



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Personnel

Subject: 2025-2027 Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Responsiveness Plan

Meeting Date: April 8, 2025

Formal Title: Adopt the 2025-2027 Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Responsiveness Plan

Recommended Actions

Accept and adopt the 2025-2027 Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Responsiveness Plan.

Executive Summary

Attached for your review and approval, please find the proposed 2025-2027 Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Responsiveness (“EEO/CR”) Plan for the County of Santa Cruz. Your Board has long been committed to full compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and all other applicable local, state, and federal nondiscrimination laws. The proposed EEO/CR Plan is designed to establish and confirm our compliance with legal mandates and best practices.

Discussion

Since 2003, the County has had an Equal Employment Opportunity Plan that also included a component related to cultural responsiveness. At the time, it was called “Cultural Competence” but has been retitled “Cultural Responsiveness” to adopt language that aligns with evolving cultural awareness. The incorporation of culturally responsive objectives and standards reflects the County’s global understanding of, and commitment to, the values and principles of equity, accessibility, inclusion, diversity, empathy, trust, and service, and aligns with the Board’s commitment to anti-racism efforts. Cultural responsiveness is not only a critical component of the County’s overarching mission and Strategic Plan, but it is a crucial element of effective day-to-day workplace operations in the County’s provision of services to a diverse local community. In order to deliver equitable, appropriate, accessible, and effective services, public servants must have awareness, sensitivity, understanding, and acceptance of the diversity of cultural frameworks, beliefs, customs, personal experiences, differing abilities and native languages of those for whom the services are intended. This concept, known as “cultural responsiveness,” is an important component of the plan.

The mission of the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Office is to encourage full participation in the employment process by all sectors of the County population and support a workplace environment which promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion. The EEO Office, in collaboration with the EEO Commissioners and department heads, developed the proposed 2025-2027 EEO and Cultural Responsiveness Plan to uphold this mission.

As you are aware, the County receives significant federal and state grant funding. As a condition of receipt of such funding, the County is required to provide the federal and state government with an EEO Plan which compares the available workforce in the local metropolitan statistical areas (as determined by the most current Census data derived

from the American Community Survey) with the County government's workforce by gender and race/ethnicity; identifies and describes the County's outreach and recruitment strategies for underutilized populations (i.e., populations where there is a significant gap between the local available workforce and the actual County workforce composition); and outlines specific steps to promote outreach and ensure equal employment opportunity for federally-designated protected classes.

The 2025-2027 EEO/CR Plan also includes proactive measures to promote a workplace that is reflective of the community which it serves and values the diversity of all its employees. Consideration has been given to aligning the plan with the overarching vision, focus areas, and objectives of the County's Strategic and Operational Plans to promote consistency among the County's initiatives and blueprints for operational excellence. While these Countywide plans were separate endeavors developed through separate processes, conscious effort has been given to incorporating the principles which guided the development of the Strategic and Operational Plans within each department's individual EEO/CR plan, including developing strategies for continuous process improvement and benchmarks and standards for measuring outcomes and progress toward specific objectives.

These actions are consistent with the County Equity Statement, developed in a collaborative community and staff effort, and adopted by your Board on October 3, 2023:

"Equity in action in Santa Cruz County is a transformative process that embraces individuals of every status, providing unwavering support, dignity, and compassion. Through this commitment, the County ensures intentional opportunities and access, fostering an environment where everyone can thrive and belong."

Changes in Federal Reporting Requirements and State Law

On March 28, 2024, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) published the results of its review of Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 (SPD 15) and issued updated standards for maintaining, collecting, and presenting race/ethnicity data across federal agencies. In addition to changes to question formats and data collection methods, a new racial category was added: Middle Eastern or North African (MENA). In the past, MENA individuals were tabulated in census data under the White racial category. Moving forward, MENA census data will help inform policy decisions, health research, civil rights monitoring and enforcement, and other needs of the MENA community. The County reports workforce data to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) biennially through the mandated EEO-4 Report. Once data collection at the state and federal levels have been updated to include this racial category, the County EEO Office will collaborate with Information Services and Personnel staff to update our own race/ethnicity data collection processes and the County's Workforce Composition and Utilization Analysis Report to include the new racial category as well. When the federal EEOC eventually updates the EEO-4 report's race/ethnicity categories, we will be prepared, and in compliance with, the OMB's directives described above. As noted in the previous EEO plan, the Gender Recognition Act (Senate Bill 179) was passed in October 2017 which enables California residents to designate their gender identity as nonbinary on state identification documents, including birth certificates, driver's licenses, and state identification cards, without proof of undergoing any gender transition treatment. Reconciling this legislation with federally mandated reporting has proved challenging, as the federal government requires that all government employees be designated as "male" or "female" in mandated workforce composition reporting and does not recognize nonbinary gender identity.

