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County of Humboldt Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Assessment Project

August – November 2024

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I. PURPOSE/OVERVIEW



Coaching Imperative has partnered with the County of Humboldt since 2021 when the first DEI survey was launched. This year, 2024, the same DEI survey instrument was distributed to track the changes in the organization over time.

The Survey Instrument: Coaching Imperative developed a survey instrument collaboratively with Humboldt County. The survey's focus

areas include Hiring and Retention, Career Development, Personal Experiences, Policies and Procedures, Inclusion and Belonging, Experience with Supervisor, Ongoing Diversity Training, and Community Relations. The survey instrument is modelled after the [SHRM Diversity and Inclusion Survey](#). Coaching Imperative collects and analyses the data, and, per the contract, all of the data is the property of the County of Humboldt's Office of Human Resources/Risk Management upon completion of the project.

Focus Groups: Coaching Imperative conducted three focus groups. These sessions brought together different members of the organization to discuss and share insights about their experiences, perceptions, and ideas related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The qualitative data supports the quantitative data from the survey and helps inform strategies, policies, and practices to improve inclusivity within the organization. Participants were encouraged to speak from personal experience while allowing for multiple truths to foster individual and organizational learning.

Individual Interviews: Department Heads were given an opportunity to participate in 1-1 interviews anonymously. These interviews helped to gather in-depth insights, understand leadership perspectives, and identify department-specific challenges and opportunities. These interviews also explore leadership's role in promoting an inclusive environment and their readiness to support DEI strategies.

About Coaching Imperative: Our human-designed, wellness-centered approach includes Assessment, Education, Training, and Coaching. These four components complement each other and provide a pathway for holistic, sustainable growth and change. At Coaching Imperative, the key to overcoming challenges—individual, team, or organizational—lies in your cultural and emotional intelligence. We help leaders and teams foster authentic connections, empowering them to collaborate sustainably and build cultures where belonging and well-being are at the forefront. Coaching Imperative believes embracing diversity is the only way to recognize our collective humanity. We meet our clients where they are and help them reach their goals.

II. METHODOLOGY/ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Using a multi-phased and mixed methodology approach to data gathering, the research processes included:

2024

- 691 Responses to Survey Response.
- Three Focus Groups 54 Respondents. Focus group dates are September 18th, 25th, and November 4th 2024
- 7 Departmental Directors Interviews. Interviews conducted between August – October, 2024

2021

- 818 Responses to Survey. August 11 – August 23, 2021
- Three Focus Groups 13 Respondents. Focus group dates are July 21, 22, and 30, 2021.
- 13 Departmental Directors Interviews. Interviews conducted between June 7 – July 6, 2021

III. KEY TERMS

DIVERSITY: Psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any individual, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles.

EQUITY: The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to provide equal opportunities to all groups.

INCLUSION: The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate and bring their whole, authentic selves to work. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in the words/actions/thoughts of all people.

LEADERS: Leadership is a collective, relational process whereby individuals move themselves and others through practices of discernment, growth, and change to achieve health equity with and for those that our systems have pushed to the margins.

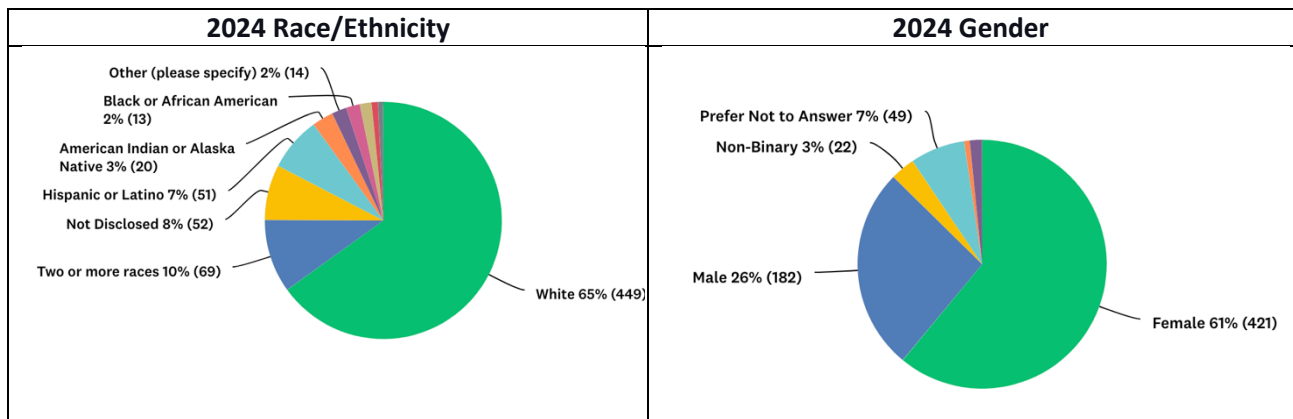
IMPLICIT BIAS: Attitudes or stereotypes towards people without our conscious knowledge. These biases operate beyond our control and awareness, inform our perception of a person or social group and influence our decision-making and behavior toward a person or social group.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: A concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society. This is measured through power distribution, wealth, education, healthcare, and other opportunities for personal activity and social gain. Equal rights +Equal opportunity + Equal treatment.

