

18. Accept and file notice of intent to establish a Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice Advisory Group, and take related actions ()



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.

CIRCLE ON ANTI-RACISM, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE BYLAWS

MISSION, VISION AND VALUES STATEMENT

- A. Mission: The Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic and Social Justice (CARESJ) is an advisory and accountability community that will, as a recognized Departmental Advisory Group, provide wisdom and support to the County of Santa Cruz's County Administrative Officer in prioritizing and operationalizing the County Equity Statement and the County Board of Supervisors' resolution determining racism to be a public health crisis.
- B. County Equity Statement: 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.

BACKGROUND

The Circle on Anti-Racism, Economic, and Social Justice (CARESJ) was formed in the wake of the 2020 murder of George Floyd, as community leaders of color came together to demand meaningful action and accountability from Santa Cruz County. In response to the widespread calls for racial justice, equity, and systemic change, CARESJ emerged as a space for collaboration between community members and County staff to address deep-rooted inequities. Since its inception, CARESJ has worked to elevate historically marginalized voices, challenge the status quo, and advocate for policies that advance racial, economic, and social justice throughout the County.

PURPOSE

As a Departmental Advisory Group ("DAG") subject to the provisions of Santa Cruz County Code [Section 2.38.071](#), the CARESJ DAG (hereafter, "CARES J") shall exercise the following responsibilities in its purpose to advise, support, and hold accountable the County Administrative Officer in operationalizing the County Equity Statement and the County Board of Supervisors' resolution determining racism to be a public health crisis. With the assistance of staff members from the County Administrative Office, CARESJ will

- A. Create a brave space for people of all races, and in particular Indigenous, Black, Latin, and Asian people to fully engage and participate;
- B. Develop community-centered approaches for racial equity and justice;
- C. Become informed on County of Santa Cruz programs and operations, and how they do/do not center equity; and
- D. Provide insights, counsel and support to the County Administrative Officer on:
 - i. Current efforts and County Strategic Initiatives, including Strategic Planning, Budget and Operational Plan, and Performance Management.
 - ii. Community indicators of well-being and ensuring that the data reflects all parts of the community that leads to equitable and restorative investment.

MEMBERSHIP

- A. In accordance with Santa Cruz County Code [Section 2.38.080\(A\)](#) CARESJ members shall be a resident of or employed in Santa Cruz County.
- B. CARESJ will consist of no less than seven (7) and no more than twelve (12) appointed individuals fitting all membership criteria.
- C. In accordance with Santa Cruz County Code [Section 2.38.080\(D\)](#), the County Administrative

Officer (CAO) will strive to ensure the community is provided an opportunity to request selection to CARESJ in order to establish and maintain diverse representation of CARESJ membership:

