
R-22-50
Meeting 22-07
April 14, 2022

AGENDA ITEM #3

To: Board of Directors
Open Space Authority

From: Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager

SUBJECT

Approve the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority's Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access Statement

REVENUE/COST

There is no cost associated with this item.

BACKGROUND

The mission of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Authority) is to conserve the natural environment, support agriculture, and connect people to nature, by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations. A key piece of this mission is connecting people to nature; people from all backgrounds, experiences, and communities connected to nature through time in open space preserves, environmental education programs, volunteer and employment opportunities, grant programs, and participation in the planning process. While the Authority has consistently prioritized connecting people to nature, efforts to bring the principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access (JEDIA) to the Authority's mission have increased in recent years.

To further prioritize this work, in the fiscal year 2020/2021 the Authority established key project milestones for JEDIA at the Authority. In early 2021 Staff provided informational reports to the Citizens' Advisory Committee and the Board of Directors of the work already underway to advance JEDIA at the Authority. At this time the Board established a Joint Ad Hoc Committee for Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access to work with Authority staff to draft the Authority's commitments for justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and access to inform future practices, policies, and programs that support the Authority's mission of connecting people to nature.

DISCUSSION

In the last year the Joint Ad Hoc Committee for Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access has completed its work. Staff is excited to share the outcomes of those Ad Hoc Committee meetings as well as an update on an assortment of projects and milestones at the Authority that are underway or recently completed and that advance the principles of JEDIA in the Authority's work.

To work with the Ad Hoc Committee a Staff Working Group (SWG) was formed to represent staff from different program areas of the Authority. Over the course of four meetings in 2021 the Ad Hoc Committee and the SWG engaged in robust discussions to understand where the Authority was starting from in this JEDIA work, and where the Authority could set its focus. These discussions resulted in terrific ideas for future initiatives and projects as well as working to clarify how the Authority can best prioritize

JEDIA across the agency. The ultimate outcome of this work is captured in the attached JEDIA Statement of the Authority. The SWG was inspired to tie the intentions and commitments created with the Ad Hoc Committee to the Authority's staff values. This connection will create a seamless integration of the JEDIA Statement to the values that Staff has already operationalized in their day-to-day functions.

While the work with the Ad Hoc Committee was ongoing the Authority Staff continually moved forward with actions, projects, and initiatives of varying scale, knowing that every action the Authority took towards incorporating JEDIA into programs was a success.

In response to the shelter-in-place limitations of 2020 the Authority began robust virtual educational programming opportunities for the public to join. As the local community began to open back up through 2021 it became clear that virtual programming was a necessary tool to engage members of the public who experienced accessibility barriers to in person events. The success of these programs has continued, and they will remain a staple of the Authority's environmental education opportunities. Digital tools to increase accessibility were also deployed through the Discovering Coyote Valley webinar series including the use of closed captions during the live webinars and translation to Spanish and Vietnamese for rewatching and continued sharing on video platforms.

The Authority's communications team has brought multilingual translation to a number of programs at the Authority. Dedicated webpages for the 2021 Year In Review were created in Spanish and Vietnamese as well as advertorials through local ethnic media to raise awareness of the Authority and this report with Spanish and Vietnamese speaking audiences. New signage in Authority preserves bear welcoming messages in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese; the messages and the language accessibility make it clear that open space is for all – that all are welcome in the open space preserves. Staff has been provided with a new Writing and Editorial Style guide which includes key insight and resources for the use of plain language in Authority content, which encourages accessibility in our communications across all platforms. Increased accessibility is also created on social media posts through the use of detailed image descriptions on all Instagram posts. These descriptions allow individuals, such as those who are blind or visually impaired or those with cognitive and comprehension disabilities to use screen readers to access images and graphics.

In 2021 the Authority Board adopted resolutions to recognize Affordable Housing Month and the intersection of environmental and social equity as it relates to housing and climate change. The Board also recognized Pride Month with a commitment to creating safe, welcoming, and inclusive outdoor spaces for all. These actions brought awareness for Staff, the Board of Directors, and the public to how the Authority can lend support and allyship to where social justice and environmental justice initiatives meet. To continue encouraging Staff's understanding of these topics Staff were provided with additional training opportunities. In early 2022 staff were invited to participate in a discussion with a local organization advocating for the unhoused, to better understand the realities of homeless in Santa Clara County. Additionally, staff were provided with a mini-training on the use of gender pronouns in terms of creating inclusive and safe spaces for all. Staff were also invited to begin sharing their pronouns in their email signatures. The Authority communications team has also added inclusive gender pronouns to the 'Contact Us' form on the Authority's website, allowing the public to share how they prefer to be addressed in responses from Authority staff.

