

Analysis  
**Oregon Youth Authority**  
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report

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**Analyst:** Julie Neburka

**Request:** Acknowledge receipt of a report on efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Oregon Youth Authority's programs and workforce.

**Analysis:** The Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) has submitted an initial report on its efforts to reduce the over-representation of racial and sexual minority youth in its custody and programs and to improve the diversity of its staff pursuant to a budget note approved for SB 5541 (2019):

**Address Equity Issues.** *Over-representation of youth of color and sexual minority youth in the juvenile justice system is of concern both nationally and in Oregon. The Oregon Youth Authority's data shows both that overrepresentation worsens as youth become more involved in the juvenile justice system, and that rates of recidivism are higher for racial minority youth.*

*The Oregon Youth Authority is directed to report to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means during the 2019-21 biennium on its efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in the agency and in the services it provides. A progress report during the 2020 legislative session should include:*

- *An evaluation of the current state of OYA's efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in its workforce and services to youth*
- *Identification of agency efforts to improve culturally appropriate programs and services for youth of color and sexual minority youth, including transition services from OYA custody back to the community*
- *Strategies for identifying and correcting practices that worsen over-representation and exacerbate disparities in the juvenile justice system, and*
- *Recommendations for actions OYA can take to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in its programs and services.*

*The Oregon Youth Authority is directed to return to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means during the 2021 legislative session with a full report and plan for implementing any needed improvements.*

OYA reports that disparities in its youth population are persistent and pervasive. Youth of color are more likely to be placed on OYA probation, are more likely to be committed to a youth correctional facility, and are more likely to be committed to the Department of Corrections than are white youth. Sexual minority youth are also represented and may be over-represented in OYA's population. The agency's "current state" analysis identifies these disparities, and catalogues those processes, practices, and activities currently underway that are intended to reduce disparities, including staff training, improving staff diversity through recruitment practices, activities supported through OYA's Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations, and participation on advisory committees and in partnerships with programs and volunteers.

The agency has initiated a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiative intended to develop and lay a foundation for the Youth Authority's diversity and equity goals, objectives, and outcomes. Preliminary plans are reported to include conducting equity assessments, focusing on staff training, expanding services to victims and crime survivors, and expanding culturally-specific services for youth in OYA's custody. The DEI Initiative is expected to identify key decision points and outcome measures, and to add to the list of "next steps" as issues emerge or change. OYA will next report on this issue and on any additional resources required to implement improvements during the 2021 legislative session.

**Legislative Fiscal Office Recommendation:** Acknowledge receipt of the report.



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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February 6, 2020

The Honorable Senator Betsy Johnson, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Representative Dan Rayfield, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE, H-178  
Salem OR, 97301

Dear Co-Chairs,

#### **Nature of the Request**

A 2019 budget note directed the Oregon Youth Authority to report on its efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in its workforce and services to youth in the 2021 legislative session.

#### **Agency Action**

In response to the budget note, we have prepared a preliminary report for the Joint Legislative Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety for the 2020 session. We will be submitting it separately.

#### **Action Requested**

The agency respectfully requests permission to make an in-person presentation to the committee about its preliminary report.

#### **Legislation Affected**

None.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

**Joseph O'Leary**  
Director

Oregon Youth Authority

971-718-4537 (cell)

[Inside OYA](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nakeia Daniels". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Nakeia" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Daniels".

**Nakeia Daniels**

Deputy Director

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# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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February 7, 2020

Senator James Manning, Jr., Co-Chair  
Representative Carla Piluso, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE, H-178  
Salem OR, 97301

Dear Chair Manning, Chair Piluso, and colleagues,

A 2019 budget note directed the Oregon Youth Authority to report on its efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in its workforce and services to youth. This budget note was a result of our 2019 Ways and Means presentation, which included a section on equity and an overview of related policy option packages. Senator Jackie Winters subsequently asked us if a budget note on equity would help support our work in this area, and we endorsed her suggestion with enthusiasm. The budget note directed OYA to report back in the 2021 legislative session; however, a preliminary report is attached.