- i. When initially establishing CARESJ membership, the CAO or their designee(s) will offer each of the calendar year 2024 CARESJ members the first right of opportunity to join CARESJ as a member.
 - ii. After initial establishment, when reviewing new requests to become a CARESJ member, CARESJ will consider a wide range of diversity criteria for maximizing diverse representation in its membership, including but not limited to race, ethnicity or national origin, disability status or medical condition, marital status, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, gender, gender identity, lived experience of racism and discrimination, contributions to the county community, commitment to systems change, and geographic or professional representation, as disclosed in the request for membership selection.
 - iii. Once established, the CAO and current CARESJ members will share open CARESJ membership opportunities widely to reach as many interested members of the public as possible, inviting interested parties to both request CARESJ membership and to also share selection opportunity information widely.
 - iv. When applications are received, the CAO or their designee(s) will consult members of the CARESJ Subcommittee on Membership for recommendation of new members.
 - v. Persons meeting the minimum qualifications for service on CARESJ shall, as much as possible, be representative of the diverse skills, backgrounds, interests, and demographics of persons residing in the county.
- D. Any person seeking to serve on CARESJ may make a request for membership selection to the CAO. Requests for membership must be submitted either electronically or in paper format as a written request, and should include the requestor's name, current contact information, optional demographic information to assist in equity among the CARESJ, reason for interest in membership and any related background or experience the requestor holds related to social services or to serving on CARESJ. The CAO shall maintain a copy of all such requests for selection to CARESJ.
- i. Optional demographic information may include home address or zip code for the area of the county in which the requestor resides, as well as race, ethnicity or national origin, lived experience of racism or discrimination, disability status or medical condition, marital status, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, gender, and gender identity.
- E. CARESJ members, in their individual capacity, may not obligate the committee to any specific policy or course of action. However, nothing in these bylaws shall be construed as limiting or preventing CARESJ members from expressing themselves publicly as individuals on topics or issues discussed at or presented during CARESJ meetings. Any expressions should include a disclaimer that the member is speaking in their individual capacity and not as a representative of CARESJ.
- F. To remain in good standing as a member of CARESJ, members shall:
- i. Annually attend at least 75% of CARESJ's regularly scheduled meetings, either in-person or virtually (both tardiness and absences will be considered when determining a member's annual 75% attendance rate);
 - ii. Treat everyone they interact with in their role as a CARESJ member with dignity, respect, and thoughtful consideration; and

- iii. Follow all additional criteria for conduct as noted in these bylaws.

TERMS OF MEMBERSHIP

- A. In accordance with Santa Cruz County Code [Section 2.38.100\(D\)](#), CARESJ members are intended to serve for the life of CARESJ. The County Administrative Officer may remove any CARESJ member at any time, should the member be out of compliance with the provisions noted in the bylaws as stated herein.
- B. CARESJ *ad hoc* and/or subcommittee group members shall serve for the life of the *ad hoc* or subcommittee purpose.

SUBCOMMITTEES

- A. Subcommittees and/or *ad hoc* committees of CARESJ may be established and dismissed by the CAO or their designee(s) to accomplish work on a specific project of the department.
- B. Subcommittees and/or *ad hoc* committees will report to the CAO or their designee for the duration of the committee's term.
- C. A Subcommittee on Membership will consist of two (2) CARESJ members who will provide CARESJ membership recommendations to the CAO based on the criteria outlined above. The CAO reserves the authority to make final decisions on CARESJ membership.

MEETINGS

- A. A minimum of six (6) regular meetings of CARESJ will be held per year at locations throughout the county as determined by the CAO or their designee and in consultation with CARESJ members, in advance of each regularly scheduled meeting.
- B. In addition to the 6 regularly scheduled meetings, the CAO or their designee may call for additional meetings with CARESJ members or *ad hoc* and/or subcommittee members to discuss emerging topics or to plan for public engagement.
- C. Each CARESJ meeting may be held in a hybrid format so that members may participate virtually as well as by attending in-person.
- D. CARESJ meetings shall be held in facilities accessible to all individuals, in compliance with applicable state and federal laws, including the ADA.
- E. The CAO or their designee may cancel a scheduled meeting if less than three (3) CARESJ members have confirmed that they will be present for the scheduled CARESJ meeting in question.
- F. Traditional parliamentary or Brown Act procedures shall not apply to CARESJ meetings. Instead, CARESJ meetings shall be conducted in a manner consistent with CARESJ Community Agreements:
 - i. Move up, Move back: If you are typically a person that takes up space, move back. If you are a person that typically does not take up space, move up.
 - ii. Objectives: Leave each meeting with clear objectives and action items.
 - iii. Check ins: Begin each meeting with a check in to assess the mood of the room.
 - iv. Meet people where they are at: Understanding that we each come with our own experiences and contribute in our own ways. No judgement. This also includes understanding people's positionality and the multitude of identities they come in the room with, that each of us are walking in community and must contend with dualities within our identities, and that we need to be cognizant of invisible and intersectional