The Authority has continued to create and foster partnerships with organizations from across the region and throughout various industries to amplify the impact of the Authority's work. This has included increased work with Point Blue Conservation Science to complete restoration projects that engage

elementary age school children with hands-on opportunities to contribute to the Authority's work. Opportunities like this both increase the Authority's capacity to complete these projects, but also plant the seeds of conservation leadership in the youth involved. These partnerships have also led to the Authority's development of a Land Acknowledgement Statement, which was drafted through thoughtful partnership and collaboration with local tribal partners.

Community engagement at the Authority has presented opportunities for new approaches to engage and learn from community members and organizations. In the early stages of the Coyote Valley Conservation Areas Master Plan (CVCAMP) process the team conducted informational interviews with individuals and community leaders who have deep understanding of certain focus areas or issues that are beyond our traditional conservation lens. The Authority's grants team has also improved community engagement and outreach to increase awareness of the Authority's Urban Grants Program.

Tribal engagement at the Authority has touched down in a number of ways including through collaboration with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, and Tamien Nation on restoration and capital improvement project sites on many Authority managed preserves. The Authority's tribal engagement also provides key opportunities for the Authority to stand in solidarity with tribal partners, such as supporting Federal Recognition of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, as approved by the Board of Directors in October 2021.

Seeking input from the groups and individuals that the Authority interacts with has provided insights that the Authority can use to make operational decisions and to shape future programs. In 2021 this has included inviting preserve users to provide input on survey about 'One Way Trail Use', which was distributed in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese. The Authority's grants team has also reached out to organizations who have been awarded grants as well as those who were not awarded, the Authority has solicited feedback on the Authority's process as well as provide feedback so that organizations can improve their future grant submissions to the Authority or other grant making organizations.

The human resources and grants team have also taken strides to remove barriers to employment and grant opportunities. Through an agency-wide Classification and Compensation study external consultants reviewed position classifications of the Authority to ensure that the requirements for education and experience did not create undue hardship for potential candidates to meet. This review also applied a critical eye to the document language with the goal of easing the understanding of the position responsibilities. The grants team is actively working on simplifying the grant application process and reducing barriers to application for organizations.

A key outcome of the agency-wide Classification and Compensation study was the opportunity for the Authority to set a new standard for pay equity. With the approval of the new Salary Position Pay Plan in September 2021, the Authority established a new baseline for compensation that reflects a living wage for all positions at the Authority.

The Authority has expanded recruitment efforts for employment and governance opportunities. In both of these scenarios the goal has been to distribute the opportunity to as many potential applicants as possible, whether for an employment opportunity or a volunteer committee appointment. The teams have reached out to new professional associations or organizations, message and job boards, and asked more of Staff, Board Directors, and CAC Members to help share the opportunity. The results have been

effective as employment applicant numbers continue to increase, often including applicants who bring new skills to the Authority and represent a diverse variety of lived experiences.

In addition to these many accomplishments in bringing JEDIA to the forefront of Authority programs and projects, Staff has much to look forward to. In the coming year there will be new opportunities across the Authority's departments and programs to not only exhibit the principles of JEDIA, but to make meaningful impacts that connect people to nature.

Community engagement for CVCAMP will occur through listening sessions with local community-based organizations and community-serving agencies and other opportunities that keep with JEDIA goals. The Board of Directors will embark on deepening public engagement with constituents. The Authority will participate in the Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network's State of the Trails project which will survey trail users and non-users to understand access barriers, with a focus on access, demand, and connecting to urban residents. The Authority's communications team will augment these efforts with a new Language Access Plan, continued translation support, and a new Intentional and Inclusive Language Staff Guide.

The Authority is nearing kickoff of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan; immediate work on this project will include conducting assessments, outreach, and analysis. A new parking reservation system is being considered which can support improved safety and access for preserve visitors on busy days. The system also affords the Authority to apply a JEDIA lens to the goals for equitable access to Authority preserves. Exciting restoration projects will provide opportunity to invite future conservation leaders to gain hands-on experience working in nature. Future staffing plans will continue to provide for key entry point employment opportunities as well as expanded career ladders for land-based functions.

The work of the Joint Ad Hoc Committee for Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access has concluded. Going forward Authority Staff will continue to convene a staff working group to advance this work and engage with the full bodies of the Board of Directors and Citizens' Advisory Committee, allowing everyone involved with the Authority to remain active in this work. The upcoming FY2022/2023 Workplan will identify specific milestones for public communication, transparency, and accountability to support the continuation of this work.

The work of operationalizing the principles of justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and access at the Authority presents Staff, Board Directors, and Committee Members with challenges and opportunities. At each decision point the Authority has the opportunity to expand how people can connect to nature through the Authority's programs, projects, and initiatives. JEDIA work will never be 'done', and the Authority is only just beginning to see the impact of the work completed so far. With continued commitment to making JEDIA a key aspect of projects, programs, and initiatives, the Authority will strive to improve and make a bigger impact.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Board approve the Authority's Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access Statement.

Prepared by:
Elizabeth Loretto, Human Resources Officer

Attachment(s): Resolution 22-41 – A Resolution of the Governing Board of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Approving Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access Statement

Exhibit L – Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access Statement of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority