

Attachment F

DEI Regional Symposium

Overview

In 2020, the County of Santa Barbara launched the JOIN Race, Equity, and Inclusion Framework. Through the framework, department heads, assistant department heads, and managers were introduced to concepts around racism, diversity, equity, inclusion, strategic questioning, and unconscious bias. This was a foundational initiative for the County. The County Executive Officer, Mona Miyasato was envisioning ways to expand on these with a regional focus. In 2021, the DEI Regional Group was formed by leaders from the County of Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, the City of Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo. The DEI Regional Group recognized that although they were serving different communities, they were aligned on seeking answers to DEI questions that would benefit all. This call to action to address regional questions led to the launch of the DEI Symposium.

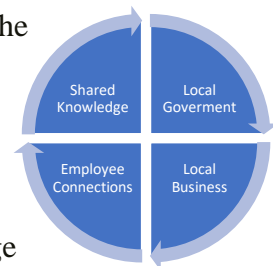
Challenge

Local government leaders did not have a forum where they could collectively connect, discuss and explore questions amongst themselves and key staff about equity and inclusion concepts and approaches. They did not have a safe space for conversation and discuss the real challenges in accomplishing this work in local government where managers must balance fairness, effectiveness, and efficiency. Given that local governments vary in their approaches, understanding, or acceptance of DEI work, the DEI Symposium would provide participants a way to learn more about, initiate, or further advance equity and inclusion in local governments.

Solution

The DEI Regional Group believes that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are essential components of any successful organization and they needed a safe space to further the work. They created a planning committee that included representatives from various municipalities in the regions to implement and expand the program. It is a collaborative effort that involves local government, local businesses, and engagement from public and private sector employees. One example of this collaboration is the Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity (DIBE) external group consisting of over 30 location organizations from the public and private sectors.

In 2023, **11** organizations participated in the event—**four** from the private sector and **seven** local government organizations, two higher Education Institutions. Eight topics were covered and more than **127** participants. During the rising cost of hosting the event, the committee pursued securing additional sponsors for the event. The DEI Symposium was sponsored by the County of Santa Barbara, The City of Goleta, the City of Santa Barbara, LinkedIn, and Cottage Hospital. **Sponsors donated a total of \$9000 in addition to the funds that were approved by the County of Santa Barbara’s Board of Supervisors.** Organizations that could not provide financial support but wanted their employees to attend could register their employees at a rate of \$250 per person.



Innovation

The Symposium is an innovative solution that not only answered the questions related to DEI that the group wanted to address but has served as a bridge for building regional

communities. It is a collaborative effort that involves local government, local businesses, and engagement from public and private sector employees. One example of this collaboration is the Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity external group consisting of over 30 location organizations from the public and private sectors. To support Santa Barbara County's Human Resources planning committee, members from DIBE volunteered to help inform the development of the 2023 Regional DEI Symposium agenda. This team consisted of local DEI consultants and professionals in the DEI realm including the City of Santa Barbara, Cottage Health, Pacific Pride, Pacifica Institute, and Apeel Sciences. Lending their expertise from lived experience but also their educational and professional backgrounds, they provided suggestions and key insights to designing engaging, informative, and inspiring content to facilitate conversations about inclusion and belonging in the workplace.

The DIBE group continues to meet quarterly and provides a welcoming platform where organizations can share the challenges, successes, as well as resources for DEI initiatives. To further the integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion into the fabric of the work the regional group, Santa Barbara County transferred the yearly planning of the event into the County Human Resource, Organizational, and Talent Development Division. This group will take the lead in working with other organizations and staff to plan the event; it is also a way to demonstrate that this work plays a vital role in the organization's success—it is not a temporary stand-alone fly-by-night effort. It will assist our employees in being better prepared to serve their communities and residents.

Results

The first DEI Symposium was launched online in February of 2022. There was a total of 55 participants (leaders, department heads, and managers) representing 11 jurisdictions who engaged in a conversation on how to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in all regions. The second conference in the Fall of 2022 was held on-site in Santa Maria and the attendance doubled. Sponsors were comprised of the founding organization of the DEI Regional Group—the City of Santa Maria, the City of Santa Barbara, the City of San Luis Obispo, and the County of Santa Barbara. There was a focus on inclusion, recruiting, and acknowledging that it took intentionality and time to create inclusive work cultures.

Survey results from the DEI Regional Symposium confirm that starting a DEI Regional Symposium to create a safe space to discuss and learn more about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was timely and relevant. 121 employees attended and 71% of those who completed the conference survey strongly agreed that DEI is relevant work and 97% indicated that they were comfortable sharing their thoughts and feeling at the symposium.

In May 2023, 127 employees attended the conference that was held in Solvang. The 3rd Symposium built on the success of the previous symposiums and expanded its reach to ALL employees, not just leadership but the workforce at the County. DEI efforts are expanded beyond leadership and throughout all levels of the organization. Empowering employees to participate and get involved to drive accountability-DEI initiatives go beyond HR and into each dept. within organizations (this puts into action the statement of commitment that the county adopted in 2020).

Another aspect of the symposium was that private organizations were invited to attend. This demonstrated how employers in this region share a commitment to employee empowerment, employee resource groups, and encourage workplace conversations about DEI. Of the 56

participants who completed the survey, 82% strongly agreed that the DEI Symposium was relevant to my work and 96% said they were comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Replicability

Based on the feedback of the participants and the success of the program, the DEI Symposium will be hosted annually and integrated as a program within Santa Barbara County's Human Resources Department. To replicate this initiative, organizations should pursue partnerships around the DEI areas where they are aligned by identifying the gaps in the DEI dialog that they would like to address. Partnerships should include non-profit, government, and private sector organizations to ensure employees from all sectors can benefit from the dialogue and sense of inclusion the DEI Regional Symposium provides. Obtaining additional allyship and financial support from the private sector will benefit the communities and organizations they serve through ongoing education, relationship building, and fostering of understanding of the that is cultivated at the DEI Regional Symposium.

Project Contact

Dr. June Mighty, Organizational & Talent Development Division Chief
Santa Barbara County Human Resources Department
jmighty@countyofsb.org
805-692-1740

Additional Materials

Attachment A- [2022 DEI Symposium Summary](#)

Attachment B – [2023 DEI Symposium Summary](#)

Link to website: [DEI Regional Symposium](#)