



2023-2024 APGA IDEA Cohort

Assessing IDEA at Ruth Bancroft Garden and charting our path forward

Why did you pick your project?

For our project, we wanted a better understanding of the composition of our staff, board, volunteers, and those we currently serve. Additionally we sought to identify avenues for connecting with our greater community, as well as eliciting the support of Garden leadership to ensure that IDEA would become part of our organizational culture. With this in mind, the following three goals were identified:

1. Enhance Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems relevant to diversity to accurately capture the demographics of those we are currently serving.
2. Develop an outreach strategy to engage organizations serving target populations we wish to include at the Garden (visitors, members, board, staff, etc.).
3. Enlist board support and coordination.

GOAL 1 - Data Collection: Enhance CRM systems relevant to diversity to accurately capture the demographics of those we are currently serving.

We discovered integrating our CRM systems involves a technological challenge and high level of expertise/time that was beyond the scope of this project. We have made substantial progress in identifying key issues, aligning garden staff and Board on the need for more technical support, and initiated a search to bring more robust IT capacity to the organization by recruiting a new position toward this end.

Although integrating our CRM systems (NCR, woocommerce and Altru/Blackbaud) was outside of the capacity of our committee, we were able to conduct a smaller survey of staff, volunteers, and board members to gather data on the demographics and identities currently represented in our organization. We had previously conducted a small visitor survey that we could also compare against. The survey also included questions about perceptions of IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) work and the receptiveness of individuals to training in these areas.

To see a snapshot of the findings - see appendix.

Interpretation:

The organization has room to grow to better represent Contra Costa County as a whole. Being mindful of the demographic gaps between board and staff as well as the organization and county

census numbers, heightens the importance of creating inclusive conversations and equity of voice if we are going to continue to bring in new perspectives and both create/ respond to new audiences. There is a consensus within the organization that IDEA is crucial to our role as a non-profit and in serving our community, though different groups have varying perceptions of our current effectiveness creating an inclusive, representative organization that serves the community as a whole. Internally, there are also differences in how people feel their opinions, experiences, and perspectives are respected. These are all areas that warrant further discussion between stakeholders to ensure we are all moving together as an organization.

What has changed?

The survey has initiated an organization-wide conversation about IDEA, setting the stage for a more informed discussion (beyond personal opinions of whether or not we are diverse/inclusive etc) about the organization's current demographics. The demographic data also has given us baseline data so we may begin to make goals, and track progress. As for the IDEA attitudes section, the survey suggests, we still need to develop some shared understanding of what IDEA is, and why it matters to our organization.

GOAL 2 - Outreach Strategy - Develop an outreach strategy to engage organizations serving target populations we wish to include at the Garden (visitors, members, board, staff, etc.).

Our first step in developing an outreach strategy was to examine the Education Department and identify the local organizations we are currently partnering with. We sought to deepen our relationships with these organizations and explore new opportunities for outreach to underrepresented populations with our education offerings.

Our Children's Program Director has been particularly successful in outreach efforts, hosting numerous storytimes in the past few months at organization's serving a diverse community. Now that these groups have been introduced to the Garden, we will also be offering them the chance to visit. In terms of adult and visitor education, we have been fortunate that many outside organizations have expressed interest in visiting us, and we have been able to provide tours and other experiences. Thanks to the generosity of the American Public Gardens IDEA grant we have also been able to connect with our local community college's horticultural department and bring in a Spanish speaking summer intern.

GOAL 3 - Enlisting Board Support/Coordination

Our board has been tasked with finding a new Executive Director (ED), working towards greater budget stability, and building relationships among many new board members. Our new ED will start in July 2024 who will help chart the next chapter of our organization, and has a track record of success working in a diverse community setting. We are hopeful he will help us continue to unlock the potential to reach an ever broader audience.

Who are we making the change for?

In pursuing IDEA initiatives, we aim to enact changes within our organization, both internally, for our organizational culture, and externally, for the broader Bay area community that surrounds us.

We recognize that in order to better represent and respond to our community, we need to focus internally as well, ensuring that our organization prioritizes IDEA goals in our programs and organizational structure. This is still very much a work in progress.

What was your approach?

