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County of Humboldt Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Assessment Project

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Table of Contents

I. PURPOSE/OVERVIEW	2
<i>The Survey Instrument</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Focus Groups.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Individual Interviews:.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>About Coaching Imperative</i>	<i>2</i>
II. METHODOLOGY/ASSESSMENT PROCESS	2
III. KEY TERMS	3
<i>DIVERSITY:.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>EQUITY:</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>INCLUSION:</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>LEADERS:.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>IMPLICIT BIAS:.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>SOCIAL JUSTICE:</i>	<i>3</i>
IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
V. SURVEY DATA.....	4
<i>Demographics.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Leadership.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Career</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Policies</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Supervision & Training</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Diversity & Inclusion Culture</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Overall Areas of Improvement.....</i>	<i>12</i>
VI. KEY OBSERVATIONS	13
VII. RECOMMENDATIONS	16

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 modeled 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 organization members to discuss and share their experiences, perceptions, and ideas about 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 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 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: Creating environments where 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 respects all people's words/actions/thoughts.

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: 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. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 DEI survey results indicate notable progress in fostering a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture within the County of Humboldt. Key highlights include:

- 1. Increased Perceptions of DEI Importance:**
 - The percentage of employees who feel diversity is essential rose to **61%**, a **23% increase** from the 2021 baseline.
 - There was a **7% increase** in agreement that the County actively seeks diverse candidates, reflecting a growing commitment to inclusive hiring practices.
- 2. Policy Awareness and Accountability Improvements:**
 - **56%** of respondents agree that policies and procedures encourage diversity (up from 40%).
 - **80%** understand the procedures for reporting discrimination, a **5% increase**.
 - **49%** believe the County takes appropriate action against bias, up from 46%.
- 3. Enhanced Supervisory Support:**

- **81%** of employees strongly agree or agree that their supervisors are committed to and support DEI efforts, reflecting a positive workplace leadership environment.
- **62%** of employees feel the County provides effective DEI educational programs, marking a substantial increase from 2021.

4. Cultural and Behavioral Shifts:

- Employees’ appreciation for differing backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences increased by **8%**.
- Experiences at the County have made employees more understanding of coworkers' differences, up **3%**.
- Reports of intolerance for racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender-based jokes or slurs rose by **9%**, reinforcing a culture of respect and zero tolerance for discrimination.

5. Areas for Continued Focus:

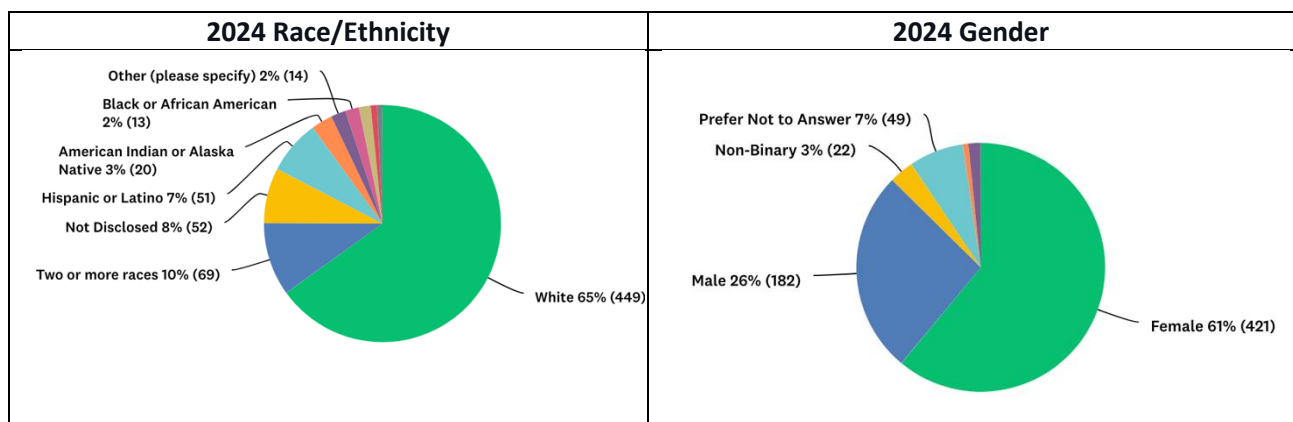
- In 2024, there were decreases in the following:
 - a. Leadership of County Treats All Employees Fairly. **12%** decrease
 - b. The County provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs. **5%** decrease
 - c. The County fosters a workplace that allows employees to be themselves at work without fear. **9%** decrease
- There was a **17%** decrease in response to the question regarding supervisory handling DEI matters satisfactorily.

The County of Humboldt has made measurable progress in creating a stronger DEI culture. By actively championing DEI, the data suggests that leaders create a more inclusive workplace that benefits employees and the organization. There is still a need for continued efforts to ensure that the culture respects differences and that psychological safety is prioritized to support a healthy organizational culture.