OYA has long recognized that youth of color and those who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, questioning, or intersex) are overrepresented in the state's juvenile justice system and in its own care and custody; and that the young women in its care, while not overrepresented, require treatment and programming specific to their needs. While we have done some important work already in addressing the needs of all of these populations, we recognize that there is much more work to do. That's why we began laying the groundwork for an agency-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative last year.

To create a solid foundation for our work, we convened a workgroup made up of staff from across the agency to ground our DEI initiative in the agency's vision — that when youth leave OYA they go on to lead crime-free and productive lives —and our shared vision on unity and diversity:

As OYA employees, we respect, honor and embrace the diversity among youth, staff, families and partners. We provide a welcoming and respectful environment that fosters inclusion and learning. We provide culturally responsive services that are accessible and benefit youth, staff, families, and partners.

Our task now is to objectively assess our current state and identify concrete actions, policies, and procedures that will bring the DEI initiative to life for our staff and the youth and families we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JO' followed by a stylized flourish.

**Joseph O'Leary**  
Director

A handwritten signature in grey ink, reading 'Nakeia Daniels' in a cursive script.

**Nakeia Daniels**  
Deputy Director

# **Preliminary Report to the Legislature**

## **2019 Budget Note on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**

### **Equity Budget Note**

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The Oregon Youth Authority was directed by the legislature in a 2019 budget note to report on its efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in its workforce and services to youth.

The budget note specifically requested:

1. An evaluation of the current state of OYA's efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in its workforce and services to youth;
2. identification of agency efforts to improve culturally appropriate programs and services for youth of color and sexual minority youth, including transition services from OYA custody back to the community;
3. strategies for identifying and correcting practices that worsen over-representation and exacerbate disparities in the juvenile justice system; and
4. recommendations for actions OYA can take to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in its programs and services.

Last year, we launched a new, comprehensive initiative focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have identified multiple areas where we believe we can make significant progress, which are outlined below.

### **Why This Is Important**

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Data shows that youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. While the Oregon Youth Authority is only one part of that system, we play a critical role in addressing the historical and systemic inequities that it perpetuates.

To successfully fulfill our mission — protecting the public and reducing crime by holding youth accountable and providing opportunities for reformation in safe environments — we must ensure that we are effectively meeting the needs of all youth and communities, especially those who are marginalized.

We need a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace in order to be aware, innovative, and agile enough to connect with and understand the needs of the youth and families we serve and the staff we serve alongside. In addition, we must recognize that, as a government agency responsible for youth who have been separated from their families and their communities in the service of public safety, we have an additional responsibility to do everything we can to make sure youth stay connected with their families, communities, and culture while they are in our care.

## Current State

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OYA has a long history of striving to build a diverse workforce and to provide equitable, inclusive, culturally-appropriate services to the youth we serve, and their communities. By statute, the agency is required to “be cognizant of and sensitive to the issue of overrepresentation of minority youth offenders in youth correction facilities” (See [ORS 420A.010\(10\)a.](#))

Still, disparities in our youth population are persistent and pervasive. Compared to White youth, African-American youth are 2.1 times more likely to be placed on OYA probation, 3.3 times more likely to be committed to a youth correctional facility, and—prior to the passage of SB 1008—nearly 7 times more likely to be committed to the Department of Corrections (DOC). Compared to White youth, Native American youth are roughly 3 times more likely to be placed on OYA probation or committed to a youth correctional facility, and 3.4 times as likely to be committed to DOC. Finally, 35% of the youth in OYA secure custody who were committed to DOC are Latinx<sup>1</sup>— a jump of about 60% from their representation in the general population.

