



# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND  
CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Councilmember Esparza

**SUBJECT:** SEE BELOW

**DATE:** 6/10/2021

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Approved *Maya Esparza*

Date: 6/10/21

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**SUBJECT: OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES AND WELCOMING  
SAN JOSE PLAN 2021-2024**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the Office of Immigrant Affairs Activities and Welcoming San José Plan 2021-2024 Report, and direct staff to:

1. Return to Council with further analysis, and community engagement and feedback from immigrant communities and other communities of color regarding the preferred terminologies of these communities, and a strategy for utilizing terminology that is as inclusive and culturally sensitive to all of our diverse communities as possible.
2. With regard to addressing Anti-Blackness and other forms of discrimination within our immigrant communities, return to Council:
  - a. with a strategy focused first on intragroup dialogue. In order to provide a strong foundation for future intergroup dialogue, convene initial conversations around Anti-Blackness and other forms of discrimination. Intragroup discussions are fundamental due to issues of intergenerational trauma, history, and violence.
  - b. Based on the learnings from intragroup community dialogues, develop a strategy to promote inter-group, inter-community dialogues that will bridge divisions and allow participants to understand the lived experiences of those from different racial and national backgrounds. These community dialogues should be centered on Anti-Blackness and use this as a foundation upon which to build inclusive dialogues around the lived experiences of community members and the effects of bias and discrimination.

## **BACKGROUND**

As a City, we strive to create a community where diversity is celebrated, and where all of our residents feel accepted and welcomed for who they are as members of our community. We also strive to acknowledge, address, and dismantle the systemic and institutional racism and barriers that have shaped the experiences of our communities of color for generations.

This work begins with the words we use. Those words may determine who feels included, and who feels excluded, from the work we do as a City. Words like “Latinx,” for example, can be affirming for those who are excluded from the gender binary of “Latino/a,” but it is also an anglicized word that may have no meaning to a monolingual Spanish-speaking immigrant. Similarly, “BIPOC” has a powerful meaning for many in our black and indigenous communities, but can also leave groups who do not know the origin of the term feeling excluded. The tension in these terms may be generational, it may correlate to levels of education and familiarity with academic discourse, and with one’s native language.

While we know that no single set of terms will satisfy everyone, we owe it to our community to conduct further outreach, engagement, and be very thoughtful and intentional about how we can adopt terminology or multiple terminologies that are as inclusive and accessible to as many of our residents as possible, being cognizant of the reality that different terms will speak to different audiences. This requires us to listen carefully to our communities, and utilize terminology that reflects their own preferences, cultures, and values. We may not be able to please everyone, but we can, and must, demonstrate to our community that we understand the importance of making the good faith effort to listen to our residents, and ensure that they are heard.

One of the key elements of the Welcoming San José 2.0 Plan under the Access and Engagement strategy involves working to address the biases and prejudices that exist within our immigrant communities, as exist in all of our communities. Foundational to this effort is addressing Anti-Blackness within our communities—immigrant or otherwise. The painful history of our country has illustrated pointedly that Anti-Blackness is a theme that has run through nearly every other racial or ethnic group in the United States, and continues today. This work should form the cornerstone of intragroup dialogues that will foster the opportunity for meaningful personal connections and interactions to begin the difficult effort of unpacking biases and prejudice. Building upon on this effort, staff should develop a strategy to expand these sessions, centered on Anti-Blackness, to intergroup, inter-community dialogues that will focus on the lived experiences of those from diverse racial and national backgrounds.

This requires understanding the unique ways in which bias and discrimination impacts and affects each different group, because ultimately, learning about the experiences of as many different communities and groups as possible has proven to be more effective in addressing bias against any one individual group. Santa Clara County, for example, has hosted a series of sessions, with format and training by the National Compadres Network, that begin with healing spaces as a precursor to the dialogues, where community members from diverse backgrounds and experiences are able to connect, open up to one another, and develop an environment conducive to having these conversations. Through intergroup dialogues, participants are not only able to form personal connections, but are able to see firsthand the differences within people who

may look the same, and the similarities between those who look different. Rather than learning about systemically-based institutional racism at a theoretical level, these systems are able to be experienced through the personal, direct impacts on those participating in the dialogues, allowing for a deeper understanding and appreciation for the effects of these systems of oppression.

For these dialogues to be effective, we must be mindful of the self-selection bias that can lead to participants who are already likely to be those most open to new ideas and challenging conversations around race. Based on the experiences of other organizations that have done this work, I encourage staff to investigate potential incentives, even as simple as providing free food and refreshments, as part of developing the work plan for these dialogues, so that we bring in a more diverse population for whom these conversations may be more difficult—and more needed.

The work of creating a Welcoming San José for all our communities begins with listening to them, and striving to be as inclusive as possible, in our words, in our policies, and in our actions. It continues with creating meaningful opportunities for residents of all different backgrounds to interact and learn from each other, and for we as a City to learn from them as well. We approach this effort with the humility to acknowledge that this is a learning process for all of us, but the conviction that working together, we can make meaningful and lasting change for the better for all of our communities here in San José.

*The signers of this memorandum have not had, and will not have, any private conversation with any other member of the City Council, or that member's staff, concerning any action discussed in the memorandum, and that each signer's staff members have not had, and have been instructed not to have, any such conversation with any other member of the City Council or that member's staff.*