Advancing Environmental Justice

The integration of EJ principles is critical to ensure the meaningful participation of the community in the decision-making process and to work towards the equitable distribution of benefits and services to all communities. Agency-wide consideration of EJ factors in all our work supports Valley Water’s commitment to equitably providing safe, clean water, flood protection and environmental stewardship that reflects community needs and priorities. Progress in this area includes:

• Incorporation of EJ language into Board Governance Policies as of February 2021.
• Delivery of all-employee EJ Information sessions and trainings.
• Establishment of EJ Workgroup, composed of agency-wide subject matter experts.
• Newly required environmental justice impact section on all Board Agenda Memos as of January 2022.

Honoring Diversity

Valley Water is committed to the equitable acknowledgment and celebration of all to raise awareness and visibility of our diverse communities. This practice supports and encourages staff engagement in the conversation about challenges faced by the diverse communities of Santa Clara County and to increase understanding, foster empathy and build community. Current REDI initiatives under this component include:

• Acknowledgment of culturally significant observances on internal employee channels.
• Board resolutions in celebration of culturally significant observances.
• Co-development of informational articles and educational activities in collaboration with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).
• Cultural Speakers Panel Series launched in the Spring of 2021.

Building Community – Employee Resource Groups (ERG)

Employees are our most important asset. As such, Valley Water sponsors a healthy network of Employee Resource Groups. These twelve employee-led groups serve as social and professional support communities for employees, provide a professional network and contribute to the advancement of agency-wide DEI goals through the facilitation of cultural and educational programs. ERGs membership is open to all Valley Water employees regardless of their membership, affinity, or alignment with the ERG’s target community or interest. ERGs are an asset to the organization in various ways including:
• Internal subject matter experts who support DEI efforts across agency business units, including the communications unit and human resources division, among others.
• Liaising between Valley Water and affiliated external communities.
• Co-hosting of annual Taste of Inclusion and other all-employee social, cultural and educational programs.

Beyond Compliance – Tribal Engagement
Launched in November of 2021, the goal of the Tribal Liaison is to increase meaningful engagement between Valley Water and tribal communities within our jurisdiction. Program priorities include ongoing outreach to tribal groups to ensure their awareness and access to available community resources (i.e., education programs, rebates and grants), increasing employee understanding of local tribal communities, and building collaborations with tribal communities that extend beyond project monitoring activities required for compliance. Current efforts include:

• Initiated information exchange between the tribal community and Valley Water to ensure the inclusion of cultural plan resources of tribal significance in the revegetation plant inventory list.
• Development of Valley Water Tribal Land Acknowledgement in consultation with Bay Area Native Peoples.
• All-employee Tribal Environmental Justice Information Sessions and Tribal Cultural Sensitivity training.

Strengthening DEI along the Talent Pipeline – Supporting DEI in HR
Valley Water is working to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion along the talent pipeline from interns to executive leadership and ensure our workforce represents the communities we serve. In a support role, the Office of REDI assists the Human Resources Division to ensure DEI is an integral part of their entire process, ensuring equitable access to employment opportunities at Valley Water, DEI value alignment and skill development among staff. By empowering all employees to take an active role in DEI initiatives, each member of our community serves as a DEI change agent.

• Revamp of Next-Gen Career Pathways: To ensure all communities have equitable access to career opportunities at Valley Water.
• Development of DEI interview questions and evaluation rubric: DEI is a critical component of the selection process to ensure value alignment between candidates and Valley Water.
• Institutionalization of Unconscious Bias Training: Building the DEI capacity of our workforce is an important element of Valley Water’s approach to addressing systematic inequities.

Building DEI Capacity – Starting from the Top
Valley Water believes the key to the success of a DEI strategy is support from management that understands and is committed to DEI.

• Executive Leadership Team completed DEI baseline trainings in June 2022.
• Board approved implementation of DEI baseline training for all board members for FY23.
• Agency-wide DEI Strategic Master Plan and Equity Action Plans.

Key Milestones:

- **JUL 2020**
  - Creation of the Office of Racial Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI)

- **SEPT 2020**
  - Resolution Addressing Systemic Racism and Promoting Equity adopted by the Board

- **FEB 2021**
  - Revision of Board Governance ENDS Policies to include Environmental Justice principles

- **APR 2021**
  - Implementation of first ever All Employee Equity Assessment

- **JUL 2021**
  - Launch of mandatory Unconscious Bias Training for managers and supervisors
  - Adoption of Juneteenth as an official Valley Water holiday

- **OCT 2021**
  - Formation of Environmental Justice Workgroup

- **NOV 2021**
  - Creation of Tribal Relations function and liaison
  - Initiation of new 5-year DEI Strategic Masterplan development

- **JAN 2022**
  - Incorporation of EJ Impact section and statements on all Board Agenda Memos
  - Launch of mandatory Unconscious Bias Training for all employees

- **JUN 2022**
  - Completion of Baseline DEI Training by leadership team