

2025-27

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Plan Agency Affirmative Action Plan



COMMISSION
FOR THE
BLIND



BLINDNESS WITHOUT BARRIERS

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Executive Director Message

Governor Kotek has asked all Oregonians to believe in our state and a future where all our people can thrive, enjoy financial stability and pathways to greater opportunity, and feel safe in their homes and communities.

For Oregonians who are blind, these goals begin by building confidence in their own future, through understanding what is possible after vision loss. Only through access to training, resources and support can they believe in the core principle of blindness rehabilitation: Blindness does not pose a barrier to living a fully-independent, safe, and meaningful life.

As the only statewide organization that provides specialized services to adults who experience vision loss, the Commission for the Blind plays a critical role in building an Oregon that ensures that the pathways to greater opportunity are accessible to all Oregonians who are blind. As we consider ensuring all of us have safe homes and communities, for individuals who experience vision loss, feeling safe includes having access to the resources and skills necessary to live independent and productive lives.

Governor Kotek's leadership and commitment is to build a better Oregon where all may live, work and thrive aligns with our vision statement *Blindness without Barriers: A state of inclusion for Oregonians with vision loss*. I am proud to lead our efforts to ensure every citizen is afforded the same opportunities of creating a better life for themselves and their families. The Oregon Commission for the Blind's mission is to *empower Oregonians who are blind to fully engage in life*. We serve Oregonians who experience vision loss starting from 14 years of age through the adult life span to prepare for a career, maintain a job, and regain employment as well as remaining safe, independent and active in their homes and communities for as long as possible. We are so fortunate to have the guidance of a seven-member commission appointed by Governor Kotek to provide us with policy direction and fiscal oversight to inform our decisions about service delivery and that resources reflect the needs of the citizens who are blind in Oregon. The Commission's work involves regular opportunities for public input from stakeholders which ensure that the policy and resource decisions are translating into a positive impact on the lives of the citizens we serve throughout Oregon.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility/Affirmative Action Plan 2025-2027

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility are integral to the agency's mission and vision for Oregon. Research indicates that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the medical conditions that can lead to blindness, which means that the agency's work to ensure equity in our service delivery is at the core of the agency's ability to achieve our mission and support an Oregon where all our citizens can thrive. Every three years, the agency conducts a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that focuses our efforts to better understand where there are gaps in terms of unserved and underserved populations and their needs that can optimize access to services and outcomes. Through the Diversity Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Affirmative Action Plan, we can make strategic, targeted investments and guide our work to ensure that we are able to achieve our goals and objectives in support of Governor Kotek's vision for Oregon.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dacia Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dacia" being more prominent than the last name "Johnson".

Dacia Johnson
Executive Director

Agency Overview

Since being established in 1937, the Oregon Commission for the Blind has been a resource for Oregonians who experience vision loss as well as their families, friends, and employers. We have nationally recognized programs and staff that assist Oregonians who experience vision loss toward independence, employment, and self-sufficiency.

Mission and Objectives

Mission

The mission of the Commission for the Blind is to Empower Oregonians who are blind to fully engage in life. Since being established in 1937 as a state agency, the agency has evolved over time to be a consumer driven organization with a citizen governing body appointed by the Governor. Today, the agency receives policy direction and oversight from a seven-member Commission representing consumer organizations, education, ophthalmology/optometry, business, and individual citizens. It is required that the majority of the seven members of the Commission are persons who experience blindness. These leaders of the organization have charged the agency with the important task of becoming an exemplary service provision entity within state government.

Objectives

The Commission for the Blind has five major program objectives in service to our mission:

1. Helping Oregonians who are blind get and keep jobs that allow them to support themselves and their families.
2. Training Oregonians in the alternative skills related to blindness such as adaptive technology, white cane travel, braille, and activities of daily living.
3. Helping seniors and individuals with vision loss (who are unable to work) live with the highest levels of independence and self-sufficiency so that they can remain independent in their homes and active in their communities.
4. Licensing and supporting business owners who operate food service and vending operations in public buildings and facilities throughout the state.

5. Executing business functions and providing administrative support for agency programs that ensure effective and efficient use of resources--delivering high quality services and achieving positive outcomes.

We Serve

Oregonians who are blind and visually impaired who require rehabilitation services in order to be employed or live independently in their community.

Businesses in Oregon who have, or are considering hiring, employees who are legally blind.

