

Institutionalizing and Elevating IDEA

IDEA Center for Public Gardens
2023-24 Cohort Project



Descanso
Gardens

Overview

- About our project
- Outcomes
 - Board, Staff, Volunteers, Training Presentation
- Lessons learned
- Next steps

About our project

- Motivation and participants
 - Over the past several years, Descanso Gardens' commitment to IDEA has been described in several key institutional documents. With these pieces in place, it was important to enact change in a multitude of ways, across the organization, so that this commitment to IDEA is embedded and acknowledged as a key part of ongoing operations.
 - In 2023, the cohort team, Juliann Rooke (*CEO*), Sandra Mays (*Board of Directors, then Governance & Nominations Committee Chair*), and Emi Yoshimura (*then Director of Education*) applied to participate in the IDEA Center for Public Gardens 2023-24 Cohort program with a proposed project focused on
 - Making our commitment to IDEA “real” for staff, volunteers and board members, and
 - Elevating IDEA work so staff, volunteers, and board members will feel this work is valued, supported, and recognized.

About our project

- Approach

- We focused our goals around three main audiences: the Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers.
- We looked for projects and initiatives that were already in discussion and needed to be given support or priority.
- We utilized existing institutional committees (i.e. the Staff IDEA Committee, Board of Directors Governance and Nominations Committee) and existing processes (i.e. strategic planning, performance evaluations) where possible and appropriate.
- We worked in a way that was decentralized and dispersed vs. focusing on one distinct effort.

Outcomes: Board of Directors

- Board Recruitment: Ask Board members to proactively invite contacts with deep connections to underrepresented communities to attend CCA and other development events.
- Board Recruitment: Include connections to diverse and underrepresented communities in discussions of potential board members qualifications.
- New Board member onboarding: Provide new Board members with information on Descanso's institutional commitment to IDEA work and invite participation in ongoing initiatives.
- Ensure budget for IDEA related initiatives included in institutional budget.
- Ensure strategic plan and associated work plan are advancing IDEA work.

Outcomes: Staff

- Performance reviews: Revise performance evaluation process to include IDEA related work as a measure of success. Provide related training to supervisors.
- Holidays: Explore adding a floating holiday so staff have flexibility to use PTO for a holiday/observance of their choosing.
- New employee onboarding: Provide new employees with information on Descanso's institutional commitment to IDEA work and invite participation in ongoing initiatives.
- Develop standard option for staff to include pronouns in email signatures. Provide related training.
- Develop standard option for staff to include pronouns on name badges. Provide related training.

Outcomes: Volunteer

- New Volunteer onboarding: Provide new volunteers with information on Descanso's institutional commitment to IDEA work and invite participation in ongoing initiatives.
- Provide regular trainings on IDEA related topics.
- Volunteer recruitment: Identify new ways to broaden diversity of people recruited to participate as volunteers.

Outcomes: IDEA Training Presentation

- The following slides were developed to support ongoing communication with all audiences (Board, staff and volunteers).
- These are meant to be flexible and will be modified as needed.

IDEA Training Presentation

How to use these slides

- In the past several years, Descanso has worked steadily to build our internal understanding of IDEA and how IDEA can and should be a part of our gardens. Please use these slides to give new and ongoing Board members, staff, and volunteers an orientation to Descanso's commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- Some possible opportunities: new staff orientation, new board member orientation, volunteer trainings

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA)

Descanso Gardens: policies and practice

What is IDEA

- Inclusion
- Diversity
- Equity
- Accessibility

Milestones

- 2019: Adoption of a Statement & Policy on Diversity and Inclusion
- 2020: Establishment of a cross-departmental IDEA working group
 - Included members of the board, staff and volunteers
- 2021: Development of a 5-year Strategic Plan that includes a commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access as a shared value and goal reflected throughout the strategic plan
- 2023-24: Participation in the IDEA Center for Public Gardens 2023-24 cohort program

2019: Statement & Policy on Diversity and Inclusion

Statement

As a public garden, we believe that access to nature and green spaces is fundamentally important to the human experience. Located in Los Angeles County, one of the most diverse metropolises in the world, we recognize our responsibility to serve and welcome a diversity of people and communities. Moreover, we embrace the value of human diversity and see strength in human variety with respect to ethnicity, age, culture, gender, personal values and beliefs, socioeconomic situation, physical abilities, religion, and sexual orientation. Consistent with our mission, we strive to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion and access to nature spaces for Los Angeles County residents and beyond.

