



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Joanna Kaiserman, Senior Land Use Planner

DATE: December 13, 2022

SUBJECT: **Work Session*:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan

Purpose

Staff is presenting the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategic Plan for the Commission's consideration and approval. The DEI Strategic Plan reflects input from members of the public, partners, and Commissioners received over the past year and at the July 12, 2022 Commission meeting. Staff welcomes questions, discussion, and any suggestions for changes. Staff requests the Commission's approval to move forward with this plan at the December 13th Commission meeting.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Commission approve moving forward with the DEI Strategic Plan as presented. Staff will finalize any changes requested.

Plan Overview

The DEI Strategic Plan serves as a guide for the Commission to identify potential inequities in our work, to develop and apply an equity lens to implementation of the Management Plan, Commission operations, and policy decisions, and to establish trusted partnerships that will guide our work into the future. The Strategic Plan is a living document intended to be reviewed and updated as necessary. The plan is organized into four main parts:

- I. **DEI Commitment.** This includes the purpose, goal, and vision of the Commission in creating a DEI Strategic Plan, the directives from the states of Oregon and Washington regarding DEI and establishing accountability within the agency with methods for evaluating progress.
- II. **DEI in Organizational Operations.** This part focuses on the Commission's internal operations and how we can integrate DEI components into our daily work.
- III. **Equitable and Inclusive Programs.** This part explores integrating DEI into the Commission's current programs. This includes reviewing the Management Plan to identify potential needs for policy development and/or revisions, as well as our other programs such as Vital Sign Indicators and development reviews. The actions taken in this section will include a public process for public review and input into possible policy changes that may be needed.

- IV. **Community Engagement and Outreach.** This part describes how the Commission plans to engage with the Gorge communities, which include establishing partnerships and building relationships with organizations and individuals.

Under each part there are subsections outlining different components of the Commission's work. Staff intends to identify goals, strategies, actions, and activity measures for these components with the Commission's guidance, modeled after the structure in the Commission's draft Climate Change Action Plan. In the framework, staff has provided two example tables of goals, strategies, and actions under "Agency Policies" and under "Climate Change Action Plan". This framework is a work in progress, and staff is looking to the Commission for feedback on whether it agrees with this approach.

Input Received

The Commission last had a DEI work session at the July 12, 2022 Commission meeting. At that meeting, staff presented the framework for the Commission's DEI Strategic Plan, including an overview of the Gorge Commission's current work on DEI and the development of a plan for internal operations and external outreach opportunities to diverse communities in the NSA. At the July Commission meeting, staff received feedback on the proposed framework from Commissioners and the public. Staff identified key themes that emerged from the comments, which are listed below, along with how staff has incorporated the feedback into the plan.

1. Communication and outreach: focus on relationship building.

- Stated that building trust and relationships is one of the most important things the Commission needs to do before proceeding with the DEI plan.
- To engage communities, the Commission needs to provide an opportunity to understand the work that is done by the Commission. This will increase the value of the contribution they make.
- Clarify that the DEI strategic plan is an ongoing process and that stakeholders will have input along the way as the Commission identifies gaps and possible solutions to issues that emerge.

These suggestions for engagement are reflected in Part IV of the DEI Strategic Plan, which focuses on the Commission building relational partnerships with individuals, partner agencies and organizations, and various communities throughout the Gorge.

2. Focus DEI work as directed by States, Act, and Management Plan.

- Cautioned the Commission against conducting DEI work that goes beyond what is prescribed by state government leadership.
- Urged the Commission to assure that while protecting resources that also caring for the people who live in the Gorge be addressed.

Commission staff is following the directives of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies in the Management Plan in developing the DEI Strategic Plan and is committed to implementing DEI strategies in a way that is aligned with the two purposes of the National Scenic Area Act. The Commission has also chosen to follow Oregon and Washington state directives to agencies related

to DEI, Oregon Executive Order 22-11 and Washington Executive Orders 22-02 and 22-04. An explanation of these executive orders and the Commission's plan to address them are found in Part I of the DEI Strategic Plan.

3. General things to consider moving forward.

- Suggested that while thinking about DEI, it is important to think about socio-economic equity, disability equity, and LGBTQ+ equity as the Commission explores how it can become a more equitable institution within the Gorge.
- Given the Commission's tight budget with no discretionary budget for DEI training, a commenter highlighted that "no-cost trainings" could be an issue by putting an undue burden on the trainers the Commission may need to work with.
- Suggested that the Commission examine how other communities with desirable areas that attract high-income visitors and residents address the challenge of income and equity disparity within those communities and build sustainability that brings the first and second purpose of the Act together.

The Commission's commitment to equity and inclusion in our work for all regardless of race, ethnicity, color, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, veteran status and disability status is included in Part I of the DEI Strategic Plan and is also reflected in the DEI commitments of both the State of Oregon and the State of Washington. Consideration of fair compensation for facilitators of trainings for Commissioners and staff is reflected in the discussion of educational opportunities in Part II of the Plan. The Commission also submitted policy option packages to both states requesting funding to pay for DEI trainings.

Next Steps

Once the DEI Strategic Plan is approved by the Commission, staff will begin work on implementation and evaluation of progress through activity measures identified in the Strategic Plan. Several priorities identified for the DEI Strategic Plan are already underway and support other Commission priorities. Our work on these will continue through the winter and into Spring 2023.

- PEAR Plan - In developing the DEI Strategic Plan, Commission staff looked to the Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Plan and Playbook developed by the Washington State Office of Equity to help create a vision, values, and goals for the DEI Plan that are in alignment with the State's PEAR Plan. The Commission and other Washington State agencies developed their own agency PEAR Strategic Plans and submitted them to the state in September 2022. The Commission's DEI Strategic Plan incorporates the goals and outcomes identified in the Commission's "PEAR Strategic Plan" as well.
- Climate Change Action Plan – The Commission is working on actions at the intersection of priorities in the Climate Change Action Plan and DEI Strategic Plan. Notably, the Commission is establishing a diverse team of individuals who can help the Commission identify and rectify areas of work that create or perpetuate inequities. Climate change justice will be a topic for this team to explore. The Commission is also developing relationships with local community groups who would like to partner on community engagement and events described in the Climate Change Action Plan.

- Climate Stewards Program – Commission staff are beginning to develop the curriculum for this pilot program in collaboration with Oregon State University Extension. This pilot will adapt the Climate Stewards curriculum created by the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources with a focus on climate action here in the Gorge. The purpose of the Climate Stewards Program is to prepare community members to communicate and engage in local transformative efforts to advance community and ecosystem resilience in a changing climate. For this pilot focused on our region, the Commission is exploring a program design that includes workforce development, capstone projects, and volunteer opportunities that directly support implementation of the Climate Change Action Plan. The Commission will be working with OSU Extension and other partners on program design over the next several months for a pilot course in summer or fall 2023. The Climate Stewards pilot provides another opportunity for the Commission to listen to and learn from diverse communities and build relationships with others working on climate change in the Gorge.
- Management Plan – Commission staff will be reviewing the current Management Plan to determine if policies and guidelines inadvertently create a basis for bias in standards applied within the National Scenic Area. Staff will examine all the policies through an equity lens and then determine if any changes should be highlighted/discussed during the next decadal Management Plan review process. If any policies will need to be reviewed for their equity, it will be done so through public workshops and comment periods in order to determine how best to improve those policies to meet DEI goals.

ATTACHMENTS

A. DEI Strategic Plan