton, 565-3778

**Vote Requirement:** 4/5th

**Supervisory District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Professional Services Agreements for the Development of a Community Engagement Plan and a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy.

**Recommended Action:**

- A) Delegate authority to the Director of the Office of Equity to execute a Professional Services Agreement with Equity First Consulting, LLC for community engagement consulting services for a not-to-exceed amount of \$450,000, payable on a per-task lump sum basis, for a 18-month term ending on March 30, 2024.
- B) Delegate authority to the Director of the Office of Equity to execute a Professional Services Agreement with Nimdzi Insights LLC for language access consulting services for a not-to-exceed amount of \$185,850, payable on a per-task lump sum basis, for a 14-month term ending on ending on November 30, 2023.

(4/5<sup>th</sup> Vote Required)

**Executive Summary:**

On December 14, 2021 the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved the distribution of \$96 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds on a set of departmental proposals, including \$1.16 million for investments in cultural responsiveness for the County of Sonoma. The investments in cultural responsiveness included three projects that were identified as critically important to the County's better understanding and service to the different culturally and linguistically diverse communities living in Sonoma County. Of the total \$1.16 million invested in Cultural Responsiveness, the Office of Equity received \$710,000 to engage two consultants in the development of a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy and a Community Engagement Plan. (The remaining \$450,000 went to the Clerk-Recorder-Assessor-Registrar of Voters for the creation of a Demographic GIS Map.)

The Sonoma County Office of Equity (OOE), in collaboration with the County Administrator's Office, led the development of the two separate Plans, which are of significant interest according to the SB 160 Community Advisory Group Recommendations as part of the Sonoma County Emergency Operations Plan to communities that have experienced underservice as a result of the lack of cultural responsiveness by government agencies and the community as a whole.

With thoughtful consideration for these community members' past and present experiences as documented in

the [Portrait of Sonoma <https://upstreaminvestments.org/impact-make-a-change/portrait-of-sonoma-county>](https://upstreaminvestments.org/impact-make-a-change/portrait-of-sonoma-county) the OOE released two Requests for Proposals (RFP), one for a Language Access Plan and Policy Development consultant and another for a Community Engagement consultant. The OOE invited community members to participate in two separate review committees that consisted of majority bilingual, bicultural, community leaders who have experienced government underservice to inform the selection of consultants and effectively create a Language Access Plan and a Community Engagement Plan and to respond to the needs of our unique local context.

### ***Language Access Plan***

The County has both legal and operational obligations to effectively communicate with and deliver services to residents who are monolingual, Indigenous language speakers, people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf and hard of hearing, and other Linguistically Diverse (LD) individuals who live or work in Sonoma County. This is most commonly referred to as language access. However, the review committee members expressed a strong desire to ensure that we were reaching beyond access to language justice to honor the fundamental right for every person to speak, understand, and be understood in the language in which they prefer and which they feel more articulate and powerful. [Language Justice <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young\\_lawyers/projects/disaster-legal-services/language-justice-during-covid-19/>](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/projects/disaster-legal-services/language-justice-during-covid-19/) rejects the notion of one dominant language and culture, it recognizes that language can be a tool of oppression, as well as an important part of exercising autonomy and of advancing racial and social justice. While the Office of Equity recognizes the importance of Language Justice, the consultant will first tackle language access and language justice may be a future phase. The consultant will evaluate the County's existing language access provision currently in certain departments as required for receipt of federal funds, assess County departmental needs, engage local communities, and develop recommendations to create the infrastructure and capacity needed to successfully implement a County-wide Language Access Plan and recommended Policy for the Board of Supervisors' consideration.

### ***Community Engagement Plan***

Separately, the Community Engagement Consultant will support the creation of a Community Engagement Plan to achieve equitable participation and access to County government services and resources for underserved communities of color and other communities that have traditionally experienced marginalization from government processes and services. The Consultant will evaluate the County's existing community engagement vehicles and practices, assess County departmental needs, engage community members, and facilitate the development and creation of a community-driven Engagement Plan for the Board of Supervisors' consideration.