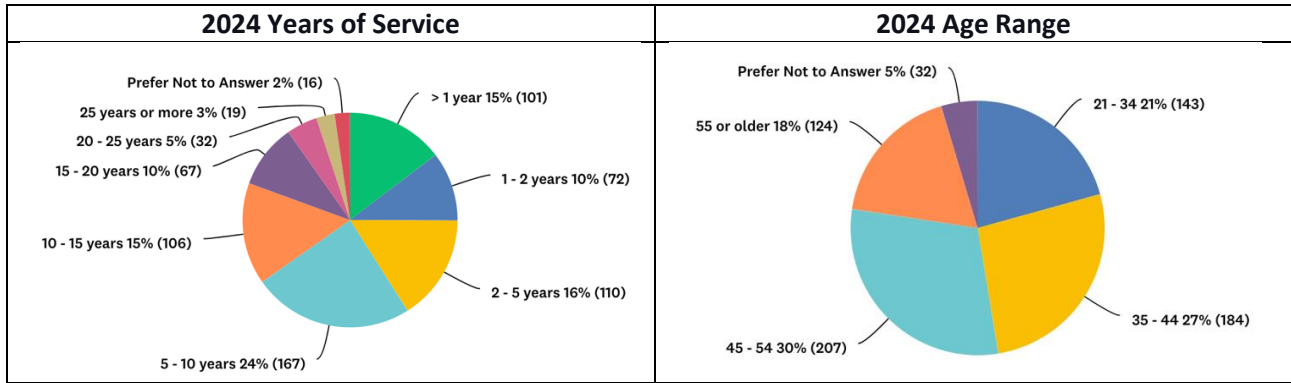
V. SURVEY DATA

Demographics

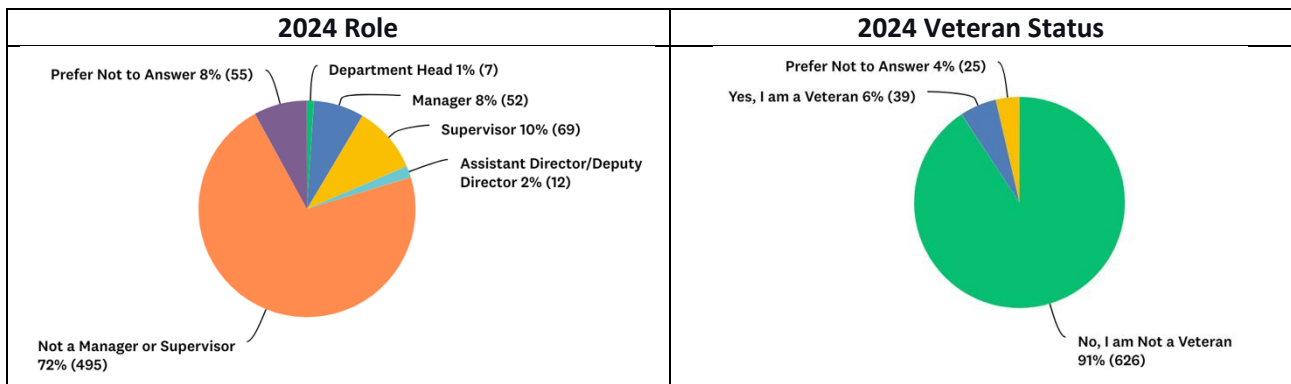
In 2024, most survey respondents were White (65%) and Women (61%). This is a slight decrease from the 2021 administration of the DEI Survey project when respondents’ percentages were White (70%) and Women (64%).



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%.