IV. SURVEY DATA

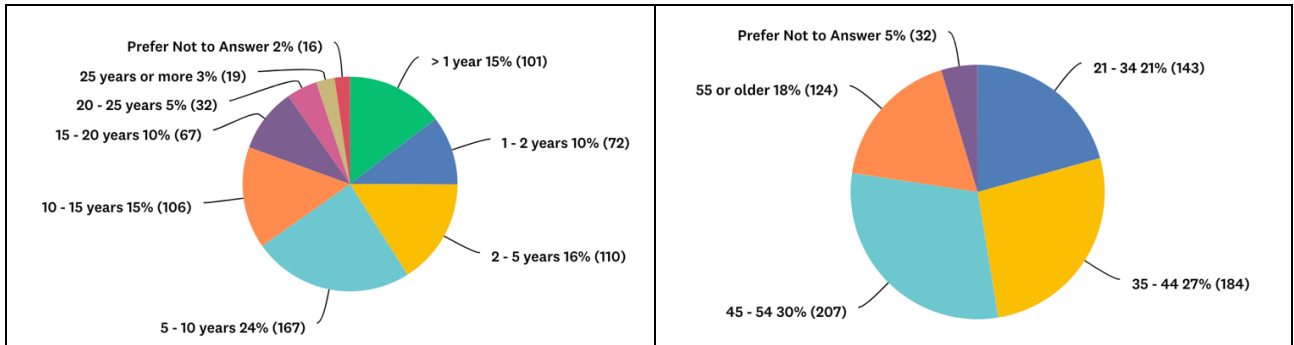
Demographics

In 2024 most of the respondents to the survey were White (65%) and Women (61%). This is a slight decrease from the 2021 administration of the DEI Survey Project. In 2021 most of the respondents to the survey were White (70%) and Women (64%).

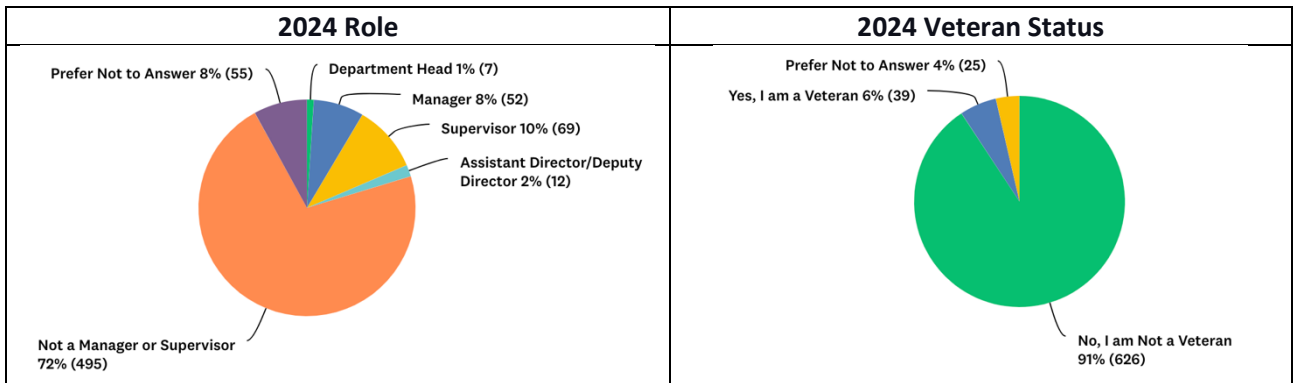


In 2024, the 45-54 age range had the highest response rate, 30%, with 35-44 second at 27% and 21-34 third at 21%. In 2021, the response rate of those 45-54 (24%) and those 35-44 (25%) were lower, while the 21-34 age group response rate was slightly higher, at 24%.

