



**TO:** Columbia River Gorge Commission  
**FROM:** Joanna Kaiserman, Senior Land Use Planner  
**DATE:** April 8, 2025  
**SUBJECT:** **Executive Director's Report:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Update

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### **Background**

The purpose of this staff report is to give an overview of the Commission's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) commitments, the state equity directives from Oregon and Washington and state funding allocated for this work, and to introduce the proposal from the Avarna Group for equity workshops with the Commission.

During the June 2020 public comment period for the Gorge 2020 Draft Management Plan, staff received comments from individuals related to the topic of equity. The Commission discussed how to respond to these public comments and decided to include a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement and policies into the updated Management Plan.

The Commission made a commitment to focus on internal management, explore Commissioner and staff perspectives on DEI, begin to build competency in DEI among Commissioners and staff, and develop a DEI Strategic Plan. In December 2022, the Commission approved the DEI Strategic Plan, which identified goals and includes strategies and action steps for advancing toward those DEI goals. One of the action steps identified in the approved Strategic Plan is to have professionally facilitated discussions with Commissioners about our agency's equity values. The Commission received funding from both Oregon and Washington for this in the 2023-2025 biennium.

### **State Equity Directives**

Both Oregon and Washington governors have prioritized equity work for agencies in the state. Washington State's Human Resources Directive 20-02 for state agencies included the requirement to update or create workforce Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies and procedures. Although the Gorge Commission is not a state agency, staff chose to follow the directive and in October 2020, developed and submitted agency DEI policies and procedures. Following a directive by Washington State's Office of Equity, the Commission convened a Pro-

Equity, Anti-Racism (PEAR) Team to advise the Commission on implementing the DEI Strategic Plan. The PEAR Team first convened in April 2023, and continues to meet regularly, providing staff with recommendations. The Oregon Governor’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion along with the Office of Cultural Change created a statewide DEI Action Plan, released in 2021. The Office of Cultural Change, was established in June 2020 to promote DEI efforts across the enterprise and evaluate and implement processes that remove systemic barriers throughout state government. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are values shared by both states, with both Oregon and Washington directing agencies to create DEI plans and show progress within the agency and through external engagement and outreach. The Gorge Commission received funding from Oregon and Washington specifically for DEI work for fiscal year 2025 (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025).

### **Internal Equity Training**

Beginning in 2023, the Commission convened a Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Team. The purpose of this group is to facilitate conversations with community members to provide the Commission with guidance on implementing the DEI Strategic Plan and Climate Change Action Plan, while building trust and strengthening relationships with community groups. One of the first recommendations provided by the PEAR team was to focus on the goal of fostering ongoing DEI training, growth, and leadership among management, staff, and the Commission. PEAR Team members emphasized the importance of having a foundational DEI training in order for staff and Commissioners to better understand how the Commission’s work may be perpetuating inequity and where changes may be needed. The PEAR Team emphasized the importance of first doing the internal foundation building amongst staff and Commissioners and then turning the focus to external engagement. This recommendation led staff to seek out DEI trainings, and based on recommendations from other organizations, chose to contract with the Center for Diversity and the Environment (CDE) to facilitate an organizational equity training for staff in December 2024.

### **The Avarna Group**

Following the staff training, Commission staff realized that building a shared understanding between staff and Commissioners about the Commission’s values would be essential to our work moving forward. Staff reached out to the Avarna Group, who works with nonprofit, private, and public sector organizations, to explore the services that they offer.

Avarna’s vision is: “We dream of a more resilient and connected world where all humans sustain healthy relationships with ourselves, one another, and our planet.” Their mission is: “We manifest this dream by empowering organizations in the environmental, conservation, outdoor, and climate movement to transform their ecosystems—including workforces, workplaces, programs, and outdoor spaces—toward justice, fairness and belonging. We do this

through strategic planning, facilitation, assessments, advice, coaching, learning experiences, curriculum development, toolkits, and resources.”