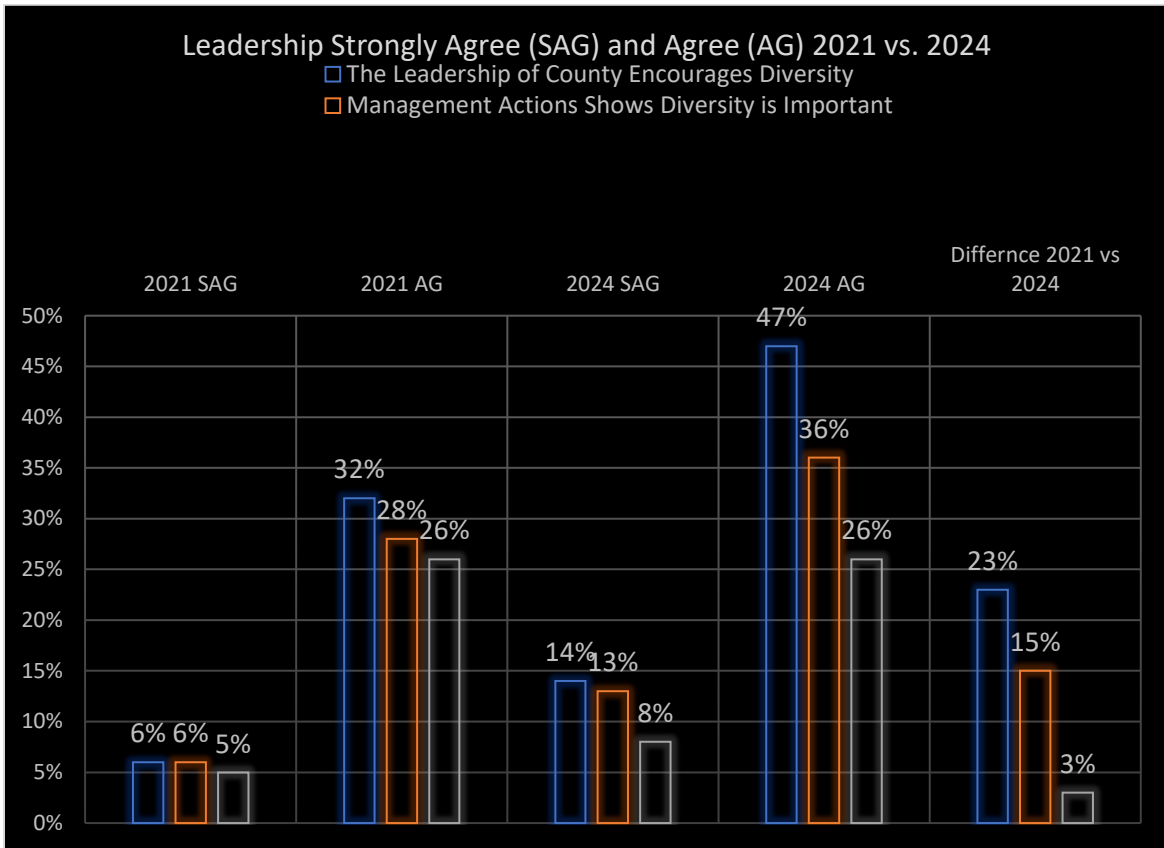


In 2024, most respondents were not managers or supervisors, 72% consistent with 2021’s data of 73%. Only 6% of workers are Veterans, down three percentage points from 2021s 9%.



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 of people who strongly agree or agree that management actions show that diversity is essential. These significant increases show improvement that should be recognized and celebrated because Employees are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and productive when they feel valued, respected, and included. A strong DEI culture fosters a sense of belonging and reduces employee turnover.