2024 Years of Service	2024 Age Range
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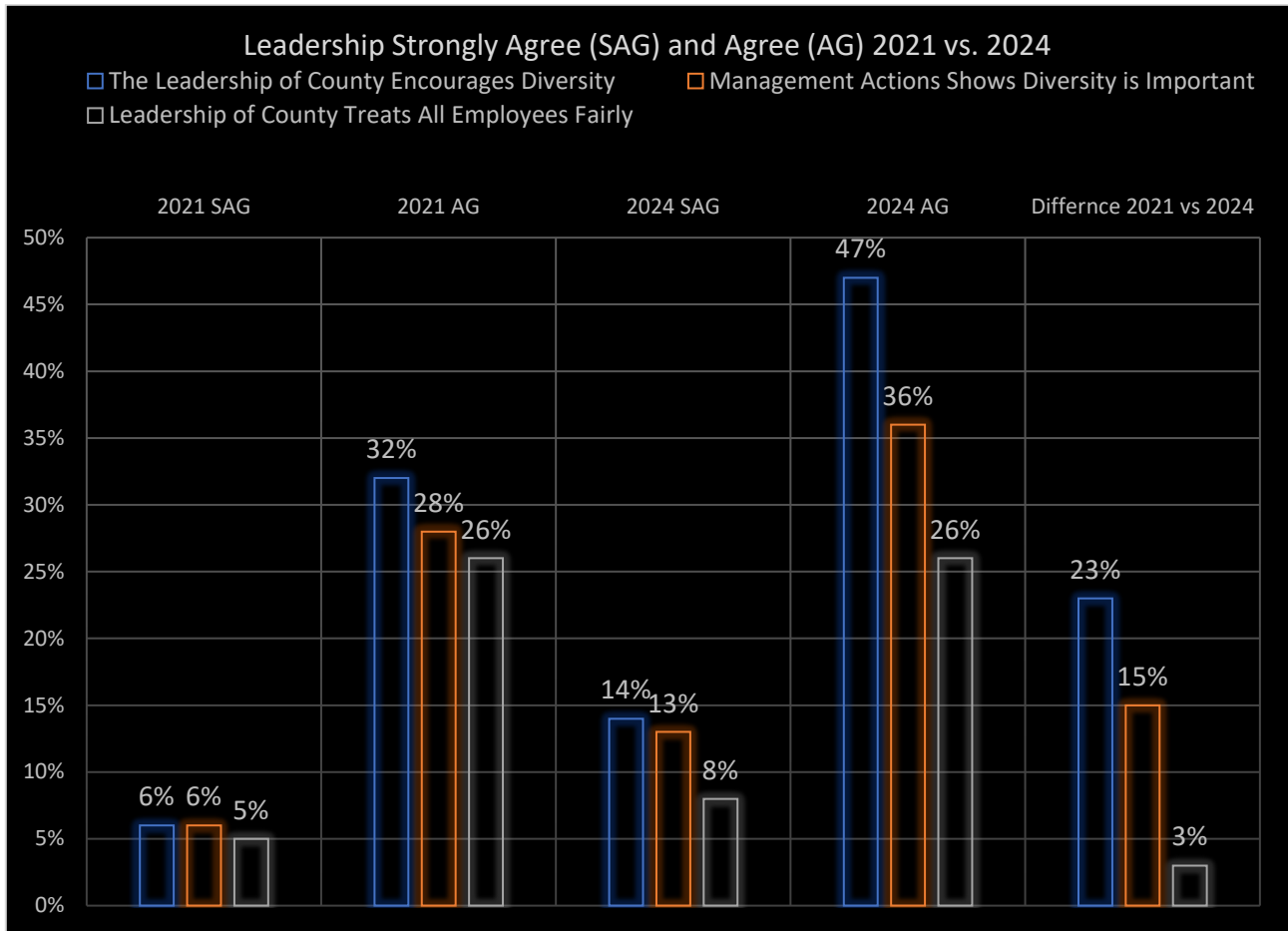


In 2024 the majority of respondents were not managers or supervisors, 72% consistent with 2021's data of 73%. Only 6% of workers are Veterans, down three percentage points from 2021's 9%.



Leadership

The chart below compares the key leadership data collected in 2024 to the baseline data collected in 2021. The percentage in 2024 rose to 61% a 23% increase. There is also an increase in the percentage who strongly agree or agree that management actions show that diversity is important. These increases are significant and show improvement.