We Provide

A continuum of services from youth transition to services for seniors who experience vision loss. ORS 346.110

Employment counseling, training and job placement, individual and group counseling addressing adjustment to blindness. ORS 346.180

Technology Services, adaptive equipment and software customized to meet the needs of individuals and employer work sites. ORS.346.180

Resources for businesses interested in hiring or retaining employees who are experiencing vision loss and for Oregonians seeking information and referral regarding visual impairment. ORS 346.180

Training that enables individuals who are experiencing vision loss to remain independent in their homes and communities, and training in adaptive skills which increase work readiness. ORS 346.250

Public education on the abilities of people who are blind or visually impaired. ORS 346.170

Small business opportunities in public buildings and on public property via the Business Enterprise Program. ORS 346.520

A registry of Oregonians who are legally blind. ORS 346.160

Name of Agency Executive Director

Dacia Johnson, Executive Director
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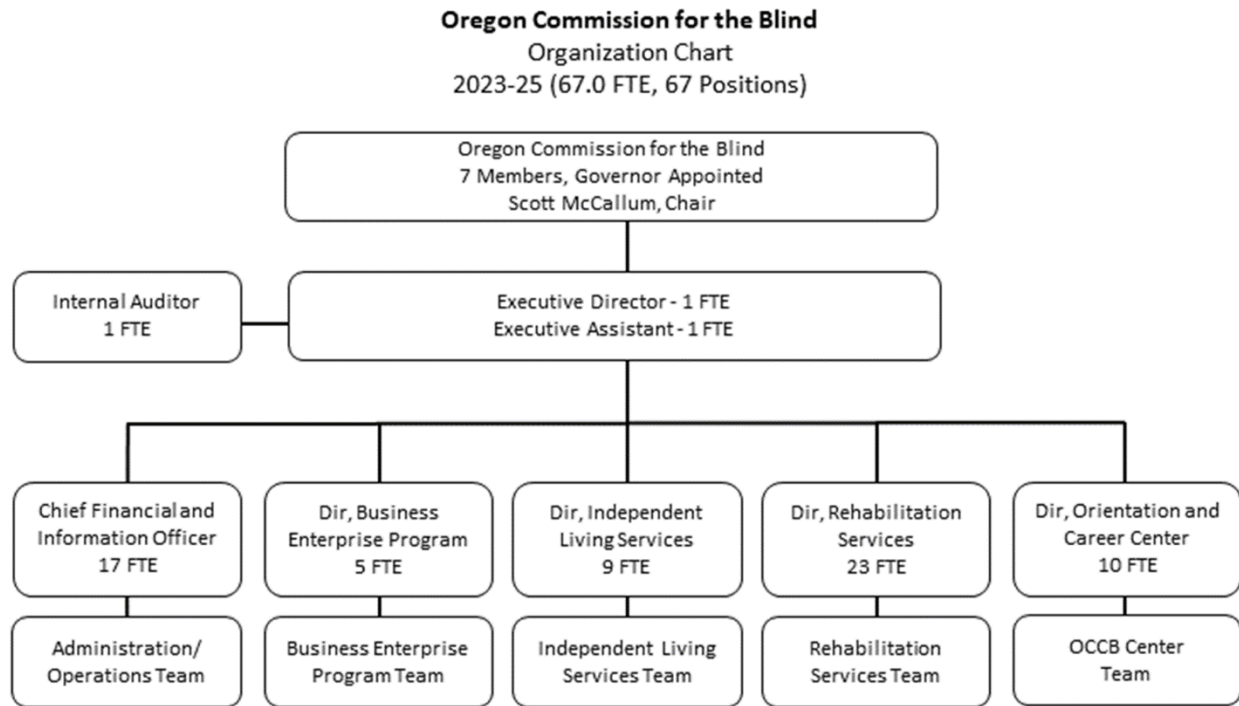
Name of Governor's Advisor

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Name of Affirmative Action/DEI&A Representative

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Organization Chart



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

The Commission for the Blind is proud to be representing the State of Oregon as one of the agency equity leaders to promote education and move forward the DEI&A movement in our state.

This report is a combined DEI&A and Affirmative Action plan with the goal that they support one another. The DEI&A plan outlines how the agency aims to create a workplace where individuals from diverse backgrounds are valued, included, and have equal opportunities for success. The affirmative action plan outlines the agency's workplace demographic data and the actions it will take to attract, recruit, and retain underrepresented groups. This document begins with the DEI&A plan and concludes with the affirmative action plan.

The Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) works directly towards a concept that falls under the umbrella of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

- DEI focuses on creating a society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of background or ability.
- The OCB's mission is to empower Oregonians who are blind or visually impaired to achieve full inclusion and integration in society.

Areas of Overlap:

- The OCB works to break down barriers for those with visual impairments, giving them a more equal chance to participate in society (equity).
- By providing services and support, the OCB helps create a more diverse and inclusive Oregon where people with vision loss can lead fulfilling lives.

While the OCB has a specific target client (Oregonians who experience vision loss), their mission aligns with the broader goals of DEI. We know that from statewide statistics that Oregonians who experience disabilities are employed at a lower rate compared to the public at large. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are fundamental to OCB's success. A staff that reflects a variety of backgrounds and experiences allows the agency to better understand the specific needs of individuals with vision loss. This is because blindness can manifest differently depending on a person's background and when vision loss occurred. A diverse team can then tailor services and communication methods to ensure everyone receives effective support.

Furthermore, DEI fosters cultural competency within the agency. With a staff that understands different cultures and socioeconomic situations, the commission can provide inclusive and respectful services to all Oregonians with visual impairments. Finally, a diverse team brings a wider range of perspectives to the table, leading to more innovative solutions and improved service delivery. In essence, DEI strengthens the OCB's ability to connect with clients, build trust, and empower them to achieve full inclusion within society.

Why We Include Accessibility:

Because of our work specializing in blindness rehabilitation, we have added a particular emphasis on disability and accessibility. Disability is part of the human experience and is reflected in all communities. If you experience blindness, accessing information and navigating your environment can pose a barrier to inclusion. Navigating online platforms to search for a job or accessing public services are examples of how challenges with accessibility may lead to underrepresentation of individuals with disabilities in the workplace as well as in the community at large.

Strategy focus area: Budget

In preparation for the 25-27 budget development process, the agency, under the leadership of the Commission for the Blind board launched a comprehensive strategic planning and budget development process including a PESTLE analysis which informed our key goals below. The PESTLE analysis helped to ensure that the strategic priorities contain a multi-dimensional perspective of the agency's work and operational context. To prepare for Oregon's future and respond to the evolution and demands of Oregon's changing demographics, shifts in the economy and the needs of Oregonians who are blind, the Agency has developed the following focus areas and strategic priorities to prioritize our resources and establish direction for our work as an agency.

This process involved engagement of the Governor appointed Commissioners representing citizens who are blind, employers, education, optometry, the National Federation of the Blind of Oregon and the American Council of the Blind of Oregon. This process included a series of public input opportunities inviting stakeholders, as well as agency staff to offer input into the Strategic Plan and budget development process. The Agency Request Budget was created to reflect the input from the stakeholders and staff, under the Leadership and guidance of the Commission for the Blind board.

As the only state agency that provides specialized services to Oregonians who are blind, the agency proposed to enhance access to service delivery across Oregon, improve wrap around services to support individuals enrolled in programs within the agency, and to improve access and design of statewide information technology systems.

Engaged & Proficient Team

Staff are open, accessible, and accountable for the outcomes on behalf of the citizens of Oregon. We employ specialized professionals trained in blindness rehabilitation who understand their critical role and contribute toward our goals and mission. We seek to innovate whenever possible and utilize evidence-based practices to deliver services. We believe professional development training and continuing education for our staff is critical to our outcomes.

Effective Education and Outreach

As a specialized agency, we are diligent in our efforts to ensure that Oregonians know who we are and what we do. Anyone who needs to access our services may reach us in a manner convenient for them. Business and community partners understand that Oregonians who are blind are capable and competent members of the community and want the same things as their neighbors: a good job, a safe home and thriving community, access to healthcare and resources, and freedom to pursue the life of their choosing.

The following core elements are integral to our success:

- Vision care and medical professionals appropriately refer qualifying patients to our services.
- Employers and hiring managers embrace job candidates who are blind and contact us to provide adaptive technology to enable the individual to perform their role, reducing stigma and bias in the workplace and public.
- Governmental and nonprofit social and service agencies are familiar with our services so they may engage with and rely on us when needed.