In addition, a significant population of OYA youth identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex (LGBTQ+). Though numbers are difficult to determine with precision, available research at the national level has estimated that LGBTQ+ youth “represent 5 percent to 7 percent of the nation’s overall youth population, but they compose 13 percent to 15 percent of those currently in the juvenile justice system.”<sup>2</sup> (OYA’s own numbers — almost certainly an undercount— rely on whether youth choose to share their status with agency staff.) Our 2018 biopsychosocial survey found that 115 youth (or 9% of youth in OYA custody at the time) self-identified as something other than heterosexual to staff; 12 youth had a confirmed diagnosis of gender dysphoria; and 38 youth self-identified as something other than the gender they were assigned at birth. Looking at the data from another angle, our Gender Identity Committee identified 22 youth in OYA care and custody who were exploring gender identity issues as of January 2020.

All the disparities mentioned above—across race, ethnicity, gender, and LGBTQ+ population— demonstrate why taking a comprehensive approach and make diversity, equity, and inclusion an agency initiative is so important. It will give us the opportunity to look intentionally at where we focus our resources, and whether there are areas where we either create, exacerbate, eliminate or mitigate barriers as an employer, as guardian of our youth, or in partnership with community members. We hope to enhance what we’re doing well, and pivot where we need change.

## STAFF TRAINING

We are aware that we could do much more to provide useful, ongoing DEI-related training for all staff. We expect the results of the agency equity assessment, described later in this document, will help us zero in on what types of DEI-related training we’ll need to offer our staff.

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<sup>1</sup> “Latinx” is a gender-neutral alternative to “Latino/Latina”.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “LGBTQ Youths in the Juvenile Justice System” (literature review), August 2014, at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/LGBTQYouthsintheJuvenileJusticeSystem.pdf>.



Some of our current and recent offerings:

- **Cross-cultural Communication**

All new staff joining OYA are required to go through two rounds of orientation training about key policies and practices in working with each other and working with youth. As part of the training, they are given a cross-cultural communication training. The training was developed by the director of OYA's Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR) and is delivered by him or a member of his team. Upon completion, participants are expected to be able to explain the benefits of the agency having a diverse workforce; implicit and unconscious bias; the resources provided by OIIR—including translation services for youth and families—and how to engage with the OIIR team; the importance of cross-cultural communication skills in enhancing relationships; how cross-cultural differences can create misunderstandings, and demonstrate culturally responsive behavior.

- **Implicit Bias**

OYA managers across the state received a training on implicit bias as part of OYA's Positive Human Development culture change efforts.

- **LGBTQ+ 101 Training**

In recent years, we have done trainings for youth and staff statewide on LGBTQ+ and Transgender issues. We are now working with advocacy groups to develop and deliver a new LGBTQ+ 101 training in 2020 for existing agency facility and field staff to help support youth identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex. The plan is also to develop a similar, more condensed version for new employee training as well.

## **APPLICANT DIVERSITY**

OYA seeks to improve the diversity of its staff at all levels. As part of its OYA Management Performance System (OPMS), OYA tracks its success at recruiting a diverse pool of job applicants. While quarterly measurements show that the agency has been meeting those targets, we are currently reviewing a new, more meaningful way to measure progress in this area. That said, our past efforts have borne some fruit:

- As of July 2019, among its full-time staff, about 23% of the agency's overall staff were of color, 30% female, and just under 1% had a disability. Among represented staff, only 24% were of color, though 42% were female.
- During the 2017-19 biennium, the agency met its goal of increasing representation of people of color in middle and upper management positions. Their representation stood at 13% in 2015-17 — the agency increased their representation by 5.4 % in 2017-19. And in 2018-2019, OYA significantly diversified its leadership team: at this time, one third of its members are African-American or Latinx (the other two-thirds are White); and gender balance is about half and half (8 males and 7 females).
- In 2017-19 OYA successfully increased the representation of women in middle management positions to 41.5% — an increase of 3.1% compared to 2015-17.

