



## **County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors**

### **Agenda Item Submittal**

**From:** County Administrative Office

**Subject:** Establishment of CARESJ Advisory Group

**Meeting Date:** February 25, 2025

**Formal Title:** Accept and file notice of intent to establish a Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice Advisory Group, and take related actions

### **Recommended Actions**

1. Accept and file notice of intent to establish a Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice (CARESJ) Advisory Group; and
2. Direct the County Administrative Office to submit CARESJ Advisory Group attendance reports and summary of activities at the end of each calendar year.

### **Executive Summary**

On December 8, 2020, the Board of Supervisors directed the County Administrative Office (CAO) to develop an advisory body made up of leaders from the Black, Indigenous, and Latin communities in Santa Cruz County. Since 2021, the Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice (CARESJ) has convened monthly and advised the County on compensation for County commissioners, the County Equity Statement, and Community Indicators. In 2025, CARESJ will primarily advise the CAO on implementation of the Strategic Plan refresh.

To date, CARESJ activities have been funded through a Public Health grant, with little public reporting. That grant expired in December 2024. This memo serves as the required notice of intent to form the new advisory group, which will allow CARESJ members to continue providing critical community perspective, while also bringing more transparency to CARESJ membership and activities.

### **Discussion**

The Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice (CARESJ) was established in response to the Board of Supervisors' August 2020 declaration of racism as a public health crisis. Since its inception, CARESJ has played a pivotal role in advancing equity efforts within Santa Cruz County. In December 2020, the Board directed the CAO to collaborate with CARESJ to explore and recommend the establishment of either a commission or an advisory body. The current recommendation to formalize CARESJ as an advisory group fulfills this directive, creating a structured forum for advancing equity and addressing systemic disparities.

CARESJ was instrumental in the development of the County Equity Statement, adopted in October 2023, which commits the County to creating an environment where everyone can thrive and belong. CARESJ also modeled a different form of community engagement, ensuring that equity-centered decision-making is grounded in authentic community input and collaboration. By integrating diverse perspectives and elevating historically underrepresented voices, CARESJ has strengthened the County's capacity to achieve meaningful, inclusive results.

CARESJ also supported the effort to compensate residents who participate on County

commissions and advisory bodies. The 'A Santa Cruz County Like Me' effort, which sought input from CARESJ, established a commissioner stipend program and Youth Advisory Task Force. These actions have made participation in commissions and advisory bodies more accessible to youth, renters, and South County representatives.

To date, CARESJ's activities have been supported through a Public Health grant, which provided funding for its operations but had limited public reporting requirements. With the expiration of this grant in December 2024, transitioning CARESJ to an official advisory group under the CAO will ensure its continued work while also enhancing transparency. The CARESJ Advisory Group will follow established reporting procedures, making its membership, activities, and contributions more visible to the public. This shift aligns with the County's commitment to accountability and inclusive governance, reinforcing the role of community voices in shaping policies and programs.

As an advisory group, CARESJ will:

- *Provide Strategic Guidance:* Offer recommendations to the CAO on execution of its strategic initiatives.
- *Strengthen Community Engagement:* Ensure underrepresented voices remain at the forefront of County decision-making.
- *Enhance Transparency and Accountability:* Operate with clear reporting structures, including annual attendance and activity reports to the Board.

In 2025, the CARESJ Advisory Group will primarily support the CAO in its execution of the Strategic Plan refresh, collaborating to ensure inclusive community engagement and consistency with the County Equity Statement. This formalization of CARESJ reflects the County's commitment to embedding equity at every level of governance and fostering a more just and inclusive community.

CARESJ will consist of 7 to 12 members who either reside or work in Santa Cruz County and are selected based on diverse lived experiences, professional backgrounds, and commitments to equity. Membership will be maintained through an open application process managed by the County Administrative Office (CAO) with input from a CARESJ Membership Subcommittee. Members must attend at least 75% of meetings annually to remain in good standing, and participation may be compensated through a stipend approved by the Board of Supervisors.

CARESJ will hold at least six regular meetings per year, with additional meetings convened as necessary. Meetings may be conducted in a hybrid format to allow for both in-person and virtual participation. While CARESJ meetings are not open to the public, specific public engagement opportunities will be scheduled as needed. Meetings will be guided by community agreements rather than traditional parliamentary procedures, fostering inclusive and action-oriented discussions.

The CARESJ Advisory Group will maintain meeting minutes and provide regular reports to the Board of Supervisors as required under SCCC 2.38.170(C), highlighting key activities, accomplishments, and future goals.

### **Financial Impact**

A \$100,000 budget to support the stipend program was included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget. This budget will accommodate stipends for members of commissions and department advisory groups.

**Strategic Initiatives**

Equity Framework - Community Voices & Partnership  
Operational Plan - Operational Excellence

**Submitted By:**

Carlos Palacios, County Administrative Officer

**Recommended By:**

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

**Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:**

ChatGPT 4o, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) large language model tool, contributed to the development of this agenda item, including Staff Report, in compliance with the County of Santa Cruz AI Appropriate Use Policy.