Operational Excellence

We are intentional in our efforts to perform at the highest level to ensure optimal results on behalf of Oregonians who are blind. We map our workflow and processes and look for ways to measure and evaluate our work to ensure we are achieving the expected and desired outcomes. We identify collaborative opportunities and solutions to help us meet outcome-based performance measures, as well as meeting Agency, legislative, and funding requirements and reporting.

Exemplary Service

As the only specialized agency in Oregon that provides rehabilitation services to adults who experience vision loss, we set the bar high for service standards across programs. We care about understanding our performance in delivering the right services in a timely manner, while maintaining a focus on resource utilization to ensure services are being delivered in effective and efficient ways.

Successful Client Outcomes

Our team of professionals develop customized plans for each individual to support their employment and independent living goals. Agency staff work to ensure clients are successful, which ensures that the Agency is successful in meeting and exceeding the expectations placed upon us by the Governor, legislative leadership, our federal partners, and Congress.

Policy

Overview

OCB employment practices are consistent with the State's Affirmative Action Plan Guidelines and with state and federal laws, which prohibit discrimination.

For Individuals with Disabilities

OCB will not discriminate, nor tolerate discrimination, against any applicant or employee because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the known applicant for employment is qualified.

OCB agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat known qualified individuals with disabilities without regard to their physical or mental disabilities in all human resources selection and decision practices, such as: advertising, benefits, compensation, discipline (including probation, suspension, and/or termination for cause or layoff), employee facilities, performance evaluation, recruitment, social/recreational programs, and training. OCB will also continue to administer these practices without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status or disability. Additionally, all applicants and employees are protected from coercion, intimidation, interference, or discrimination for filing a complaint or assisting in an investigation under this policy.

For Members Uniform Services (ORS 659A.082)

OCB will not discriminate or tolerate discrimination, against any employee because they are a member of, apply to be a member of, perform, has performed, applied to perform or have an obligation to perform service in a uniformed service.

It is also the policy of OCB to provide an environment for each applicant and employee that is free from sexual harassment, as well as harassment and intimidation on account of individual's race, color, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, age, familial status or disability.

Dissemination of the Affirmative Action Policy and Plan

The impact of the Affirmative Action Plan can be fully realized only to the extent that its provisions are known by those who must apply it and those who benefit from it. With this in mind, the following describes methods used to disseminate the information both internally and externally.

The responsibility for dissemination of the agency's Affirmative Action Policy Statement and Affirmative Action Plan has been delegated to the Affirmative Action Representative. Such communication is both internal and external, and will include, but is not limited to:

Internal Dissemination

The Executive Director shall:

FOR EMPLOYEES:

- Communicate the plan to all employees in order for employees to:
 - Be aware of the plan.
 - Be aware of their individual responsibilities for effective implementation of the plan.
- Make Affirmative Action Plan and Policy available for employees in the agency electronic shared folders.
- Annually all policies shall be provided to all agency employees for review and acknowledgement.

FOR MANAGEMENT:

- Conduct meetings to explain the intent of the Affirmative Action Plan.
- Distribute the plan to all who have the authority to recruit, hire, train, and/or promote.

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- Review with each their responsibility for achieving the agency's affirmative action goals and objective and provide relevant information throughout the year.

NEW HIRE ORIENTATION:

- Include the following as part of each new hire's orientation:
 - Affirmative Action Policy
 - Affirmative Action Plan
 - Grievance Procedure

External Dissemination

1. All recruitment announcements, applications for employment, and newspaper advertisements will contain the phrase, "An Equal Opportunity Employer."
2. OCB's Affirmative Action Plan is posted on the agency's internet site and made available to the public upon request.
3. Provide copies of the agency's Affirmative Action Policy Statement, Affirmative Action Plan and Grievance Procedure to any person, including job applicants, upon request.
4. Notify interested bidders, contractors, subcontractors and suppliers of the agency's affirmative action policy when requested. Notices shall include a statement that the agency will not knowingly do business with any bidder, contractor, subcontractor, or supplier of materials that discriminates against members of any protected class.