A particular area of focus will need to be the diversity of staff who provide direct services to youth. Our youth come from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and gender identities, and they need role models who share, respect, or understand their background. Furthermore, some research suggests that youth are more successful when they receive treatment, education, and other services that respect and meet their specific cultural and linguistic needs.<sup>3</sup> While all staff should be able to provide inclusive and culturally competent services, many of our youth find they are better able to form connections with adults whom they view as similar to themselves.

The demographics of OYA staff providing direct services to youth do not match the demographics of youth we serve.<sup>4</sup> To begin with, while only 56% of our youth identify as White, nearly three-quarters (71%) of our direct service staff identify as White. Similarly, while about 13% of our youth identify as African-American, only 6% of our staff do so; 21% of our youth identify as Latinx vs. 14% of our staff; and 5% of our youth identify as Native American vs. only 1% of our staff.

As a result, we need to focus on identifying innovative ways to attract, hire, and retain more diverse staff.

### **OFFICE OF INCLUSION AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS (OIIR)**

While our goal is for all direct care staff to be able to relate to youth in culturally-responsive ways—to recognize when culture might play a role in reformation, accountability, behavior, or an interaction—OYA also provides culturally-specific and gender-specific services to youth through its Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR). The 12-person OIIR team serves all OYA youth, both in close custody and in the community. Together, the team provides mentoring, case consultation, supportive community groups, and links to community resources for youth in the community; these are language-appropriate services tailored to fit the individual needs of culturally and linguistically diverse youth.

OIIR team members lead—often with the assistance of other staff—culturally-specific and multi-cultural groups at Camp Riverbend, Camp Tillamook, MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility (YCF), and Rogue Valley YCF. They also support OYA staff members running groups at Eastern Oregon YCF and at Rogue Valley. In addition, they run a rite of passage program for African-American youth at MacLaren and Rogue Valley, and talking circles for Native youth at Camp Florence, MacLaren YCF, and Camp Tillamook/Tillamook YCF. A contractor runs a talking circle at Rogue Valley YCF; additional talking circles are being planned at Oak Creek YCF and other facilities as well.

OIIR supports significant cultural events within each of OYA's youth correctional facilities to model and promote a commitment to equity and inclusion, allow all youth access to diverse cultural experiences, and assist youth in maintaining a positive connection with their culture and/or supportive community members. The OIIR team currently supports (and brings in community volunteers for) Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Kwanzaa, LGBTQ Pride and Coming Out Day, Native American Heritage, Native American pow wows, Luaus, and multi-cultural Festivals. All of these events are

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<sup>3</sup> For example, some clinical trials have shown that attending to cultural factors increases parent and youth engagement and improves youth outcomes. See Elizabeth Feldman, Eric Trupin, Sarah Walker, and Jacquelyn Hansen, "Evidence-Based Practices with Latino Youth: A Literature Review" (University of Washington Dept. of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and Models for Change, November 25, 2013); 22, <http://bit.ly/1nhyoUE>.

<sup>4</sup> Employee data gathered from Workday as of January 2020 for jobs classified as "protective service workers".

educational and celebratory events for youth, families, staff, and communities. They incorporate, history, food, and culturally-specific activities.

Because OIIR staff constitute a relatively small team when compared to the nearly 500 youth of color and the approximately 115 LGBTQ+ youth in OYA's care in facilities and in the community, OIIR multiplies its efforts by consulting with other staff to share their expertise on case planning, placement, and appropriate services for youth; and through strategic use of passionate volunteers and external organizations funded by outside grants.

## **ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND PARTNERSHIPS**

We convene meetings of African-American, Native American, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ advisory committees for our agency. The membership of these committees is all volunteer. They play a valuable role, as they provide support to youth and families and work to assist with guiding the department on meeting the cultural needs of the youth and families it serves from their communities.

In addition, OYA maintains an internal gender identity committee made up of staff to (a) review and make recommendations on the appropriate placement and care of transgender, gender diverse and intersex youth upon intake to an OYA facility; and (b) respond to transgender, gender diverse and intersex youth requests for accommodations or needs. The committee helped shape the agency's policy on "Meeting LGBTQQI and Gender Nonconforming Youth Needs", finalized and adopted in July 2018.