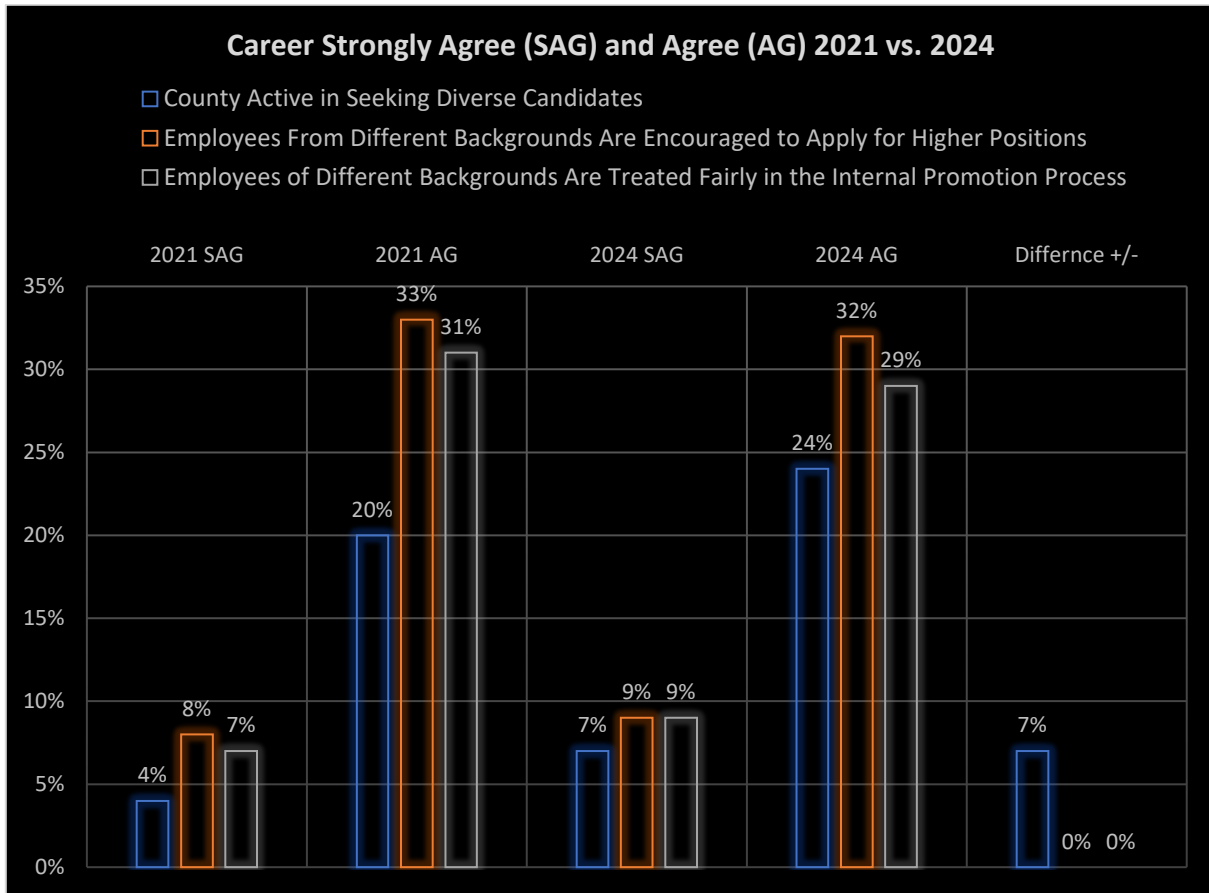


"I am a member of a diversity group but find no time to attend. Too busy at work. I have personal experience with the "fairness to all employees" statement. Although I have the very best boss ever (exceptional in the areas of fairness, overall diversity, etc.), my lived experience in observing how others have been treated at the "executive" level... could use some work in that department."

While there has been improvement, there are still some within the county who do not support the DEI initiatives because they either feel that diversity is divisive or that too much attention is placed on race to the neglect of other communities like people with disabilities or LGBTQ populations. It should be noted that this resistance to DEI is not unique to the County of Humboldt, but is a naturally occurring phenomenon that should be monitored and supported with opportunities for cross cultural dialogue.

Career

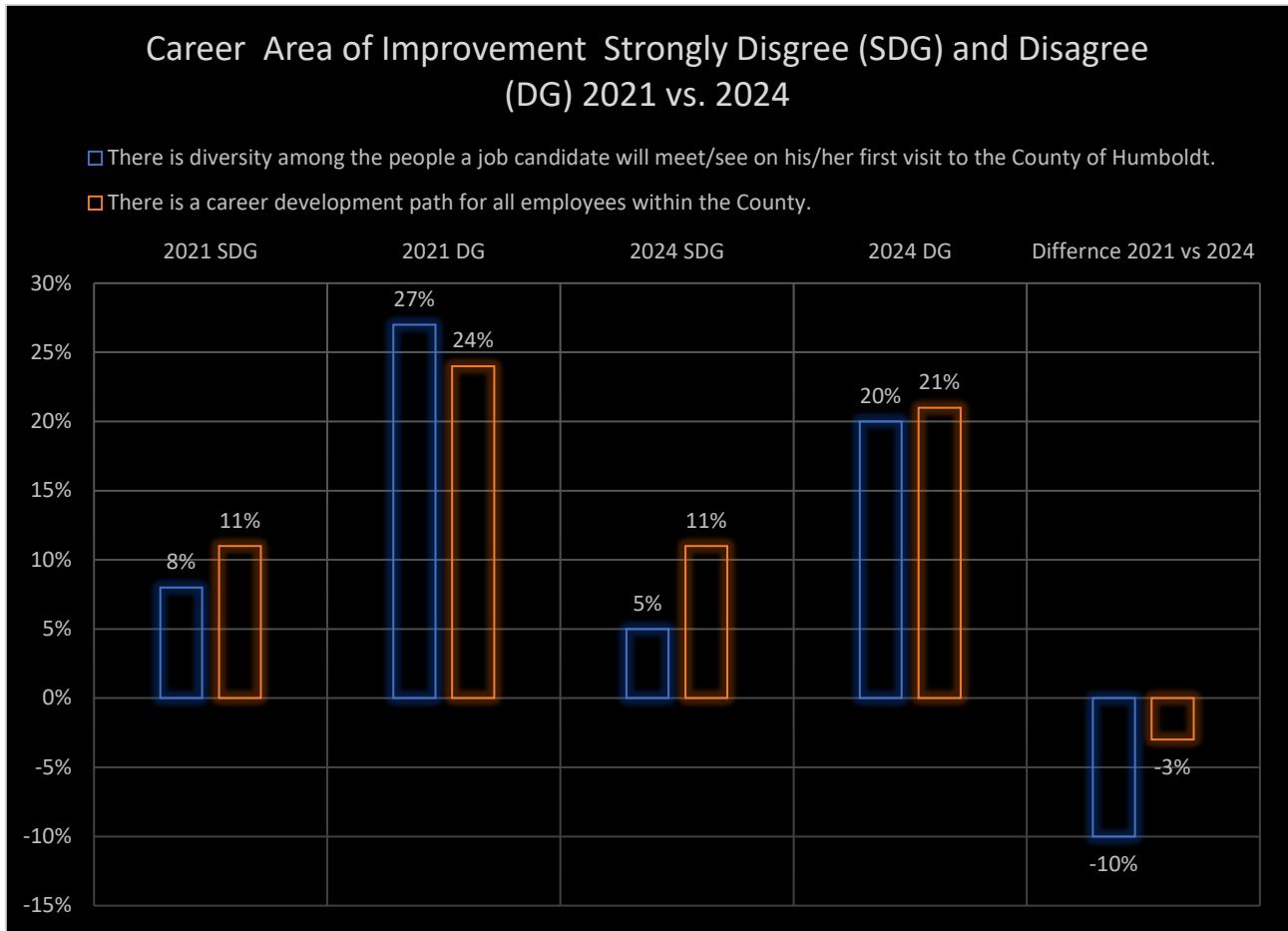
In 2024, there is a seven percent increase in those who agree and strongly agree that the county actively seeks diverse candidates. In 2021, the survey respondents indicated that 24% (agree or strongly agree) believe the county actively seeks diverse candidates. Yet respondents' perceptions of employees from different backgrounds as being encouraged to apply for higher positions or treated fairly in the internal promotion process remained the same. The strongly agree and agree distribution slightly shifted, but the overall combined percentage did not change.