Monitoring and Reporting System

The Affirmative Action Representative will monitor the Affirmative Action Plan on a continual basis. Monitoring will include, but not be limited to:

1. Monitoring the auditing and reporting system. Reporting and auditing includes:
 - a. The maintenance of accurate and up-to-date records on all applicants, hires, promotions, transfers, and terminations by sex, race, and EEO-4 categories.
 - b. The review of all promotions, transfers, and terminations to be certain that all employees are treated fairly and equitably; and

- c. The review of all selection, promotional, and training procedures to ensure non-discriminations in practice
2. Prepare updates and evaluations of the Affirmative Action Plan to be submitted to the Office of Cultural Change as required. An Affirmative Action progress report will also be prepared and submitted as part of the agency's budget submission.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is OCB's largest program and largest funding source dedicated to helping Oregonians who are blind get and keep jobs and find a career path in a field of their choosing. Every three years, the agency's VR program conducts a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to assess the needs and unmet needs in service provision. This needs assessment, required under Title IV of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), informs the state plan for service delivery that is reviewed and approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (US Department of Education). RSA oversees the national public vocational rehabilitation system throughout the US and Territories. The 2023 CSNA gathered input and data from stakeholder groups consisting of staff and board members, current and past participants, job developers, and service providers of cooperative or complementary services. Agency leadership has committed to ensure CSNA recommendations are translated into relevant, actionable results in service improvement and design. A number of the needs assessment findings and recommendations are also relevant to the agency's efforts to advance DEI as well as Succession Planning. CSNA results are shared as additional context for the work the agency performs. For example, the CSNA calls for attention to under-represented groups, staff training, and increasing public awareness of services. The recommendations below are commitments the agency is implementing along with those described in the Affirmative Action Plan. We trust that these recommendations and continuous programmatic and process improvements will serve to enhance future outcomes for Oregonians who experience vision loss.

Recommendations

These are the top recommendations for consideration from the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment 2023. Many of these recommendations are already underway and are included to underline the importance of continuing to focus on those aspects of service delivery. Those new recommendations will guide the Agency's priorities in providing quality services to Oregonians with vision loss. Full recommendations are available in correlating sections of this report.

Providing Individualized Services

Participant respondents and vocational rehabilitation counselors indicated the importance of continued individualized services and recommended future considerations for further emphasis on tailored services. Participants spoke of instructors creating an “okay to fail” and self-paced approach to services. Most indicated already receiving this type of individualized service delivery and the Agency will continue to support this approach. Staff aspects of training center service delivery to better meet individual needs and circumstances of participants. These include alternative strategies to promote training attendance than what is currently in place. They also highlighted an interest in seeing disability and cultural needs being assessed to determine level of need and using this information to inform service delivery. Counselors would also like to revisit what is considered in determining whether a participant is ready to engage in training center instruction.

Awareness of Services

A general theme among participant respondents was awareness of services. The participant focus groups especially explored the challenges provided by a perceived lack of awareness. Generally, they would like better communication and more avenues through which to learn about services. Specific recommendations included a manual, a more informative website, and newsletters highlighting available services. The Agency has published materials available describing services, however it is noted that these materials need to be more widely and frequently circulated to participants.

Services to Potentially Unserved or Underserved Populations

Ethnic and Racial Groups

A theme throughout participant respondents was the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training for Agency staff and vendors. Vocational rehabilitation counselors also expressed a desire for continued training in this area. The Agency has provided multiple mandatory DEI trainings over the years and will continue to make this training a priority. Staff would also like to make partnering with organizations serving these populations a priority yet acknowledge limitations of time to establish these relationships and a lack of awareness of the existence of such organizations. The Agency may consider making this a priority through the help of vocational rehabilitation counselor interns or help of other staff with the bandwidth to do this outreach. The Agency will also be investing more in understanding the experience of immigrants in receiving vocational rehabilitation services. Staff also underscored the importance of recruiting staff that better represent the diversity of participants, which is a high priority for the agency as well.

Rural Participants

A theme amongst participant respondents and staff was the importance of greater vendor choice and vendors with adequate availability to serve rural areas. This continues to be a barrier to employment. The Agency has invested resources in seeking vendors serving rural areas and will continue to do so. Transportation also continues to be an issue for rural participants and the Agency continues to assist participants in addressing these barriers as resources allow.

Supported Employment

Two main themes presented themselves in the results of surveys and interviews. These are tailoring services to meet the needs of supported employment participants and developing relationships with other individuals and entities providing additional support. Specific recommendations from staff include adapting training curriculum that considers the specific needs of supported employment participants including those with behavioral challenges, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and severe and persistent mental illness. A vocational rehabilitation counselor also suggested the Agency designate a specific counselor to be a supported employment specialist. Developing relationships with other Agencies, vendors, and employers was also identified as needs of supported employment participants.