OYA has also partnered with multiple programs, volunteers, and contractors to provide culturally-specific supportive services to marginalized youth, most recently including:

- The I Am Academy —a four-bed culturally-responsive independent living program for disproportionately overrepresented male youth ages 17-25 with a history of negative peer group affiliation.
- Morpheus Youth Project—providing mentorship and cultural art activities to Latinx youth at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility.
- CAPACES Leadership Institute—volunteers from this nonprofit, comprised of nine Latino-led social justice organizations based in the Willamette Valley, teach youth at MacLaren Youth Correctional about the history and culture of Latin America, societal expectations, and current events. Volunteers also lead advocacy lessons on community service and civic engagement.
- Oregon's 9 federally-recognized Native American tribes—We frequently welcome the tribes into our facilities for events and programs such as pow wows, sweat lodge ceremonies, and beading groups. As an example, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde comes into our facilities on an annual basis to provide talking circles, round dances, and opportunities for youth to be mentored by tribal elders. Similarly, the Southern Oregon Indian Center provides Native American youth in secure close-custody at Rogue Valley Youth Correctional Facility with religious and culturally-responsive services.
- Rivera House—a 9-bed independent living program for LGBTQ+ young adults ages 17-1/2 to 25 who are re-entering the community. OYA has a separate contract with a therapist with specific expertise around gender identity to provide additional support for LGBTQ+ individuals at Rivera House.
- Gender Identity-Focused Therapy —provide best-practice therapeutic services for youth who are exploring gender identity and for whom a psychological assessment has recommended

mental health treatment specific to supporting gender identity issues. Services are focused on reducing psychological stressors and assisting with skill development in healthy living.

### **SECURE FACILITIES: UNIT SIZE AND FOCUS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

The majority of living units in OYA's nine secure facilities around the state are 25-bed units. We have been working to reconfigure them into 16-bed units to bring them closer to national best practice. Smaller units make it easier to build meaningful connections with youth, teach skills and manage challenging behavior. This is of critical importance, as research shows that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is the strongest predictor of successful treatment.<sup>5</sup>

As things stand, however, it can be challenging for staff to be able to develop meaningful, supportive relationships with youth. On a 25-bed unit during peak staffing hours when three staff are on duty, there are about 8 youth for every staff person. However, if any of the youth is in crisis, or one of the staff is deployed elsewhere to co-facilitate a treatment group, then the functional ratio is about 12 youth for every staff person, making it difficult to build and maintain meaningful relationships.

This merely compounds the issues for marginalized youth, who may already be struggling to connect with staff who do not share or understand their cultural identity, sexual orientation, or gender identity. They would have more opportunities for extra support — even from staff who are different from themselves — in smaller units.

### **TREATMENT PROVIDED**

OYA makes use of approximately 20 different evidence-based treatment curricula for specific criminogenic needs (e.g., substance use or antisocial attitudes), offense-specific therapy (e.g., treatment for youth who commit sex offenses), and developmental needs (e.g., conflict resolution skills, perspective-taking, decision-making).

While these curricula have been normed to show they are effective with all youth, they are not necessarily written to be culturally relevant. The exceptions are the White Bison substance use curriculum for Native American youth, gender-specific interventions in use with young women at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility, and the gender identity therapy noted above.

The lack of cultural specificity reflects the state of the treatment field, which has generally focused on developing evidence-based curricula that work for all populations vs. developing evidence-based curricula created with culturally and linguistically diverse populations in mind.

One way we try to deal with this is by diversifying the teams providing treatment. Currently, we deliver treatment to youth in our secure facilities using a group facilitation team that draws from Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHPs), alcohol and drug treatment coordinators, and staff from facility living units. By training living unit staff from diverse backgrounds to help facilitate and deliver treatment using the evidence-based curricula, it makes it possible to ensure that delivery and presentation of the treatment curriculum can be tailored to the culturally-specific needs of different populations.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Lynne Knobloch-Fedders, "The Importance of the Relationship with the Therapist," (The Family Institute at Northwestern University: January 31, 2008), at <https://www.family-institute.org/behavioral-health-resources/importance-relationship-therapist>.