- identities. Allow people to show up how they can and where they can.
- v. Validation/Psychological Safety: Receiving grace, understanding, validation and trust from the group. Not feeling like we should have to reconcile any parts of our identity. Being given the space to show up as your full self. Be okay with being uncomfortable.
 - vi. Accountability: Creating a safe space for accountability. Calling in versus calling out. Being able to be wrong, no judgment, but the expectation is that we will hold each other accountable. All members have committed to an open-door policy where we are each open to feedback, whether that be individually or within the group setting.
 - vii. Creating space: Ensuring each member of the group has spoken or given time to reflect and respond.
 - viii. Interdependence: Affirming our interdependence, we all need each other, and must work together.
 - ix. Being open: Awareness that this work requires radical ideas. We cannot limit our scope and work within the systems already in place, we need to be able to think outside of the systems.
 - x. Be present: Be engaged and stay engaged, even when we are uncomfortable. Stay curious, pose questions, and be intentional.
- G. Regularly scheduled CARESJ meetings are not held publicly. However, the public may be invited to specific meetings or public engagement opportunities as determined in advance by the CAO or their designee and CARESJ:
- i. There is no set number of meetings for public engagement opportunities. Planning for potential public engagement will be a standing item on each regularly scheduled CARESJ meeting agenda, so that the group may discuss why, when and where to potentially engage with members of the public through public engagement efforts.
 - ii. During CARESJ meetings or events that involve public engagement, guests will not be required to register their name or fulfill any other obligation as a condition to attend a CARESJ meeting or public engagement event but may volunteer such information for inclusion in any CARESJ meeting minutes being kept, or for the sole purpose of contact for information related to CARESJ or County-related activities.

NOTICING OF MEETINGS

- A. The CARESJ meeting schedule, agenda, and minutes will be posted on a CARESJ website at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to the meeting.
- B. While regularly scheduled CARESJ meetings will not be held publicly, the public may access the CARESJ meeting schedule, standing agenda and minutes by independently accessing them on the CARESJ website, or by requesting materials be sent to them electronically, as available.

COMPENSATION

- A. CARESJ members may receive a stipend as compensation for their public service as established annually by resolution of the Board of Supervisors.

AGENDAS

- A. All regularly scheduled meetings of CARESJ will include a standing agenda with the following items incorporated:
 - i. Welcome and Land Acknowledgement.
 - ii. Advisory topics of interest for round table discussion.

- B. CARESJ members who wish to add specific advisory topics to an upcoming CARESJ meeting agenda may submit those topics to the CAO or their designee at least five (5) days in advance of the meeting.

MINUTES

- A. In accordance with Santa Cruz County Code [Section 2.38.160](#)(C), CARESJ meeting minutes shall be prepared and maintained by the CAO or their designee.
- B. CARESJ meeting minutes shall contain notes describing the major considerations discussed as they relate to reporting requirements for memorializing meeting dates, times and locations, meeting attendance, work done to achieve CARESJ goals and accomplishments; and the setting of future CARESJ goals.
- C. Once finalized, CARESJ meeting minutes shall be published and made available on the CARESJ public-facing website.

REPORTS

- A. In accordance with Santa Cruz County Code [Section 2.38.170](#)(C), CARESJ will issue a report to the CAO according to a schedule set by the Board of Supervisors, highlighting the activities, accomplishments and future goals of the group relating to:
 - i. Role(s) of CARESJ;
 - ii. CARESJ meeting dates, times and locations;
 - iii. CARESJ goals set, and accomplishments met during the reporting period, including a summary of activities, special projects and workshops or seminars that CARESJ members have participated in, when applicable; and
 - iv. CARESJ future goals.
- B. In accordance with Santa Cruz County Code [Section 2.38.170](#)(E), CARESJ will submit an attendance report to the Board of Supervisors at the end of each calendar year.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement will be accomplished through reports provided to the Board of Supervisors, and through opportunities as determined by CARESJ in collaboration with the CAO.