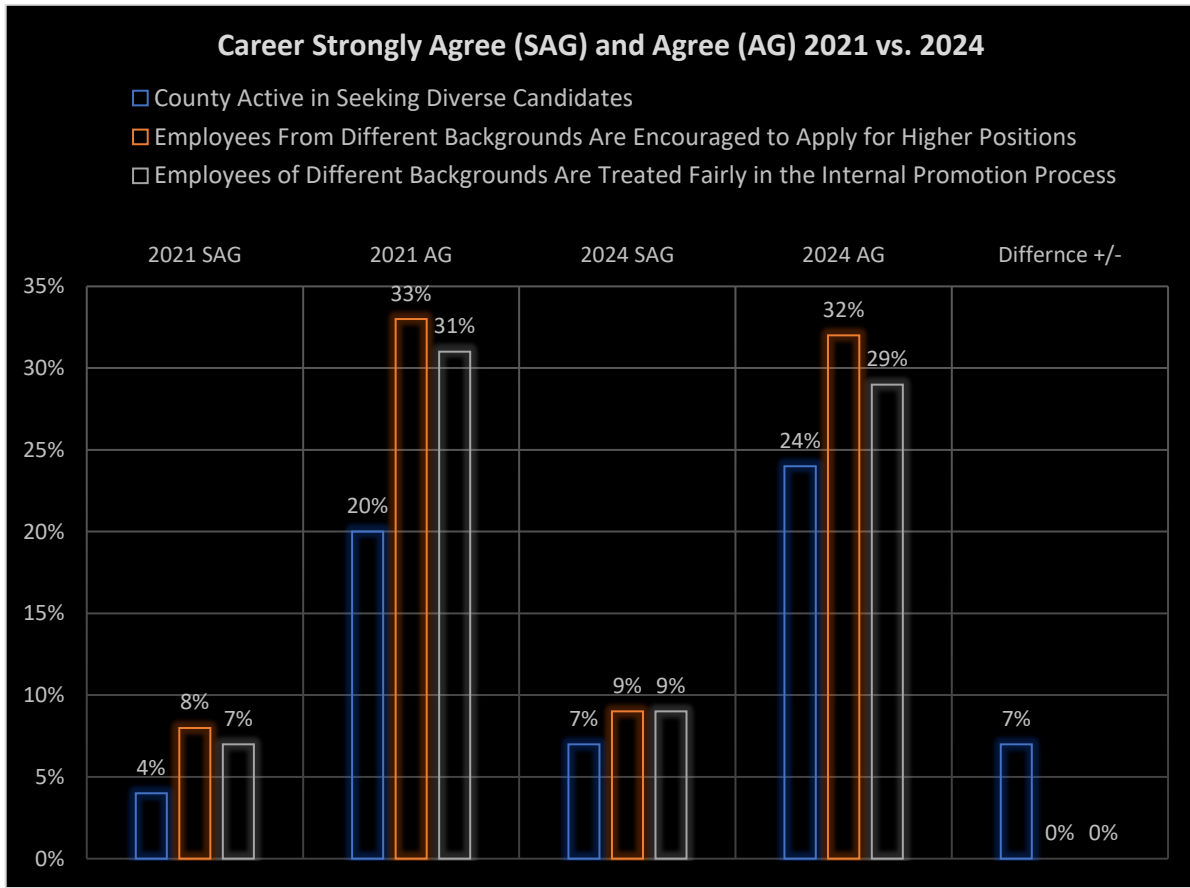


"I am a member of a diversity group but find no time to attend. Too busy at work. I have personal experience with the "fairness to all employees" statement. Although I have the very best boss ever (exceptional in the areas of fairness, overall diversity, etc.), my lived experience in observing how others 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 is not 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

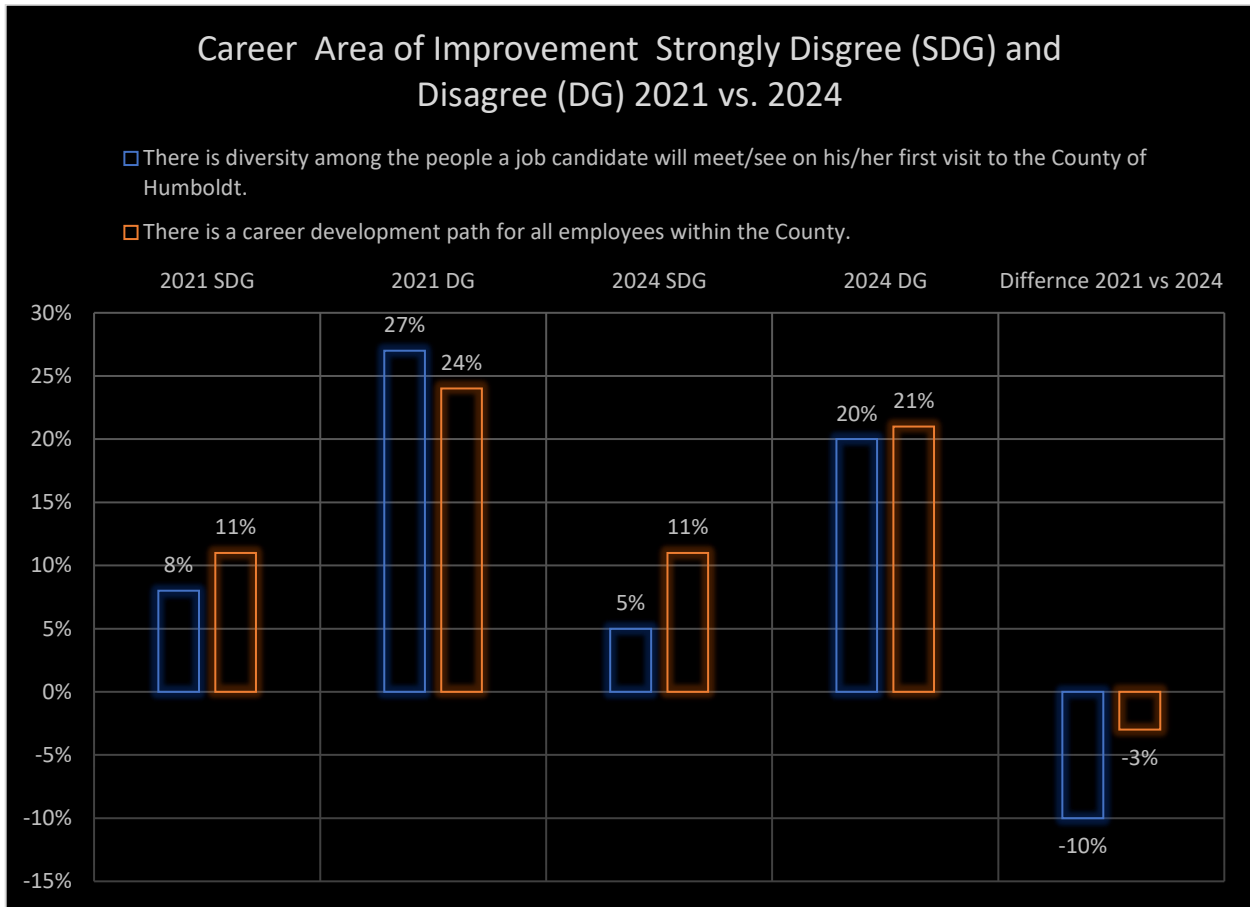
In 2024, there is a **7%** increase in those who agree and strongly agree that the county actively seeks diverse candidates. In 2021, the survey respondents indicated that 24% (agree or strongly agree) believe the county actively seeks diverse candidates. Yet respondents' perceptions of employees from different backgrounds 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. Additionally, internal searches can limit a pool's diversity to the existing members of a particular office, department, or local geographic region.