Both Plans are essential to ensuring the County of Sonoma effectively reaches and responds to the needs of communities that have historically experienced marginalization from government processes and services, with particular regard to Black, indigenous and other communities of color, and those who speak languages other than English.

The recent crises that residents of Sonoma County have faced, such as devastating fires, record-breaking flooding, and, currently, the COVID-19 pandemic, have deepened the already existing inequities and highlighted the imperative and potentially lifesaving responsibility to effectively communicate, reach, and

engage residents with thoughtful regard to the languages they speak and of their cultural identities. Through the creation of both a Community Engagement Plan and a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy, the OOE will have an actionable roadmap to continue the development of four Strategic Plan Objectives out of the 12 objectives that are part of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Pillar <<https://socostrategicplan.org/racial-equity-and-social-justice/>>.

## **Discussion:**

### **Background**

In March 2021, The Board of Supervisors approved a 5-year Strategic Plan, which includes a Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) pillar <<https://socostrategicplan.org/racial-equity-and-social-justice/>>. The Office of Equity is currently the lead department in the implementation of the pillar's specific goals and objectives, which reflect the Board of Supervisors' recognition of the need to institutionalize equity-centered principles in the County's processes and service delivery to address racial inequities impacting people of color both in our organization and in the community.

Additionally, on December 14, 2021, the Board approved the distribution of ARPA funding to department proposals, including \$1.16 million for County Investments in Cultural Responsiveness including \$450,000 for the Enterprise Level Consolidated Demographic GIS Map for the Clerk-Recorder-Assessor and \$710,000 to the Office of Equity for the creation and implementation of a County Community Engagement Plan and Language Access Plan and recommended Policy. The OOE will work in collaboration with the County Administrator's Office to develop the Plans.

### The Opportunity

The Office of Equity values collective impact and seeks integrated approaches between community and local government working toward a common goal. The collective impact approach is premised on the belief that no single policy, government department, organization, or program can tackle or solve alone the increasingly complex social problems we face as a society. The approach calls for multiple organizations or entities from different sectors to work together in favor of a common agenda, shared goals, and alignment of effort. Examples include strengthening identification of resources within our County, leveraging the strengths and skills of County staff and community members, and deepening our data collection and analysis approaches with community members impacted by our policy decisions. In times of critical need, the County has a responsibility to identify effective and sustainable systems-level solutions.

As part of this process, the OOE set out to conduct a solicitation process for two different consultants to support this work and expand the capacity of the OOE to create a plan and implement it. Before launching the Requests for Proposals (RFP), the OOE's Community Engagement Analyst conducted research on jurisdictions that have successfully implemented Community Engagement Plans and Language Access Plans including King County, Washington, Napa County, and San Francisco City and County. The OOE also spoke with the staff leads of each plan, including Community Engagement & Co-Creation Program Managers, to learn about best practices including hiring a consultant to seek internal and external input, and to develop the plans which were also reflected in our Request for Proposals and scoring criteria.

The OOE also invited community members to participate in two separate review committees that consisted of majority bilingual, and bicultural, community members representing different identities and/or communities

including Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Native American community leaders who have experienced government underservice. These community members, in total 12, helped select proposals for creation of a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy and a Community Engagement Plan that would effectively respond to the needs of local communities with particular regard to their identities and preferred languages. All materials related to the Language Access Plan and recommended Policy were translated to Spanish including the LAPlan and recommended Policy Request for Proposals, all proposals received, and Scoring Criteria. Participants also had access to interpretation services in the selection process for the consultants.

The consultant selection process recognized that to create a culturally responsive Community Engagement Plan and a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy, the engagement of local communities in the process needs also to be culturally sensitive and have a deep regard for the different identity markers of Sonoma County residents. As a requirement of cultural responsiveness, the consultants were to demonstrate a commitment to recognize power and privilege as undeniable factors in relationships, particularly in government settings, and to acknowledge the expertise of each individual or community group as leader and educator on the content and nature of their culture/experience. Additionally, consultants were to demonstrate an understanding of the intersectionality of social categorizations such as gender, race, socio-economic status, immigration status, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, family structural identities, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability, mental illness, and physical illness in creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage; and to have a commitment to understanding the local community, naming biases, suspending judgment, and redefining assumptions and cultural norms through a practice of cultural humility.