Throughout this project our approach has been to keep a steady drum beat on the importance of IDEA, even as we deal with the challenges of growth and change. The cohort has been instrumental in helping to make a space for continuing these conversations.

What were the challenges you faced (expected and/or unexpected) and how did you work through them?

Our organization has been in a state of transition over the past few years as we dealt with the challenges of the pandemic years, including rapid growth, leadership and Board transitions, and funding challenges. This has made it difficult to gain continuity and momentum on long term projects not connected to immediate revenue generation. Nonetheless, our education department, and staff have developed a strong 'IDEA lens' that continuously reflects and recalibrates how we approach our programming.

What were your biggest take aways / lessons learned?

This is a marathon, not a sprint.

Diversity in hiring is incredibly important for pushing the needle on IDEA.

It is important for an organization as a whole to have a culture of IDEA, if real progress will be made. This requires education, but also a steady drumbeat of why it is important. Not everyone will be on the same page, energies need to be shared between building consensus while also not waiting for everyone to be on the same page.

Big changes cost money, but funders also want to support IDEA work. Look for opportunities wherever you can to move the needle, even if it is a tiny bit.

What are resources you used and/or would recommend?

- The IDEA cafes are tremendously valuable.
- The APGA community boards are a wealth of resources (people in the garden world are so generous with their knowledge and experience).
- Create/participate in regional convenings of other gardens - we learn so much from one another
- ([Museum Report Card](#), [APGA Sustainability Index - Employee Development, Diversity and Inclusion](#), [Bakken Museum Report](#))
- [American Public Garden's: Creating a More Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Garden](#)
- [D&I Project Roadmap & Guide](#)

If you were to go back and do things differently, what would you have done?

The education department, our former ED and a board member participated in the cohort, and we had few opportunities for dialogue with the staff and board on what we were learning/aiming for. If we could go back, it would be valuable to further reflect on the month's topic/lesson, and discuss with a larger group, how we could operationalize the learning in the context of our Garden.

What advice would you give others?

There are so many great resources available in this cohort. It is easy for things to get away from you in the busy work week. It would be helpful to do a reflection after each class of key take homes, what additional questions you have and how they may be applied to your garden.

What's next for you?

Our organization's "IDEA journey" has taken a number of twists and turns since we started the APGA IDEA cohort, as our organization has been in a state of transition since the program began. Our hope is that we are preparing to round a corner in both stabilizing the organization and creating a new opportunity for both prioritizing and formalizing IDEA work with a new ED starting in July.

In creating this report, we hope to not only share our progress through this cohort, but also lay the groundwork for our work to come. Some of our next steps include:

GOAL 1 - Enhance CRM systems relevant to diversity to accurately capture the demographics of those we are currently serving

NEXT STEPS:

1. Hold a staff, board, volunteer training, based on [American Public Garden's: Creating a More Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Garden](#). In the absence of a strategic plan, the staff, board, and volunteers may benefit from having a shared 'visioning' session, that creates some more cohesion around our shared goals, and best practices for creating an internal culture of IDEA. Creating a shared vision, evaluating where we are ([see D&I Project Roadmap & Guide](#))
2. Establish an ongoing IDEA committee that continues the momentum of the APGA cohort. Such activities may include
 - Reviewing current IDEA metrics ([Museum Report Card](#), [APGA Sustainability Index - Employee Development, Diversity and Inclusion](#), [Bakken Museum Report](#)) and outlining low-hanging fruit/ aspirational IDEA goals for the organization, creating accountability check points and seeing how these can be prioritized through funding commitments from leadership
 - Developing metrics for measuring IDEA across the organization, for visitors/members and strategies for moving the needle, including roles and responsibilities and accountability strategies.
 - Pursuing opportunities (and funding) for further training for board and staff.
 - Creating/Providing ongoing professional development/resources to the staff, board, volunteers to create some shared language and understanding of the importance of IDEA work.
 - Work with staff to create additional opportunities for IDEA work (i.e accessibility audits, identify non-english speaking media outlets, creating a preferred list of BIPOC vendors etc.)
 - Cultivating relationships with community organizations that may be potential partners.

GOAL 2 - Develop an outreach strategy to engage organizations serving target populations we wish to include at the Garden (visitors, members, board, staff, etc.).