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 that there is a discernable career development path for all employees in the county decreased by **10%** and **3%** percent, respectively. These decreases acknowledge that people within the County of Humboldt are seeing some tangible efforts to diversify.



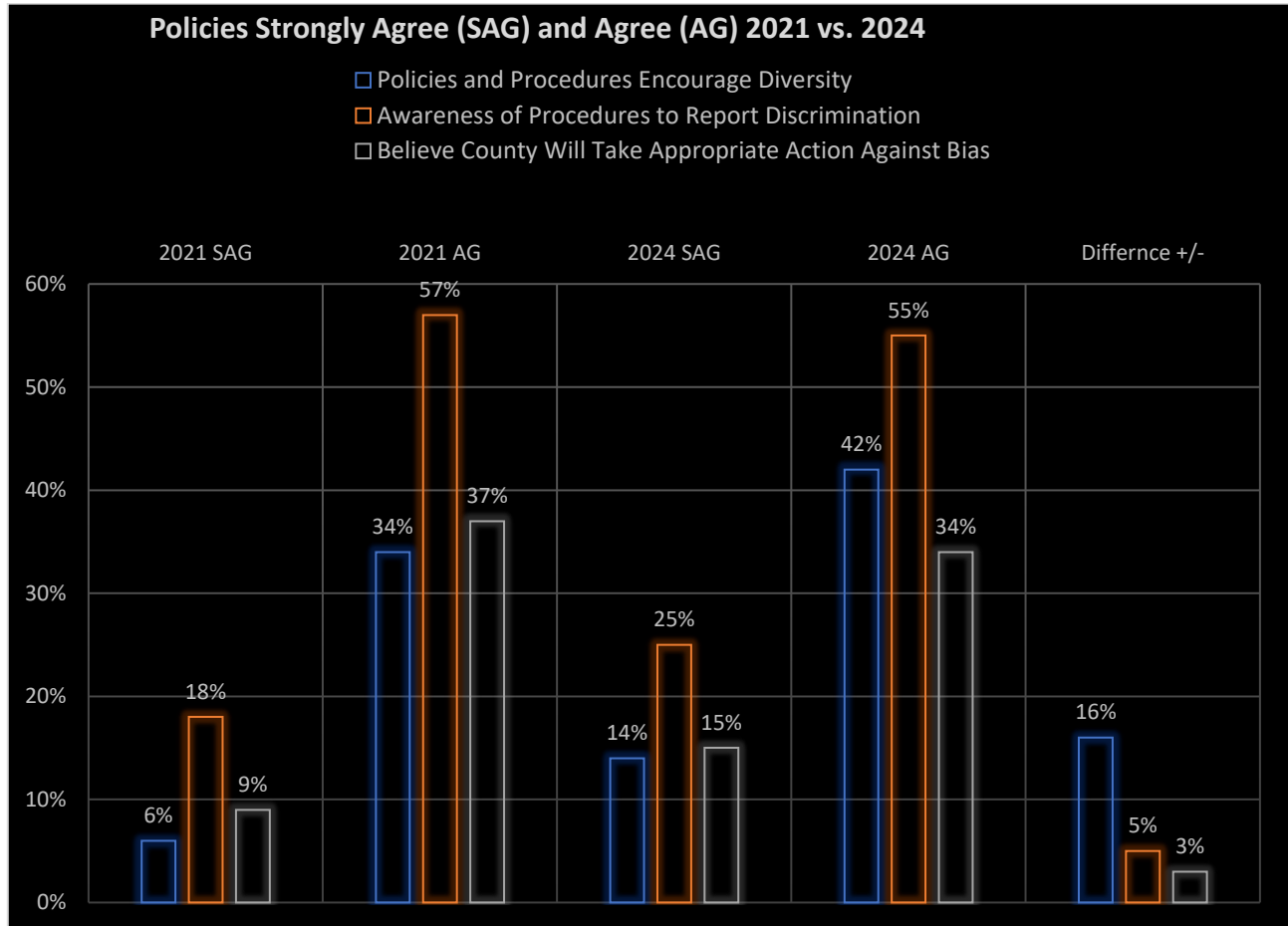
To continue to build on the County’s DEI efforts, one respondent shared that the County further taps into the small but significantly diverse population by building deeper relationships with local diverse populations like Native Americans and Hmong.