Given the demographic composition of the County, making significant visual changes in diversity is a challenge. Another challenge identified is positions listed as internal, limiting the diversity of the pool to the existing members of a particular office or department, which may or may not be diverse.

There is an unfair advantage that takes place when promotions happen within a department. Some positions are "department only" while others are extended to the public. I saw two supervisor positions post in my department recently where one was listed as department promotion only (best friend of the hiring manager was applying) I heard the listing was open for 3 days. While the other listed open to the public for 6 weeks and management took steps to recruit nationally and contact local colleges to have students apply. (no friends of management were applying)

In 2024, the percentage of survey respondents who strongly disagreed or disagreed that job candidates would meet/see and there is a discernable career development path for all employees in the County decreased by ten percent and three percent, respectively. These decreases acknowledge that people within the County of Humboldt are seeing some tangible efforts to diversify.



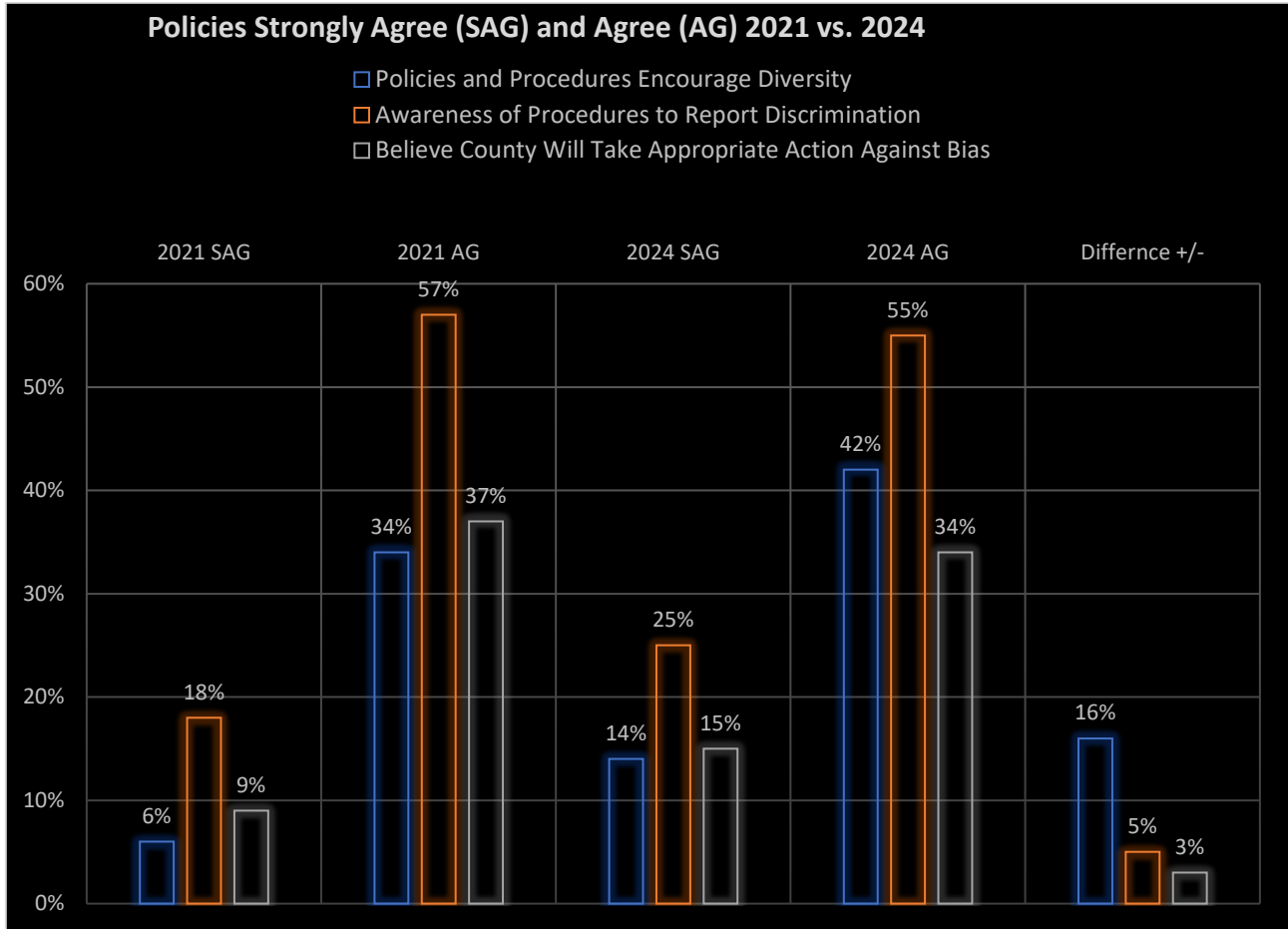
A respondent has suggested that the County further tap into the small but significant population already in the county in Native Americans and Hmong.