NEXT STEPS:

1. We aim to continue our outreach efforts into the community and make it possible for new populations to experience the Garden. Efforts may include:
 - Exploring potential synergies with the Mount Diablo Unified School District's - Growing Healthy Kids Program
 - Hosting additional programs with Care Parent Network, Monument Crisis Center, Youth Homes, Rubicon, Spirited Play Labs, and First 5
2. Continuing to develop programs that reflect and respond to a diverse community including:
 - Completing the roll out of the Social Story and related programming for visitors on the Autism Spectrum
 - Creating a rubric for how we evaluate what organizations we can offer free programming, and membership to, prioritizing those furthering IDEA work.
3. As we foster relationships with community organizations, we hope to find more thought partners and individuals willing to advise us on expanding our reach. The IDEA Committee may invite community leaders to the Garden to explore additional opportunities for reaching underserved communities.
4. Examine hiring language and avenues for diversifying staff, provide resources to the board on avenues to diversify their ranks.

GOAL 3: Enlist board support and coordination

NEXT STEPS:

1. Provide the new ED and board an update on IDEA efforts past and present.
2. Provide ED and board with resources/materials surrounding IDEA, so that we may cultivate a shared language and understanding of the importance of IDEA in the context of our Garden.
3. Ask the board/leadership to prioritize IDEA work through the following:
 - Supporting the creation of an IDEA Committee, composed of staff, board, volunteers and community partners, with paid staff time for participation.
 - Commit to producing a yearly IDEA report reflecting on [Transparency, Accountability and Change](#).
 - Creating a line item in the 2025 budget for IDEA initiatives/action items identified in that the IDEA committee suggests (such items may include trainings, accessibility improvements, internships, free or reduced programming costs)
 - Work with the IDEA committee to develop best practices for developing and recruiting diverse board members, and setting some goals for the near future.
 - Guided by [American Public Garden](#)'s recommendations, work with the IDEA committee to review and implement IDEA best practices in the context of our Garden.

Appendix A

Survey Findings

Participants:

- 64 total - staff (70% not including event staff who are part-time), board (62%), volunteers (35%)
- Visitors Survey - 450

Demographic Data:

Income: The average income of staff, board, and volunteers, hereafter referred to as 'the organization,' is \$37-68K higher than the average county resident. The board leadership's average income is more than double that of the average staff member or county resident.

Age: The average age of surveyed visitors indicates that 65% are in their middle to late ages (40-85), with volunteers and board members also skewing over 60. The average age of staff is 40 years, close to the county average of 39.9.

Gender: The organization tends to be predominantly female, with a ratio of over two to one. In the county, the sex ratio remains nearly equal until age 60, after which it begins to skew slightly more female.

Language: 98% of respondents within the organization reported English as the primary language spoken at home. According to county census data, "No households in Contra Costa County, CA reported a non-English language as their primary language at home."

Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Respondents within the organization are primarily white (74%-91%), followed by Asian American (2-10%), and Hispanic/Latino origin (5%), contrasted with county averages: 41% white, 26% Hispanic/Latino, 18% Asian American, 8% African American, and 5% Mixed Race. The limited visitor data (450 respondents) also skews more white (68%), with 18% Asian American, 8.4% Hispanic/Latino, and 1.1% African American.

Organizational Attitudes Towards IDEA Initiatives:

Perceived Importance of IDEA for organization : Staff rated the importance of IDEA at 4.9, board at 4, and volunteers at 4.3 on a scale of 1-5.

Inclusivity: Staff rated the Garden's inclusivity at 3.3, board at 4.8, and volunteers at 4.6 on a scale of 1-5.

How the Garden Represents and Serves the Community: Staff rated the Garden's representation and service at 3, board at 4.3, and volunteers at 3 on a scale of 1-5.

Feeling Opinions Input are Respected: Staff rated at 3.2, board at 4.8, and volunteers at 3.8 on a scale of 1-5 regarding how respected their opinions, experiences, and perspectives are across the organization.

Interest in IDEA Training: 94% of staff, 77% of board members, and 59% of volunteers said they would like to or were open to potentially attending future IDEA training.