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 in 2021 showed 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% know procedures for reporting discrimination, and 49% believe the County will take appropriate actions against bias.

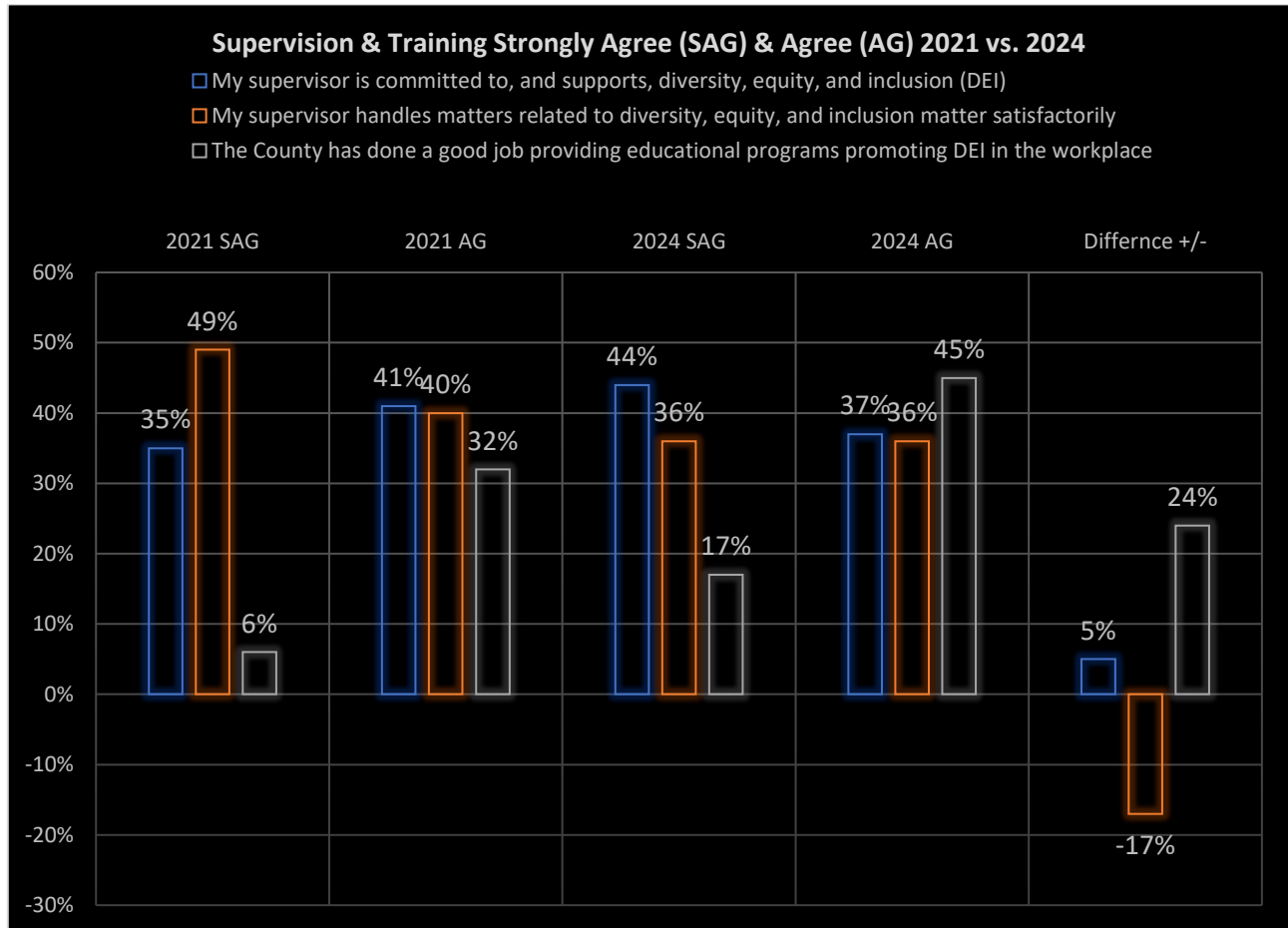


I have seen the County look into several different incidents and I feel they were taken quite seriously and that the County's response was appropriate and helpful. I haven't myself ever been a reporter of a bias incident, so haven't looked into the process for reporting, and I don't think it has ever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