Active recruitment within minority populations might be helpful, especially given staffing shortages in some areas. For example, recruiting within our Native American or Hmong populations, both of which could use more representation within County employment.

Policies

The policy segment of the DEI survey shows a high-level understanding of policies and procedures encouraging diversity (40% strongly agree or agree), procedures to report discrimination are encouraged and reporting (75% strongly agree or agree), and the belief that the County will take appropriate actions against bias (46% strongly agree or agree).

These percentages increased in 2024. Fifty-six (56%) percent believe policies and procedures encourage diversity, 80% are aware of procedures for reporting discrimination, and 49% believe the County will take appropriate actions against bias.

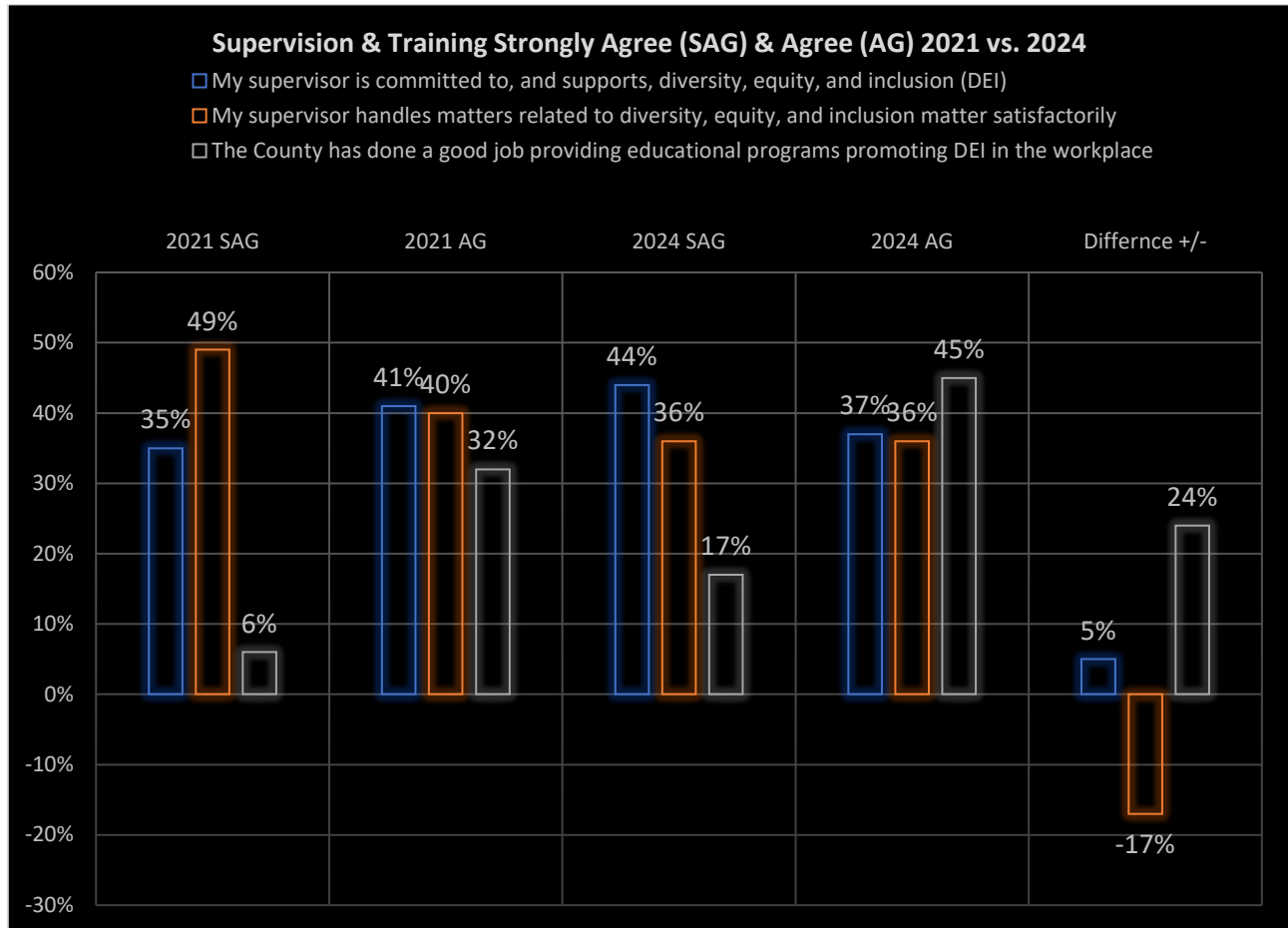


I have seen the County look into several different incidents and I feel they were taken quite seriously and that the County's response was appropriate and helpful. I haven't myself ever been a reporter of a bias incident, so haven't looked into the process for reporting, and I don't think it has ever been covered in a training attended here. But I'm aware it exists and feel I could easily find the information.