Policy

To support our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access Descanso Gardens endeavors to:

- Consider diversity and inclusion a driver for institutional excellence and seek out diversity of participation, thought and action.
- Increase diversity of our Board, Volunteers, Workforce, Audience, Vendors, Artists and Partners.
- Develop partnerships with diverse audiences to identify and meet the needs of all constituents in the community.
- Create work environments and practices that are inclusive of all individuals, and ensure that employees, volunteers, and participants feel supported, listened to and are able to achieve their highest potential.
- Regularly evaluate our diversity and inclusion practices.

Approved by the Board of Trustees on September 19, 2019

2020-ongoing: Staff IDEA Council

- 2020: Establishment of a cross-departmental IDEA working group
 - Included members of the board, staff and volunteers
- 2021-2022: Transitioned to Staff working group
- 2023 - ongoing: Staff IDEA Council

2021: Strategic Plan

Our shared values and goals are reflected throughout the strategic plan. They include but are not limited to:

- Our commitment to inclusion, diversity, and access (IDEA), which is reflected across each pillar of this plan.

Key Themes Throughout the Plan

- A commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access is growing at Descanso and an opportunity for the future.

To accomplish our programs goal, we will:

- Ensure that Descanso's programs reflect the diverse community of Los Angeles, both in content as well as in the participants served.

2023-24: IDEA Center for Public Gardens Cohort program

- Project title: Institutionalizing and Elevating IDEA
- Project Description: Descanso Gardens' commitment to IDEA is described in several key institutional documents. . .With these pieces in place, it is important to enact change in a multitude of ways, across the organization, so that this commitment to IDEA becomes embedded and acknowledged as a key part of our ongoing operations.

IDEA in practice

Establishing and supporting a culture of diversity and inclusion requires everyone's participation. Please consider the following:

- How is IDEA a part of your work at Descanso?
- What kinds of training or support would you like?
- How would you like to be involved?

Questions

Please feel free to reach out to

Emi Yoshimura

Chief Operations and Administration Officer
eyoshimura@descansogardens.org

Takeaways & lessons learned

- We have done a lot of work, and we also have a lot of work to do.
- We need to build our institutional comfort and confidence in talking about diversity and inclusion.
 - Part of this work will be in broadening the group of people who are regularly participating in these discussions and are familiar with ongoing conversations/concerns/initiatives.
 - Part of this work will be ensuring we are talking about diversity and inclusion frequently enough that it is an expected part of our work culture/practice.
 - Part of this work will be getting comfortable with having more voices “at the table.” A commitment to diversity and inclusion requires an openness to a range of perspectives.

Takeaways & lessons learned

- We need to build more understanding of what it looks like when diversity and inclusion initiatives are put into practice.
 - Agreement on ideas in theory, does not mean there is consensus/understanding of how these ideas will manifest in practice.
 - We need to communicate through to implementation.
- Progress will take compassion, patience, and steady commitment.
 - We are wanting to bring board, staff, volunteers and guests along together. This is a large group of people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, expectations, and priorities for their time at Descanso.
 - We should expect that this will take time and concerted effort.

Advice

- Look for ways to embed IDEA discussions in ongoing conversations throughout the institution.
 - For example, how are diversity and inclusion part of recruitment practices, new employee onboarding, ongoing training of staff, volunteers and board members?
- It is important to identify where this work lives - who is responsible for diversity and inclusion work at the Board level? With staff? Volunteers? And how do all these efforts coordinate and support each other.
- Try all the things - you can't be sure where you may meet unexpected resistance and more time may be needed, and where the opposite will be true.
- Celebrate the victories and progress. Don't let the perfect get in the way of the good.

Next Steps

- Share IDEA training slides
 - Share & discuss with Staff IDEA Council
 - At staff workshop in August
 - Incorporate in new staff orientation materials
 - Incorporate in new volunteer orientation
 - Discuss ways to incorporate in Board member orientation or ongoing training
- Translate IDEA training slides into multiple languages
- Strategic Plan Workplan - add action steps for 2024
- Keep going
 - With our increased understanding of IDEA and the work of implementing related initiatives, bring more people into the conversation and ensure we continue to prioritize these efforts.