The challenge we face, however, is unit size. In theory, we should be able to draw on all living unit staff to diversify teams delivering treatment and tailor them to the specific group of youth in attendance. But as we explained above, if one staffer on a living unit is tasked with co-facilitating a treatment group elsewhere, that leaves only two staff to work with the remaining youth —or 12 youth per staff person.

By contrast, on a 16-bed unit with three staff, there are about 5 staff for every youth during peak staffing hours and it's then feasible to pull one staff away to assist with treatment groups. Doing so would leave 8 youth per staff — a big drop from the ratio of 12 youth per staff we see now on our 25-bed units. Eight staff per youth is a ratio that is much more conducive to creating positive relationships that are necessary for productive change.

As we move forward, we will continue to work toward a standard of 16 beds per living unit; to the degree we are successful, we will have more flexibility to deploy a diverse set of staff to connect with youth and to deliver treatment.

## **POLICY AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

While OYA has not undertaken a comprehensive review of its policies and business operations through an equity lens to date, we have made some advances that support diversity, equity, and inclusion. While this is not an exhaustive list, some of these include:

- One of the key goals in the OYA Performance Management System (OPMS) —our continuous process improvement initiative — is focused on an “engaged, culturally competent, and successful workforce.” While we have more work to do to support that goal, we do have some associated measures — e.g., one sets a target for the diversity of our job applicants.
- In 2018, we promulgated a new rule on “transgender, gender nonconforming, and intersex offenders” ([OAR 416-435-0010](#)) and finalized a new policy for “Meeting LGBTQQI and Gender Nonconforming Youth Needs”.
- By consciously attending to diversity in recruitment, we now have one of the most visibly diverse executive leadership teams in the state.
- We have made efforts to diversify the makeup of our interview panels as well, though we are still striving for consistency.

## **First Steps Toward an Agency-wide Approach**

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We have entered a new phase in our work. The challenge before us now is to unify our efforts in various areas — services to youth, hiring and retaining a diverse workforce, data collection, and policy and infrastructure.

## **DIVERSITY EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI) INITIATIVE**

In 2019, we began work on defining a new, agency-wide initiative focused on DEI. Last summer, with inclusivity and diversity of thought in mind, we formed a workgroup of staff of diverse race, gender, and job classification, and ensured we had representation from each department. This workgroup's focus is to help lay the foundation and guidance for what will be our agency's DEI goals, objectives, and outcomes.

The group has:

- developed clear definitions for commonly-used but often misunderstood terms such as “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion” (see Appendix A);
- begun developing an “equity scorecard” that will give us a way to view major decision points for youth within our system, such as use of isolation and parole revocation, broken down by race and gender;
- created an agency equity statement (see Appendix A); and
- we will soon embark on agency-wide discussions on DEI as our newest strategic initiative.

As part of the agency’s equity statement, the workgroup also identified our initiative’s three areas of focus:

1. improve outcomes for marginalized youth (e.g., case planning, treatment, education, parole-related decision-making, foster care, and transition services)
2. diversify and support the agency’s workforce (e.g., recruit, hire, retain, promote); and
3. improve our business operations (e.g., reviewing procurement, policy, and budgeting with an equity lens)

## EQUITY ASSESSMENTS

In 2019, OYA became a member of the Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE), which is a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. The alliance has worked with nearly 200 government jurisdictions on these issues; some regional members include the Oregon Governor’s Office, Multnomah County, the City of Portland, Lane County, the city of Seattle, and King County, Washington.

We will be working with GARE to administer an employee equity assessment. This is a 50-question survey designed to assess staff understanding of and exposure to key concepts and training related to DEI. The information gathered will be used to determine areas of focus for further work and can be compared to a similar survey we will administer to assess our progress.