Supervision & Training

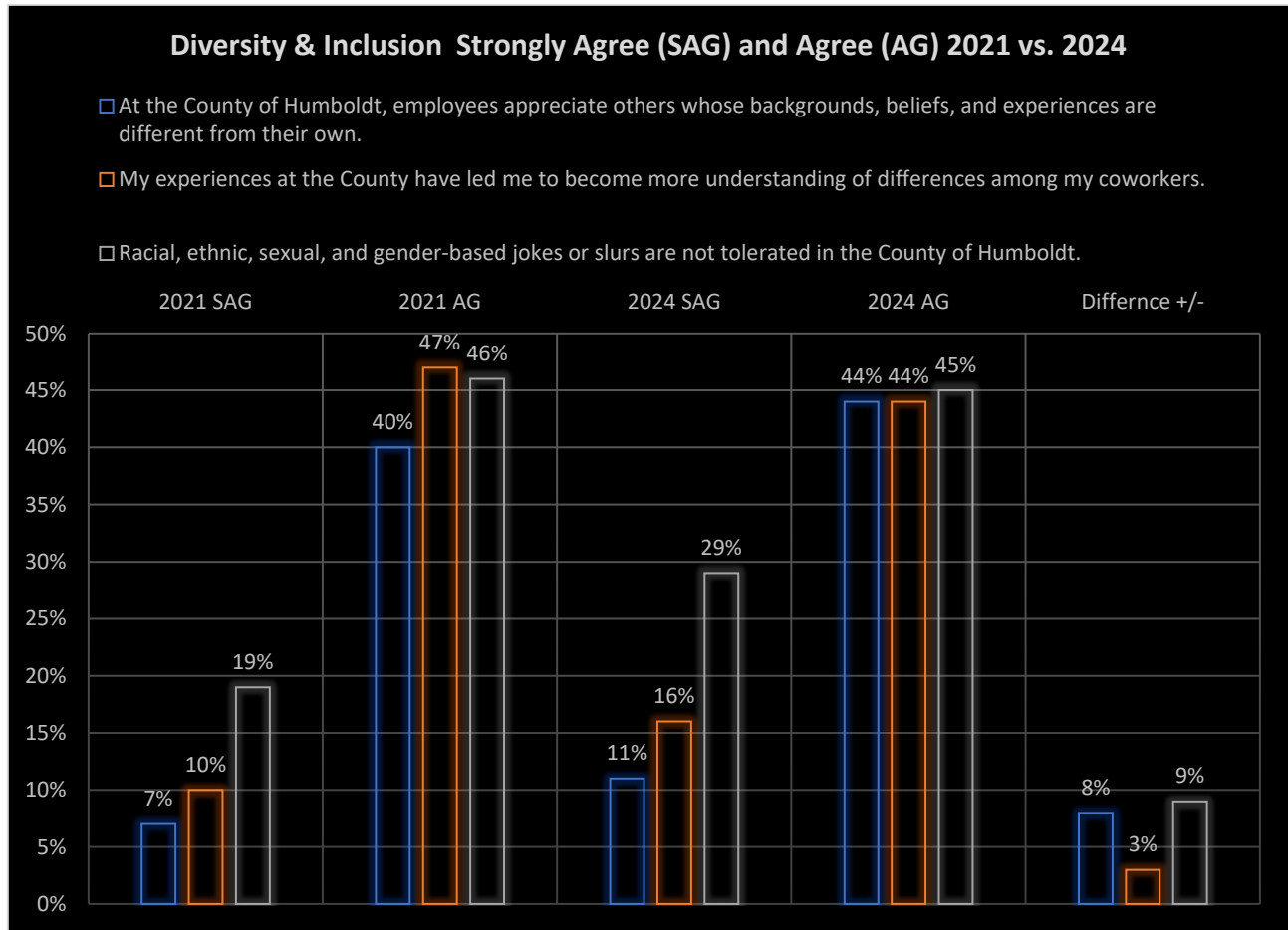
Respondents to the survey rated their supervisors very favorably. Eighty-one (81%) percent of employees either strongly agreed or agreed that their supervisor is committed to and supports DEI. Sixty-two (62%) percent report that the County has done a good job providing educational programs promoting DEI in the workplace. Both 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 privilege or status. A couple of years ago, I witnessed someone in high management verbally accost someone in my office while exhibiting physically threatening behavior; nothing was done when the grievance 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 Culture