Supervision & Training

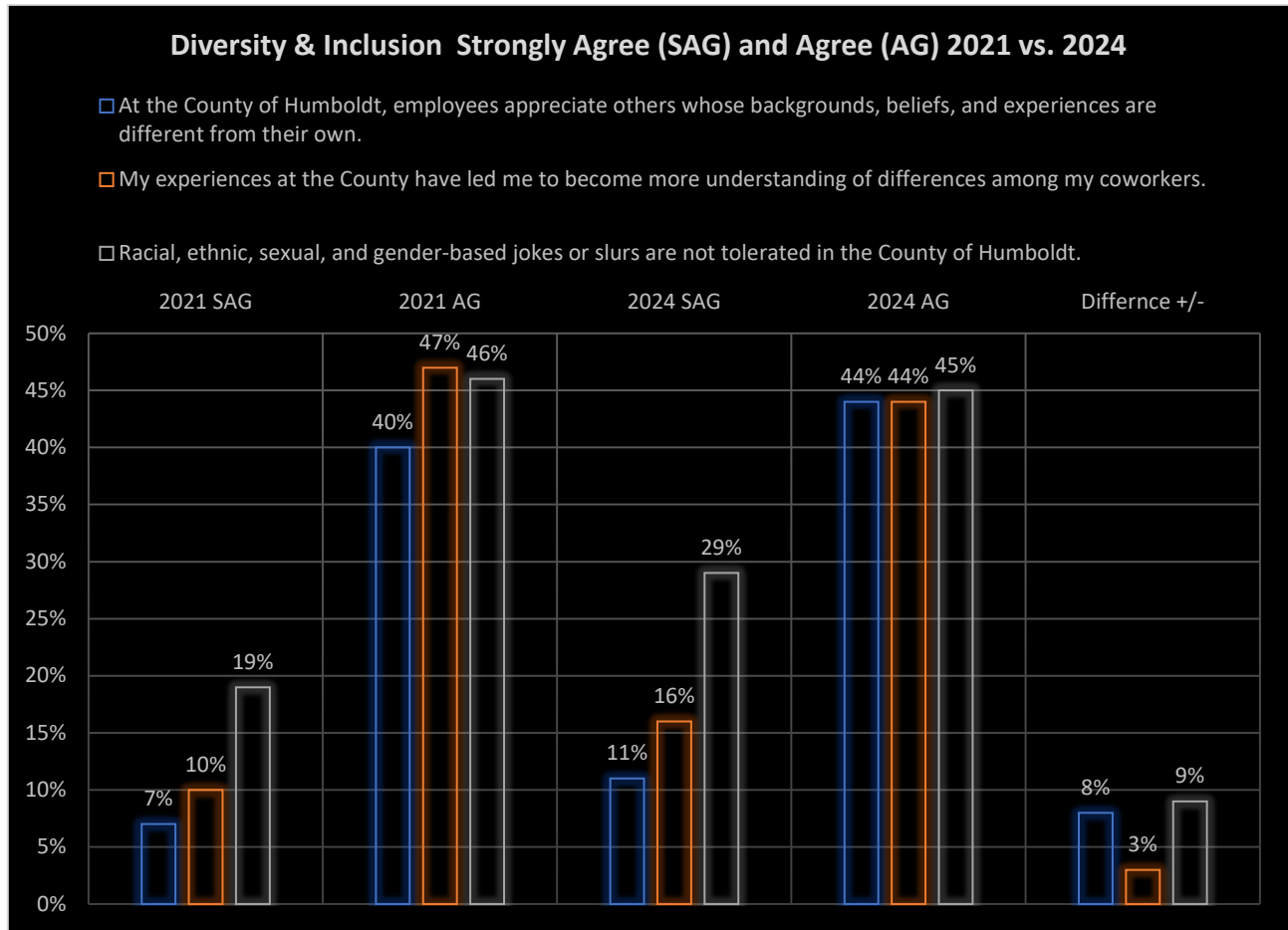
Respondents to the survey rated their supervisors very favorably. Seventy-six (81%) percent of employees either strongly agreed or agreed that their supervisor is committed to and supports DEI. Sixty-two (62%) report that the County has done a good job providing educational programs promoting DEI in the workplace. Both of these percentages are increases from the 2021 results.

However, there was a significant decline, 17% regarding supervisors handling matters of diversity, equity and inclusion satisfactorily.



It seems some people are allowed to get away with things due to their privledge of status. A couple years ago i witnessed someone in high up managent verbally accost someone in my office, while exhibiting physically threatening behavior, nothing was done when the grevience was filed until long after the incident. It seems there is acceptance of using subtle intimidation to get rid of people, always being ambiguous enough to defend the behavior or gaslight it away if needed.

Diversity & Inclusion



In 2024, the survey responses indicated an increase in the percentages of the following DEI areas:

- At the County of Humboldt, employees appreciate others whose backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences are different from their own, up 8%.
- My experiences at the County have led me to become more understanding of differences among my coworkers, up 3%.
- Racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender-based jokes or slurs are not tolerated in the County of Humboldt, up 9%.

A little tricky to answer. There are people very different from me in the department/county. My gender is different from 90% of my co-workers. As a first-generation American my mother grew up speaking a language other than English. I don't think that really getting to know your colleagues is easy. It's a process and I do my best to be empathetic and mindful of culture, economic, racial, gender diversity of our team and the people that we serve in our community.