We have also retained the services of TsaiComms, a firm that specializes in diversity, equity, and inclusion work, to do an agency equity assessment for us. Consistent with our initiative’s priorities, as outlined, above, this assessment will focus on the following three areas:

- **youth programs and services** – review youth programs, services, procedures, and practices with an equity lens; assess efforts to mitigate disparities and inequities and to deliver all services in a culturally responsive manner;
- **workforce** – a review of our human resources policies, procedures, and practices with an equity lens; assess efforts to recruit, onboard, engage, retain, develop, promote diverse staff members; and
- **business operations** – review operations policies, procedures, and practices identifying opportunities to operationally embed diversity, equity, and inclusion at every level.

## STARTING POINTS

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Because we've only just begun this new phase of work, our ideas for next steps are necessarily provisional. Below are some areas of work we expect to pursue.

### A. CONDUCT EQUITY ASSESSMENTS

We are contracting with vendors to conduct the equity assessments described above in 2020. This is an essential first step, as it will allow us to identify next steps with our workforce (e.g., policy changes, training needs). We would also be able to create measurable goals based on the assessment data, to be shared with the legislature in 2021.

### B. IDENTIFY KEY DECISION POINTS AND MEASURES

We plan to use an equity lens to review all decision points within the OYA system where disparate treatment for youth of color, young women, or LGBTQ+ youth can occur, or which can contribute to disparate outcomes. Our plan is to prioritize decision points that can be effectively monitored and where action can be taken to achieve meaningful change. Once identified, further action steps can be determined.

### C. FOCUS ON STAFF TRAINING

While we already train all new staff and provide periodic training for existing staff to help them provide culturally competent care, more training based on best-practices literature — provided on a more frequent, consistent basis — is needed. (And it will be important to provide this training for OYA's foster families and residential providers as well as staff in its secure facilities.) For example, it would be helpful for staff to understand how trauma affects youth behavior differently across cultures, as failure to properly interpret challenging behavior as a trauma reaction can result in increased lengths of stay.

We anticipate that the equity assessments will help us prioritize our training needs and appropriate staffing to deliver it.

### D. EXPAND SERVICES TO VICTIMS AND CRIME SURVIVORS

As OYA implements juvenile sentencing reform under SB 1008, we anticipate that more youth will be committed to our custody as juveniles over which we will have parole authority. We are researching ways to be more proactive with victims and crime survivors about the commitment process, so that they are able to provide input on parole decisions or other transition planning for youth.

We will also be exploring the creation of a dialog process (to be initiated by victims and crime survivors) in which they can meet with youth who committed offenses against them.

In both situations, we expect we will need assistance from victim advocates who can advocate for people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, or other underrepresented groups to make sure any such engagement is culturally-responsive.

## E. EXPAND CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC SERVICES FOR YOUTH

- **Proposed Positions to Provide Services**

During the 2019-2021 budget process, in an effort to fill some gaps and broaden our ability to provide culturally-specific and LGBTQ+-sensitive services, OYA proposed several policy option packages. Though they were not funded, we still believe they are likely to be essential to improving our services:

- A full-time HR position to give OYA the capacity to do active outreach to underrepresented communities to recruit staff, and develop and drive diversity and inclusion strategies for staff development, promotion, and retention.
- A full-time position to recruit foster families and provide training to all of our foster and proctor care providers. The position would be partially devoted to targeted recruitment of foster families from diverse communities, including bilingual and LGBTQ+-friendly homes.
- Seven additional staff for OYA's Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR)—focused on African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latinx, Native American, LGBTQ+ youth populations, along with a tattoo removal program coordinator and a position focused on gang intervention and conflict resolution—would greatly assist our ability to serve the nearly 500 youth of color and the estimated 115 LGBTQ+ youth under OYA supervision.

Two other positions we believe will be important—which we have not proposed in the past—are:

- A position to assist girls and young women connect with trades/Career Technical Education and job placement.
- A strategic diversity officer to help the agency implement its diversity plan. We anticipate needing at a minimum, an additional agency position to maintain the flow of this work.