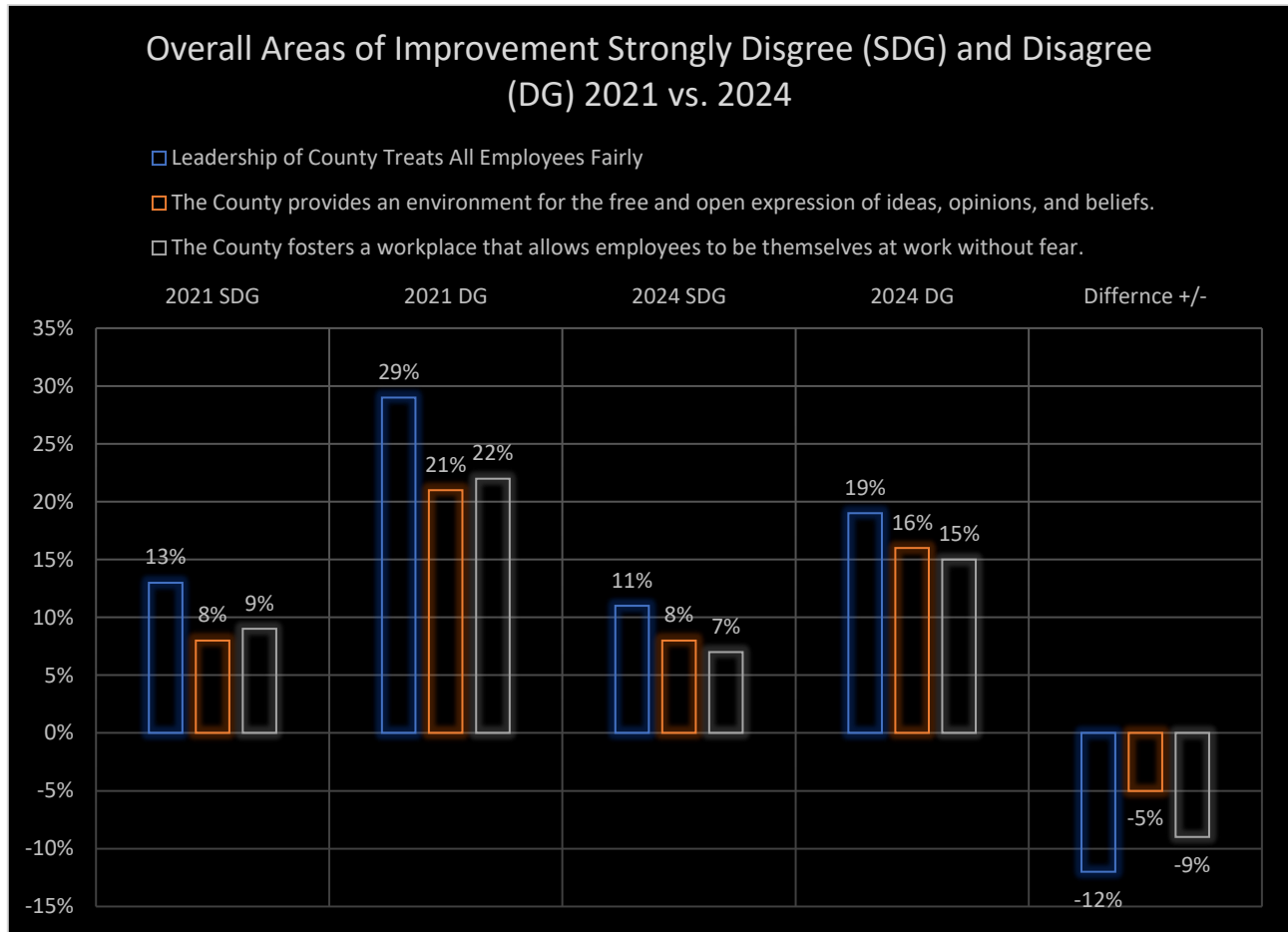


In 2024, the survey responses indicated an increase in the percentages of the following DEI areas:

- At the County of Humboldt, employees appreciate others whose backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences differ from their own, up 8%.
- My experiences at the County have made me more understanding of my coworkers' differences, 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 the cultural, economic, racial, and gender diversity of our team and the people that we serve in our community.

Overall Areas of Improvement



The image indicates decreases in employee ratings for the following areas:

- The leadership of the County treats all employees fairly – Employees perceive a decline in fair treatment from leadership.
- The County provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs. There is a noted reduction in employees' ability to freely share their ideas and beliefs.
- The county fosters a workplace that allows employees to be themselves without fear. However, ratings regarding employees’ feelings of safety in expressing their authentic selves in the workplace have decreased.

These declines suggest potential concerns related to fairness, open communication, and psychological safety in the workplace.

Leadership needs to take action not just support ideas. They need to be a part of the change in order to be known to support the work through their actions. They should show up to meetings and not have separate meetings just for managers. To complete changes for diversity it is an "all" activity not just a me and them kind of thing.

VI. 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 organizational operations, from initial recruitment to long-term professional development. Leaders play a pivotal role, with participants noting 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 beyond the workplace, 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. 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 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). 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.

VII. 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 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.