Students under 24

Themes across responses from participants and vocational rehabilitation counselors included the need to identify strategies to engage students and youth more. An identified strategy for doing so include increasing participation in the Agency's Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP), a several-week work program in which youth participate in summer work experience for a variety of employers and engage in enrichment activities. Business relations coordinators suggested students need more robust career exploration services as they identify their vocational goal.

Connecting Participants with other Social Service Support

Both participants and vocational rehabilitation counselors identified barriers to employment other than those related to vision loss. These were financial including housing and other unmet basic needs. Vocational rehabilitation counselors expressed a desire for more training on available public support and navigating those processes. They would also like to have an Agency staff member specializing in this support.

Staff Training and Collaboration

The need for additional and ongoing training for staff was mentioned often in interviews with staff. Two themes presented by staff include training on supporting potentially underserved or unserved groups. Diversity, equity, and inclusion and providing services to participants with multiple disabilities including mental health challenges were discussed in multiple interviews. Staff also expressed a need for training on innovations and trends in the labor market including technological advancements and emerging industries like careers in

social media. Approximately 15% of participant respondents indicated staff training as a way to improve services overall.

Considering Labor Market Trends and Employer Needs

Over half of participant respondents indicated an employer's willingness to hire individuals with vision loss as a barrier to employment. Strategies for developing relationships with employers to increase successful participant employment outcomes included a focus on services provided to employers by the Agency. Employers were asked to identify services that are or would be helpful from a list of services offered by the Agency. Frequently chosen included help identifying accommodations, assistance analyzing position descriptions for accessibility, and worksite accessibility consultations.

Training and Recruiting Vendors

Major needs identified by participant respondents and staff regarding vendors providing vocational services are recruitment and vendor training. A lack of vendors providing services is a commonly known statewide problem. This is especially prevalent in rural areas. In addition to availability, the high turnover in service providers creates a strain on the Agency as they are constantly orienting and training new vendor staff. Similar training as identified as important for staff was also identified as important for vendors. This includes DEI training and working with participants with multiple disabilities.

Conducting Outreach to Various Audiences

Outreach to all groups was deemed a need. This includes existing and potential participants, vendors, and employers. Specific groups including racial and ethnic minorities and those with mental health challenges were identified. The Agency continues to find ways to innovate in outreach strategies.

Affirmative Action: OCB's Workforce Development Strategy

The Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) is committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive (DEI) workplace that reflects the communities we serve. Our Affirmative Action Plan below details a comprehensive strategy to achieve this goal.

This plan builds upon Oregon's commitment to equal opportunity and affirmative action. It details the roles and responsibilities of leadership, staff, and the Affirmative Action Representative in creating a welcoming environment free from discrimination and harassment. We are committed to ongoing progress, demonstrated by the successes of our previous plan and the ambitious goals outlined here.

Key Highlights of the 2023-2025 Plan:

- Achieved significant progress, including incorporating DEI language into management position descriptions and increasing the talent pipeline of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) candidates.
- Provided ongoing DEI training opportunities for staff, ensuring they possess the knowledge and skills to contribute to a diverse and inclusive work environment.
- Demonstrated alignment between the Affirmative Action Plan, DEI Plan, and Strategic Plan, ensuring a cohesive approach to achieving equity across all agency functions.

Looking Forward: 2025-2027 Goals

The 2025-2027 plan builds on prior successes and emphasizes a deeper exploration of DEI principles. Key goals include:

- Utilizing employee engagement surveys to gather in-depth feedback on our DEI efforts and ensure a sense of belonging and inclusion for all staff.
- Integrating DEI topics into performance evaluations and professional development opportunities, further embedding these principles into core agency functions.
- Expanding recruitment efforts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to increase the diversity of our applicant pool.
- Exploring the intersection of disability and DEI, specifically focusing on blindness, to ensure our programs and services are truly inclusive.

The OCB recognizes the ongoing journey towards a fully inclusive workplace. This plan serves as a roadmap for achieving measurable progress and creating a work environment where all staff feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their talents.