Two Requests for Proposals were shared on the County's Supplier Portal and a link to the Supplier Portal was shared and advertised by our partner's newsletters as well as the Office of Equity's newsletter. The Office of Equity received 5 proposals for the Community Engagement Plan from the following firms: Civic Edge Consulting, Equity First Consulting, Moore Iacofano Goltsman Inc, Zilo International Group, and Resource Development Associates. After spending approximately 6 hours evaluating 5 proposals with a group of 4 reviewers, made up of 1 County staff and 3 community members, the review committee for the Community Engagement Consultant determined that the most qualified proposal was the one presented by [Equity First Consulting, LLC <https://www.equityfirstconsulting.com/about>](https://www.equityfirstconsulting.com/about). The Office of Equity also received 2 separate proposals from Sway B Access LLC and Nimdzi Insights for the Language Access Plan. Similarly, after spending nearly 6 hours evaluating proposals for a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy consultant, a separate review committee made up of 8 individuals made up of 1 County staff and 7 community members, determined the most qualified proposal was the one presented by [Nimdzi Insights, LLC <https://languageco.com/listing/nimdzi-insights-llc/>](https://languageco.com/listing/nimdzi-insights-llc/).

While the Board of Supervisors initially allocated \$310,000 to the Language Access bucket and \$400,000 to the Community Engagement efforts, the OOE requests to distribute the allocation across the community engagement and language access buckets as needed. Currently, \$635,850 is being requested for approved allocation and the remaining funds will be held by the Office of Equity in the case that unforeseen costs arise during the implementation of the plans.

### **Language Access and recommended Policy Consultant**

The Office of Equity is seeking delegated authority for the Director of the Office to execute a Professional

Services Agreement with Nimdzi Insights, LLC for consulting services for a not-to-exceed amount of \$185,850 for a 14-month term, ending on November 30, 2023.

As a community struck by multiple natural and man-made disasters, we have learned that effective communication between local government agencies and residents, with thoughtful regard to the languages they speak, is absolutely critical to ensuring public safety and saving lives. Therefore, we must ensure that every community member with whom County staff cannot communicate directly in their primary language has access to accurate, timely and effective translation of documents and interpretation of relevant information in a way that is also responsive to their cultural identities. To address this, the Language Access Plan and recommended Policy consultant will conduct a 3-phase process to develop a culturally responsive County-Wide Language Access Plan and recommended Policy.

The first phase of this process examines the makeup of the Sonoma County community and the responsibilities of the County as a local government institution, looks at other local jurisdictions' services, and then looks inward. The consultant will create a demographic analysis of the linguistically diverse communities in Sonoma County and will look at Federal requirements and regulations around language access services for local jurisdictions to assess our responsibilities and liabilities. The Consultant will assess the Language Access Services provided by other local jurisdictions and evaluate their applicability to the County of Sonoma. Additionally, the consultant will assess the County's existing capabilities, practices, resources, service gaps, opportunities, and costs through a series of focus groups with County staff.

During the second phase, the consultant will conduct focus groups with LD and deaf and hard of hearing community members and organizations serving these communities to validate the data with lived experience, and further assess the County's language service gaps and limitations from the perspective of the communities experiencing underservice. The consultant will use this knowledge to develop a set of recommendations to improve our existing capabilities and meet the needs for improvement identified by the local LD communities.

The last phase is the development of a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy grounded in the data gathered through internal and external engagements. The development of the plan will be an iterative process that involves feedback and input from County staff, leadership, and community through a series of workshops. The plan and proposed policy options will include recommendations for oversight, accountability, infrastructure, staffing, budget, and other resources needed to ensure a successful implementation of what is outlined in the plan.