They have worked with over 400 organizations since launching in 2015. Below are examples of these organizations.

*Public sector:*

- [Colorado Parks & Wildlife](#)
- [Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources](#)
- [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#)
- [National Park Service](#)
- Regions/Ranger districts of the [U.S. Forest Service](#) (including the Willamette National Forest and [Region 8](#))
- [BLM Fire & Aviation](#)
- [City of Prineville, OR](#)
- [City of Walnut Creek, CA](#)
- [Oregon Water Resources Department](#)
- [Upper Willamette Soil & Water Conservation District](#)
- [National Ocean & Atmospheric Agency Climate Adaptation Partnership Program](#)
- [Sonoran Joint Venture](#)
- [Interagency Visitor Use Management Council \(IVUMC\)](#)

*Environmental Funders:*

- [Resources Legacy Fund](#)
- [National Park Foundation](#)
- [Conservation Lands Foundation](#)
- [Kresge Foundation](#)
- [California State Parks Foundation](#)
- [Greening Youth Foundation](#)
- [National Park Foundation](#)
- [National Forest Foundation](#)

*Environmental Organizations:*

- [Alaska Wilderness League](#)
- [American Rivers](#)
- [Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation](#)
- [Building Decarbonization Coalition](#)
- [California Native Plant Society](#)
- [CalTrout](#)
- [Center for Humans & Nature](#)
- [Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#)
- [Clean Energy Group](#)
- [Conservation Lands Foundation](#)
- [Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide](#)
- [Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy](#)
- [High Seas Alliance](#)
- [International Fund for Animal Welfare](#)
- [Mississippi River Network](#)
- [Mohonk Preserve](#)
- [Oceana](#)
- [River Network](#)
- [Save the Waves](#)
- [Siuslaw Coho Partnership](#)
- [Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative](#)
- [Tuleyome](#)
- [Upper Willamette Stewardship Network](#)
- [WildEarth Guardians](#)
- [Wild Montana](#)
- [Wilderness Workshop](#)

Avarna provided the Commission with a proposal to support the Commission with foundational education around concepts of justice, belonging, fairness, access, and more as it relates to conservation and environmentalism, and to integrate that learning into building shared values and beliefs and reframing the Commission’s DEI Strategic Plan. Below is an outline of Avarna’s proposal and proposed budget.

**Proposal: Discovery and Learning**

1. Pre-recorded webinar: *The What & Why of the Work Sometimes Called DEI*.
  - a. History: Where did DEI come from?
  - b. Definitions: What does DEI actually mean?
  - c. Language: What are ways organizations can describe values that typically fall within the “DEI” umbrella? We introduce the 4 P’s framework to help you talk more clearly about the work.
  - d. Why: Why are these values important to the work of organizations in the outdoor, conservation and environmental field?
2. Discovery: Begin with a discovery process to establish trust and understand the Columbia River Gorge Commission’s mission, strategic goals, and challenges.
3. May 13th Commission Meeting: Learning Session 1: In a 2-hour online public meeting, we build off the pre-recorded webinar to facilitate discussions with Commissioners around the evolving landscape of DEI and what it means for the work of the Commission, particularly in the Oregon and Washington DEI landscape. Commissioners will leave with greater awareness and understanding of the evolving landscape of DEI, what DEI can mean today for the work of the Commission, and how to begin reframing DEI values in a more precise, plain, principled, and non-performative way.
4. June 10th Commission Meeting: Learning Session 2: Reckoning with histories of land use and reimagining it in service of land and people: This two-hour session is focused on land use history and its intersections with the body of work sometimes called “DEI.”

Service	Timeline	Estimated Avarna hours	Estimated fees
1. Pre-recorded webinar	April 2025	N/A	\$500 flat licensing fee
2. Discovery	April 2025	20	\$7,000
3. Learning Session 1 (2 hours)	May 13, 2025	10	\$3,500
4. Learning Session 2 (2 hours)	Jun. 10, 2025	20	\$7,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$18,000</b>