V. KEY OBSERVATIONS

After a comprehensive analysis of the focus group data collected, here are five major themes that emerged:

- 1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Efforts**
 - Continuous focus on increasing workplace diversity

- Challenges in implementing DEI initiatives
- Importance of creating inclusive work environments
- Addressing barriers to diversity (such as hiring practices, community demographics, and leadership support)
- Promoting cultural awareness and understanding

2. Leadership and Organizational Culture

- Role of upper management in fostering inclusivity
- Challenges in creating systemic change
- Need for accountability in leadership
- Importance of building trust and open communication
- Addressing gaps between leadership rhetoric and actual actions

3. Recruitment and Retention Strategies

- Challenges in hiring diverse talent
- Strategies for attracting and supporting new employees
- Importance of intentional recruitment processes
- Addressing barriers like housing, language, and community perception
- Creating welcoming environments for new team members

4. Communication and Cultural Awareness

- Importance of cross-cultural communication
- Need for cultural competency training
- Breaking down communication barriers
- Understanding different perspectives
- Promoting empathy and mutual understanding

5. Professional Development and Organizational Growth

- Addressing career development opportunities
- Creating talent pipelines
- Supporting employee learning and growth
- Overcoming workplace biases
- Implementing continuous improvement strategies

The focus group findings reveal interconnected challenges and opportunities in building a more inclusive and equitable workplace environment. The findings highlight how DEI efforts must be woven throughout all aspects of organizational operations, from initial recruitment to long-term professional development. Leaders play a pivotal role, with participants noting both the importance of visible leadership support and the current gaps between stated commitments and actual implementation. Communication emerged as a critical foundation, with participants emphasizing the need for cultural competency training and improved cross-cultural understanding at all levels. The recruitment and retention findings underscore practical challenges that extend beyond the workplace itself, including community factors like housing availability and local demographics that impact the organization's ability to attract and retain diverse talent. Professional development findings show that creating an inclusive workplace requires ongoing attention to career growth opportunities and addressing systemic biases that may limit advancement. Notably, participants emphasized that success in all these areas requires sustained commitment and concrete action rather than surface-level changes, pointing to the need for meaningful metrics, accountability systems, and continuous improvement processes to drive real organizational transformation.

The interviews with leaders yielded the following five themes:

1. Diversity in Hiring and Recruitment

- Focus on building diverse candidate pools
- Emphasis on retaining diverse talent
- Importance of bilingual skills and cultural competency
- Discussion of succession planning with diversity in mind
- Changes to interview processes and job bulletins to be more inclusive

2. Communication and Difficult Conversations

- Need for frameworks to handle challenging discussions
- Emphasis on nonviolent communication techniques
- Training for facilitating productive conversations
- Addressing political and social tensions
- Creating safe spaces for difficult dialogues

3. Cultural Intelligence and Awareness

- Importance of understanding different cultural perspectives
- Need for ongoing cultural competency training
- Focus on emotional and cultural intelligence in leadership
- Recognition of biculturalism beyond just language skills
- Emphasis on learning from different viewpoints and experiences

4. Institutional Policy and Structural Change

- Development of DEI policies and procedures
- Budget considerations for diversity initiatives
- Need to update outdated policies
- Creation of dedicated DEI positions
- Integration of diversity goals into organizational structure

5. Educational Programs and Training

- Ongoing professional development in DEI
- Workshop development for communication skills
- Training for handling microaggressions
- Emphasis on continuous learning and improvement
- Need for in-person consulting and recurring training sessions

The themes that emerged from these leadership discussions reveal crucial insights into how organizational change and DEI initiatives must be approached from the top down. Their discussions show they understand that success requires both resources (as seen in budget discussions) and cultural transformation (as evidenced by their focus on cultural intelligence and difficult conversations). What's particularly notable is how these leaders connect their personal experiences and observations to broader organizational needs. Their input also reveals a sophisticated understanding that DEI work isn't a one-time training but requires sustained, multi-faceted approaches through educational programs, policy changes, and ongoing dialogue. This leadership-level comprehension of the complexity and interconnectedness of DEI initiatives suggests a promising foundation for meaningful organizational change.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the focus group and leadership interview findings, here are key recommendations for the county government agency:

- 1. Strengthen Leadership Accountability and Implementation**
 - Develop clear metrics and accountability systems at all leadership levels
 - Create regular progress reporting mechanisms to track the gap between stated commitments and actual implementation
- 2. Enhance Recruitment and Retention Infrastructure**
 - Create a structured bilingual skills incentive program that appropriately values language capabilities
 - Implement a formal succession planning process that prioritizes building a diverse (race, class, gender, ability, etc.) based leadership pipeline based on performance
 - Create mentorship programs specifically designed to support and retain diverse talent
- 3. Build Robust Communication and Training Systems**
 - Establish regular cultural competency training programs with specific focus on local communities
 - Develop a framework for facilitating difficult conversations across departments
 - Create structured opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding
- 4. Strengthen Institutional Infrastructure**
 - Develop formal systems for collecting and acting on employee feedback about DEI initiatives
 - Continue creating formal affinity groups with institutional support and resources
- 5. Expand Professional Development Opportunities**
 - Create clear career advancement pathways for all employees
 - Develop cross-departmental learning opportunities to broaden exposure
 - Create leadership development programs targeting diverse emerging leaders
- 6. Foster Community Connections**
 - Strengthen relationships with local tribal communities and cultural organizations
 - Create regular community feedback mechanisms about county services and accessibility
 - Develop partnerships with local educational institutions for talent pipeline development
 - Create meaningful opportunities for community input in policy development

These recommendations focus on creating sustainable, systemic change while addressing both immediate needs and long-term organizational transformation. Success will require consistent leadership commitment, adequate resource allocation, and regular evaluation and adjustment of initiatives based on outcomes and feedback.