Therefore, you will observe that the proportion of male and female employees is discussed without reference to nonbinary designated employees throughout this plan. However, in practice, the County has updated its internal policies and procedures to fully recognize and support employees who self-identify their gender as nonbinary.

Accordingly, the EEO Office executed a three-phase implementation plan, which included updates to the payroll system, personnel action forms, employee information forms, and in-processing, to enable County employees to designate their gender identity as nonbinary; the development of a process to enable the County to designate “male” or “female” for mandated federal reporting purposes while complying with California Senate Bill 179 (allowing California residents to change their gender markers on state documents); and the third phase of implementation was completed during the prior plan period, by identifying gender sensitivity training in the Santa Cruz County Learns (SCCL) online training platform for County employees, and development of a Personnel policy on Gender Inclusion and Gender Transition Guidelines to share the fundamental concepts of gender inclusion, and offer practical guidance for managers, supervisors, and coworkers on gender inclusion in the workplace.

Plan Process

The 2025-2027 Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Responsiveness Plan was developed through a collaborative process involving the department heads and the County’s Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Each department’s workforce statistics, recruitment activities, and selection practices were evaluated to identify tailored strategies and approaches designed to serve and promote specific equal employment opportunity goals and objectives. Commissioners from the Latino Affairs Commission, Women’s Commission, and the Commission on Disabilities also reviewed the proposed plan and provided feedback and recommendations.

The 2025-2027 EEO/CR Plan is organized into five sections:

- Section I – Introduction and Overview – Review of the history and purpose of the EEO/CR Plan and description of the statistical analysis methodology used.
- Section II – Countywide Workforce Statistics— Countywide workforce composition by race/ethnicity, gender, and age and changes in the workforce composition over the last decade.
- Section III – EEO Office Responsibilities, Activities, and Recommendations.
- Section IV – Departmental EEO/CR Plans with race/ethnicity and gender workforce statistics
- Section V – Dissemination Plan

The overall representation of women in the County’s workforce has fluctuated very little over the past ten years, between 59% to 60%, exceeding the 46% availability of women in the local labor market as measured by the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey. The distribution of women across occupational categories in the following categories is noteworthy:

- In the category of Officials/Administrators, the representation of women increased from 60% in 2014 to 68% in 2024. The representation of women in the

local available workforce within that occupational category is 44%. Accordingly, the County currently exceeds parity with the local available workforce by 24% within this category.

- In the Professionals category, the representation of women is 64% as it was in 2014, which exceeds parity with the local available workforce by 10%.
- In the Protective Services category, the representation of women has increased from 27% in 2014 to 28% currently, exceeding parity with the local available workforce by 12%.
- The percentage of women in Service/Maintenance positions, another historically male-dominated field, was 23% in 2024, representing a 20% underutilization compared with the local available workforce (43%). Service and Maintenance positions continue to receive relatively few female applicants, with male candidates predominating these recruitments; however, the County's participation in Trades Day recruitment events and targeted outreach to women's trade and technical associations and schools continues.

Since 2014, the representation of men within the County government's workforce has decreased from 41% to 40%. The representation of women at the top levels of the organization (e.g., Official Administrators, Professionals, and Protective Services) continues to grow, far exceeding the representation of women within these job categories in the local available workforce.

People of Color

The overall representation of people of color within the County workforce has steadily increased from 42% in 2014, to 48% in 2019, to 56% in 2024. This indicates that the County's workforce currently exceeds parity by 21% as compared with the 35% availability of people of color in the local available workforce composition.

