Legislation Text

File #: 2024-0638, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Supervisors and the Board of Directors for the Community Development Commission, the Agricultural & Open Space District, and Sonoma Water Agency
Department or Agency Name(s): Office of Equity
Staff Name and Phone Number: Melissa Valle, Interim Director - (707) 565-8980
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:
County's Boards and Commissions Plan and Community Engagement Toolkit

Recommended Action:

A) Adopt the Sonoma County Boards and Commissions Plan for all County Departments and Board-controlled Agencies and direct staff to implement as resources become available.
B) Endorse the Sonoma County Community Engagement Toolkit guiding resource.
C) Accept the Community Engagement Plan and Informational Brief on Intergovernmental Relations with Native Nations in Sonoma County as informational reports.

Executive Summary:
Following the Board's discussion on January 30, 2024, around applying community engagement strategies to existing Boards and Commissions for which the Board of Supervisors and/or Board of Directors appoint individuals, staff designed a County Boards and Commissions Plan ("Plan"), presented as Attachment A to this report. The Plan seeks to expand access to and participation on County Boards and Commissions for underserved communities of color, and communities who have not traditionally participated in these governing bodies.

In addition, as part of this report, the Office of Equity (OOE) presents:

- A Community Engagement Toolkit (Attachment C), which provides recommendations on culturally sensitive community engagement best-practices to be implemented by County Departments, as funding permits.
- A Community Engagement Plan (Attachment G), which is provided as an informational document presenting key findings and strategies to enhance community engagement processes with local communities of color, and other communities who have historically experienced government disconnection and underservice.
- An Informational Brief on intergovernmental relations with Native Nations in Sonoma County (Attachment E,), which includes findings and recommendations drawn from interviews with a Native Nation Chair, members of Native communities and Native County staff members on how to foster intergovernmental relationships that are culturally responsive between County agencies and local Native Nations. This Informational Brief responds to the intricacies of conducting community engagement with community members who have their own sovereign government and recognizes that conducting engagement with Native community members and federally-recognized tribes requires a

focused understanding of existing government to government relations. The recommendations presented are informational only and provided for future consideration as bandwidth and funding for additional community engagement planning work becomes available.

Discussion:

On January 30, the Office of Equity (OOE) held a Community Engagement Plan workshop < <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6495180&GUID=86A5CDAE-1F15-413D-AF31-26A8FA801F02&Options=&Search=>> to present a draft Community Engagement Plan to the Board of Supervisors and receive direction and feedback.

During this meeting, the Board of Supervisors expressed interest in aligning any new community engagement efforts with existing governing bodies such as Boards and Commissions. Of the approximately 76 governing bodies such as boards, commissions, committees, councils, and taskforces connected to the County of Sonoma, the Board of Supervisors is responsible for appointing members to 56 of these bodies.

In response to this direction, the OOE designed a Boards and Commissions Plan, which proposes several strategies, adapted from the initial Community Engagement Plan, and seeks to expand access and participation of underserved communities of color, and communities who have not traditionally participated in governing bodies such as the existing Sonoma County Boards and Commissions.

On September 20, 2022, the Board delegated authority to the Director of the Office of Equity to execute a Professional Services Agreement with local firm Equity First Consulting LLC, for community engagement consulting services for a not-to-exceed amount of $450,000. The agreement's intended product was the creation of a Community Engagement Plan to achieve equitable participation and access to County government for underserved communities of color and other communities who have historically experienced government disconnection and underservice.

Following Board discussion on a narrower focus in the approach to a Community Engagement Plan, the project team developed a Plan (Attachment A), which is comprised of a total of 21 strategies in five key strategic areas, and at a high-level proposes that the County:

1. Conduct an assessment across all Boards and Commissions to develop recommendations on how to improve community member recruitment and selection processes, stipend payment processes, and connectivity to County priorities;

2. Provide training for existing Boards and Commission members and assigned County staff on culturally responsive engagement, recruitment, and appointment practices and processes;

3. Develop and deliver a culturally sensitive Civic Education curriculum and training for community members interested in better connecting with their local government;

4. Create and convene a Learning Cohort for County staff to foster cross-departmental resource sharing and support for existing and upcoming community engagement efforts.

To support this critical work, the Office of Equity submitted a Program Change Request (PCR) through the FY 24-25 budget process requesting the allocation of a permanent Program Planning and Evaluation Analyst ($176,628) and one-time $150,000 to perform an assessment (Strategy 5.2), related to item 1 listed above, on current Boards and Commissions.