## Conclusion

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OYA has long sought to provide appropriate services for all youth in its care; and to provide a diverse, inclusive workplace for its staff. Now, we have begun a new phase in our work: our new initiative is more comprehensive and more ambitious than our past efforts. While we have a lot of work to do — and no doubt a lot to learn about how to be most effective — we are excited by the journey ahead. We look forward to reporting again on our progress in the 2021 legislative session.



### Oregon Youth Authority – Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Data shows that youth of color and LGBTQQI youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system.

While the Oregon Youth Authority is only one part of that system, we play a critical role in addressing the historical and systemic inequities that it perpetuates.

To successfully fulfill our mission — protecting the public and reducing crime by holding youth accountable and providing opportunities for reformation in safe environments — we must ensure that we are effectively meeting the needs of all youth and communities, especially those who are marginalized.

We need a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace in order to be aware, innovative, and agile enough to connect with and understand the needs of the youth and families we serve and the staff we serve alongside.

- **Diversity:** We work to ensure a wide variety of differences are well-represented within our workplace. These include race, ethnicity, culture, age, ability, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, and sexual orientation.
- **Equity:** We work to find and remove systemic barriers that limit access to opportunities and resources for marginalized populations. This applies to those who receive and those who provide OYA services.
- **Inclusion:** We work to ensure that marginalized populations have a voice, are treated fairly and respectfully, feel welcomed, and have meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making.

To make this vision a reality, OYA will:

- Critically examine its work, particularly as it affects youth of color, LGBTQQI youth, and other marginalized youth, families, and communities.
- Include and advance those most impacted by the inequities of the juvenile justice system.
- Embed diversity, equity, and inclusion in our approach to all aspects of our work.

#### Our Goals

We are working strategically and collaboratively to:

1. **Improve outcomes for marginalized youth.** We will evaluate our direct-care processes and programs to find and dismantle inequities that impact outcomes for marginalized youth. We will examine:
  - a. intake and initial assessment processes;
  - b. treatment programs;
  - c. education, vocational training, and youth employment;
  - d. cultural services;

- e. ways we engage and involve families in the rehabilitation process;
  - f. youth placement decisions;
  - g. processes around parole violations and escalation from community placements to youth correctional facilities;
  - h. length of stay for youth in youth correctional facilities and in residential programs; and
  - i. services for youth who are transitioning back into the community.
- 2. Diversify the OYA workforce.** We will intentionally create and maintain an organizational culture that welcomes and supports diverse employees, while ensuring that a wide variety of differences are well-represented within our workplace. We will examine:
- a. recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and training processes;
  - b. ways to better support and retain employees from marginalized communities;
  - c. ways to increase participation, promotion, and leadership of employees from marginalized communities; and
  - d. ways to educate all staff on key concepts in the context of the juvenile justice system, including cultural, structural, and institutional racism; racial equity; white privilege; gender discrimination; and being an ally to the LGBTQQI community.
- 3. Improve agency infrastructure.** We will work to address systemic issues that negatively impact marginalized youth and families. This work will include:
- a. building an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens into our agency's processes for strategic planning, policy creation and implementation, contracting, priority-setting, and budgeting;
  - b. examining our policies to determine whether they perpetuate inequities and systems of oppression and to fix them when necessary; and
  - c. engaging in and effectively supporting the efforts of organizations led by communities of color, the LGBTQQI community, and other groups most affected by inequities in the juvenile justice system.

### **A Living Document**

We recognize that we will need to adapt our plans as we encounter new perspectives and additional information. As such, this statement must be a living document, and will be amended as needed over time.

We also know that OYA is part of a larger juvenile justice system. It is our intent that our staff, stakeholders, and allies hold us (and each other) accountable in achieving equity, diversity, and inclusion. We must work together to collaboratively address the equity issues that most affect the youth and families we serve, our staff, and our communities.