The utilization of people of color within the following occupational categories is noteworthy:

- Within the Officials/Administrators category, the representation of people of color increased significantly from 27% in 2014 to 35% in 2024, which exceeds parity with the 23% local available workforce by 12%.
- Within the Professionals category, the representation of people of color increased from 30% in 2014 to 44% in 2024, which represents 22% over parity as compared with the 22% local available workforce.
- Within the Technicians category, the representation of people of color increased from 45% in 2014 to 60% in 2024, which is 11% over parity as compared with the 49% local available workforce.
- Within the Protective Services category, the representation of people of color increased from 42% in 2014 to 62% in 2024, which is 25% over parity as compared with the 37% local available workforce.
- Within the Service and Maintenance category, the representation of people of color increased from 48% in 2014 to 68% currently, which exceeds the 62% local available workforce.

Latino/Hispanic applicants continue to participate in recruitments at higher rates than other people of color for positions providing direct services to the community, reflecting

the expanding client-driven, evidence-based need for bilingual, Spanish/English service delivery.

Administrative Review

When the 2022-2024 EEO Plan was published, the Agricultural Commissioner, General Services, Information Services Department, and Community Development & Infrastructure (CDI) - Public Works Division participated in the administrative review process to address underutilization of women as compared with the local available workforce; and the CDI - Planning Division participated in the administrative review process due to the underutilization of people of color.

During that previous plan period, these five departments engaged in focused efforts to increase diversity in hiring and promotions. As a result, the Agricultural Commissioner and General Services departments are no longer underutilized for women and were removed from and remain off of the administrative review program. Similarly, CDI - Planning Division is no longer underutilized for people of color, and has been removed from and remains off of the administrative review program. Currently, the only departments under administrative review for underutilization of women are Information Services, and the CDI - Public Works Division. The County has no departments currently under administrative review for underutilization of people of color.

Section III of this EEO Plan reviews the history, evolution, and success of the Administrative Review Program over the past 31 years and proposes updates and changes to the program to move the County forward as we ensure equal opportunity and nondiscrimination in our recruitment and selection processes.

Cultural Responsiveness

As the diversity of the County's population continues to evolve and progress, the systems in which public services are delivered must be routinely monitored and adapted to meet the needs of the community. An awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the myriad cultural, social, and environmental frameworks and backgrounds which influence the expectations, motivations, needs, and actions of clients and consumers is imperative to the delivery of equitable, appropriate, and effective service. This concept, defined as Cultural Responsiveness, has been incorporated within EEO plans since 2008 and includes the following standards:

1. Each department shall develop, approve, and integrate a Cultural Responsiveness Plan to incorporate cultural responsiveness principles in service delivery.
2. All levels of the department, including management and staff, shall be proportionately representative of the consumer populations to be served, knowledgeable in areas of cultural responsiveness, and monitored for the successful implementation of their Cultural Responsiveness Plan.
3. Each department shall track the progress made toward implementation of its Cultural Responsiveness plan and evaluate the outcome of that plan.
4. Each department shall collect, disaggregate, and analyze data to make informed decisions and demonstrate progress toward successful implementation of its Cultural Responsiveness Plan.
5. Each department's services shall be culturally accessible to all potential consumers, provided in an equitable, appropriate, effective, and understandable

manner, and compatible with consumers' cultural beliefs and practices, and preferred language. The department's services shall be responsive to the consumer demographics and geographic area.

At your Board's direction, each County department has developed a Cultural Responsiveness Plan based upon the above standards and guiding principles.

Conclusion

The EEO Office is grateful to the County Administrative Officer and each department head for their invaluable contributions to the EEO/CR Plan's development process. The accountability, transparency, and collaboration exemplified by County leadership throughout this process has largely contributed to the overall quality and comprehensiveness of this plan. The EEO Office also thanks the County EEO Commissioners for their time, efforts, and contributions in thoroughly reviewing the plan and offering feedback. The feedback and recommendations of the Latino Affairs Commission, Commission on Disabilities, and Women's Commission were also greatly appreciated in finalizing the plan for the Board's consideration.

The EEO Office is proud to present the proposed 2025-2027 Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Responsiveness Plan to your Board for your approval and adoption.

Financial Impact

No fiscal impact.

Strategic Initiatives

Equity Framework - Plans, Policies & Budgets, Workplace & Workforce, Leadership, Operations & Services

Operational Plan - Operational Excellence

Climate Action - Government Operations

Submitted By:

Ajita Patel, Personnel Director

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.