In addition to the Plan, OOE staff present:

- A Community Engagement Plan (Attachment G), prepared by Equity First Consulting, containing key findings and recommended strategies to enhance community engagement processes with local

communities experiencing government disconnection and underservice. Suggested strategies in this report include 1) creating structural changes to remove participation barriers for historically underserved communities with a vision to move towards community-driven decision-making, 2) creating internal supports for County staff, such as training and collaboration spaces to support community engagement efforts across departments, and 3) assessing and documenting progress on community engagement efforts. The recommendations were gathered through a year-long community engagement process involving nearly 200 community stakeholders and served to inform the Board's decision, on 01/30/24, to focus community engagement implementation efforts on existing government bodies for community participation, leading to the creation of the Boards and Commissions Plan.

- A Community Engagement Toolkit (Attachment C), prepared by Equity First Consulting, to serve as the Board's endorsed guiding document for County departments seeking to conduct culturally sensitive community engagement efforts not tied to the work of existing Boards and Commissions. The Toolkit provides actionable guidance on how to start implementing culturally responsive community engagement efforts, build accountability mechanisms to plan, implement, and reflect on engagement efforts, as well as examples of healing vs. harmful practices across different phases of engagement. The Toolkit may be implemented by County Departments, as their scope of work and resources permit.

- An Informational Brief on intergovernmental relations with Native Nations in Sonoma County (Attachment E), prepared by Equity First Consulting, which includes findings and recommendations drawn from interviews with a Native Nation Chair, members of Native communities and Native County staff members on how to foster intergovernmental relationships that are culturally responsive between County agencies and local Native Nations. This Informational Brief responds to the intricacies of conducting community engagement with community members who have their own sovereign government and recognizes that conducting engagement with Native community members and federally recognized tribes requires a focused understanding of existing government-to-government relations. The brief includes recommendations to recognize past harms and increase investments towards further cultivating relationships with Native Nations and Native community members, including employing Native-led culturally responsive education and trainings. It is important to note the recommendations in this document do not represent the breadth of perspectives from all five Native Nations, or a majority of Native community members, within Sonoma County. Instead, this document offers a starting point for the County of Sonoma to further explore how to expand and enhance its relationships with local Native Nations.

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

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice
Goal: Goal 4: Engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and to advance racial equity.
Objective: Objective 1: Establish a process for engagement and collaboration with community members and stakeholder groups, and launch a community engagement strategy by the end of 2022 with a focus on racial equity.

Pillar: Racial Equity and Social Justice
Goal: Goal 4: Engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and to advance racial equity.
Objective: Objective 3: Begin implementing strategies for regular community engagement to guide racial equity efforts.

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?
Yes
Please see the attached Racial Equity Toolkit Analysis.

Prior Board Actions:

- July 27, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act Funding Plan
- September 14, 2021: Approval to add a 1.0 FTE Bilingual Community Engagement Analyst through December 31, 2024, to support American Rescue Plan Act Funding Plan
- December 14, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Update - Response, Implementation, and Community Funding Approach
- Sept 20, 2022, Professional Services Agreements for the Development of a Community Engagement Plan and a Language Access Plan and recommended Policy.
- January 30, 2024, Community Engagement Plan Workshop: Findings, Recommendations, and Strategies for Consideration

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	**FY23-24 Adopted**	**FY24-25 Projected**	**FY25-26 Projected**
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:
Office of Equity management has submitted a FY 24-25 budget request for the Board's consideration during

the upcoming June Budget Hearings.

Estimated Ongoing Expenses:

- $176,628, ongoing, for a Program, Planning, and Evaluation Analyst to act as the Community Engagement Manager leading the implementation of the Boards and Commissions Plan.

Estimated One-time Expenses:

- $150,000 to cover the one-time cost of conducting a Boards and Commissions assessment to develop recommendations on how to improve community member recruitment and selection, connectivity to County priorities, and to develop a stipend policy for County Boards and Commissions

Staffing Impacts: 1 FTE			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	**Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)**	**Additions (Number)**	**Deletions (Number)**

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):
The Office of Equity will be requesting as part of the FY 24-25 Budget Hearings an on-going Program, Planning, and Evaluation Analyst to coordinate implementation of the Boards and Commissions Plan. This task expands the County's capacity to Achieve Goal 4, Objectives 1 and 3 of the Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Pillar of the County's Strategic Plan <https://socostrategicplan.org/racial-equity-and-social-justice/> < <https://socostrategicplan.org/racial-equity-and-social-justice/> > which seeks to engage community members and stakeholder groups to develop priorities and advance racial equity.

Attachments:
A. Sonoma County Boards and Commissions Plan
B. Plan para las juntas y comisiones
C. Community Engagement Toolkit
D. Kit de Herramientas de Participación Comunitaria
E. Informational Brief on Intergovernmental Relations with Native Nations in Sonoma County
F. Informe de Relaciones Intergubernamentales con las Naciones Nativas en el condado de Sonoma
G. Community Engagement Plan
H. Plan de Participación Comunitaria
I. Racial Equity Analysis

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:
None