### **Community Engagement Consultant**

Additionally, the Office of Equity is requesting that authority be delegated to the Director of the Office to execute a Professional Services Agreement with Equity First Consulting, LLC for consulting services for a not-to-exceed amount of \$450,000 for a 18-month term ending in March 2024.

While the County recently expanded its Communications Office to support County departments, the CAO, the Board of Supervisors and the County in communicating with the public and the media, the community engagement function remains a County-wide challenge. Currently, many departments do not have the experience, capacity, or funding, to conduct culturally sensitive and responsive community engagement that

results in equitable public participation in government processes and services. The recent disasters that residents of Sonoma County have faced including wildfires, floods, and the current pandemic, have deepened the already existing inequities, and highlight the imperative need to center communities, particularly those historically marginalized by governments, and their experiences in the way in which we deliver services and create 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 processes.

Different from traditional one-way communications distributed through mainstream systems and methods, such as press releases and social media, a County-wide Community Engagement Plan will provide guidance and best practices for facilitating culturally responsive spaces for connection between and among County departments and the wisdom and lived experiences of community members, community-based organizational partners, and other institutions and sectors with whom we partner to dismantle racial inequities in Sonoma County.

The Community Engagement Consultant will support the creation of a Community Engagement Plan for Board of Supervisors' consideration to achieve equitable participation and access to County government services and resources for underserved communities of color and other communities that have traditionally experienced marginalization from government processes and services. The Consultant will do this through a three-phase process grounded in a culturally responsive approach that captures the expertise and responds to the lived experiences of the different communities for which Sonoma County is home.

The Community Engagement consultant will start by assessing the County's existing Community Engagement plans, processes, and capabilities through a series of focus groups with staff. The second phase will involve a series of focus groups and interviews with external key stakeholders and partner organizations servicing communities of focus to support further refinement of the County's capabilities and gaps in service delivery for communities of color and others marginalized from government systems. The consultant recognizes the importance of understanding the cultural nuances when communicating with local Black, Indigenous, and other Communities of Color and will work with and compensate leaders of those communities to seek the feedback needed to understand the County's gaps in services while utilizing a trauma-informed approach and the familiarity of having a member of one's own community reach out to the communities of focus. The final phase of the project will include presenting the plan to the different internal stakeholders and members of the communities of focus to seek further feedback and finalize a Community Engagement Plan that includes a set of standard community engagement operating guidelines or "best practices," and resources that are culturally responsive and can be used by all County Departments to close gaps in services, with corresponding fiscal impacts for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

Lastly, through the creation of both the Language Access Plan and the Community Engagement plan, the Office of Equity will have an actionable roadmap to launch the development and implementation of three Strategic Plan Objectives (Goal 4/Objectives 1, 3, and 4) out of the 12 objectives that are part of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Pillar).

### **Strategic Plan:**

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

and objectives.

**Pillar:** Racial Equity and Social Justice

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

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

**Pillar:** Racial Equity and Social Justice

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

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

**Pillar:** Racial Equity and Social Justice

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

**Objective:** Objective 4: Develop and establish a language access policy for the County of Sonoma by end of 2021.

**Prior Board Actions:**

- July 27, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act Funding Plan
- September 14, 2021: Approval to add a 1.0 FTE Bilingual Community Engagement Analyst through December 31, 2024, to support American Rescue Plan Act Funding Plan
- December 14, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Update - Response, Implementation, and Community Funding Approach

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

Expenditures	FY 22-23 Adopted	FY 23-24 Projected	FY 24-25 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested	\$710,000		
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$710,000</b>		
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal	\$710,000		
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$710,000</b>		

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

During the December 14, 2022, Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board allocated \$710,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act Funding Plan for Language Access and Community Engagement from American Rescue Plan Act funds as part of County Investments in Cultural Responsiveness. Appropriations for the contracts will be added to the Office of Equity's Budget during the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Consolidated Budget Adjustments.

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

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

NA

**Attachments:**

Professional Services Agreements  
PowerPoint Presentation

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

None