Roles for Implementation of Affirmative Action Plan

Responsibilities and accountability

OCB is committed to equal opportunity and maintains an active focus in the attainment of affirmative action goals and objectives. OCB's strategy is to create a work environment and employment opportunities that attract and retain a diverse

and skilled workforce. The success of the affirmative action plan depends on the leadership and commitment at all levels of the organization.

Executive Director

The Executive Director plays a leadership role in dedicating the agency to a policy of equal employment opportunity and conveying our commitment to equitability both within and outside of the organization. The Executive Director has overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring the Affirmative Action Plan and for ensuring compliance with all applicable federal and state laws, rules, and regulations. The Executive Director agrees to:

- Foster and promote the importance of a diverse and respectful workplace.
- Periodically review the Affirmative Action Plan and progress toward meeting the agency's affirmative action objectives; and
- Recognize policy needs and initiate necessary changes.

Ensure managers and supervisors understand they are responsible for participating in and promoting affirmative action.

Managers and Supervisors

OCB's Executive staff and management team are committed to the success and ongoing development of OCB's Affirmative Action efforts and goals. OCB's management team will continue to work to:

- Foster and promote the importance of a diverse, and discrimination and harassment free workplace through day-to-day interaction with employees and through discussion with staff about the agency's Affirmative Action Plan, activities, goals and objectives.
- Assure assigned managers and employees understand their rights and responsibilities in achieving a welcoming work environment free from discrimination and harassment.
- Promote the State of Oregon as an equal employment opportunity, affirmative action employer committed to workforce diversity in training and conversations with businesses and communities regarding employment with the State.
- Review the OCB affirmative action goals and objectives on a regular basis to be aware of and consider ways to contribute toward achieving the goals and

objectives. Review and consider the agency's affirmative action hiring goals in filling job vacancies.

- Ensure that individuals involved in agency processes needing materials in alternate format (large print, electronic, Braille, and/or oral presentation) receive material in the appropriate format.
- Attend and encourage employees to attend diversity, cultural awareness, and affirmative action information sessions.
- Assure that all staff are aware of the Affirmative Action Policy Statement and Affirmative Action Plan, particularly as it applies to their unit, and maintain and maintain a copy of the Plan readily available for employees to review.
- Ensure that all employees, including communities of color, underserved communities, under-resourced, oppressed, underprivileged, women, persons with disabilities, and other protected persons, are provided an opportunity to participate in agency-sponsored education, training, and social activities.

Affirmative Action Representative

- Foster and promote the importance of a diverse, and discrimination and harassment free workplace through day-to-day interaction with employees and through discussion with staff about the agency's Affirmative Action Plan, activities, goals, and objectives.
- Assure assigned managers and employees understand their rights and responsibilities in achieving a welcoming work environment free from discrimination and harassment.
- Promote the State of Oregon as an equal employment opportunity, affirmative action employer committed to workforce diversity in training and conversations with businesses and communities regarding employment with the State.
- Review the OCB affirmative action goals and objectives on a regular basis to be aware of and consider ways to contribute toward achieving the goals and objectives. Review and consider the agency's affirmative action hiring goals in filling job vacancies.
- Ensure that individuals involved in agency processes needing materials in alternate format (large print, electronic, Braille and/or oral presentation) receive material in the appropriate format.
- Attend and encourage employees to attend diversity, cultural awareness, and affirmative action information sessions.

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- Assure that all staff are aware of the Affirmative Action Policy Statement and Affirmative Action Plan, particularly as it applies to their unit, and maintain and maintain a copy of the Plan readily available for employees to review.
- Ensure that all employees, including women, persons with disabilities, and other protected persons, are provided an opportunity to participate in agency-sponsored education, training, and social activities.

Current Biennium Affirmative Action Report

Progress Report in 23-25

Goal #1 Add DEI Language to Position Descriptions

Goal: OCB wishes to include language in management position descriptions that references Affirmative Action or DEI strategies

Progress: OCB has included DEI language into management positions descriptions. This action mirrors state-wide efforts and fully adopts such language. Complete.

Goal #2 Diverse Employee Recruitment

Goal: Form a workgroup to investigate sources of employees and/or develop a pipeline to attract diverse candidates

Progress: The agency's leadership team regularly reviews the talent acquisition process and holds such discussions in leadership team meetings. For example, managers that hire Rehabilitation Instructors post positions with all colleges (approximately only 35) that offer relevant degrees. With such a small candidate pool, the agency casts as broad of a net as possible. CHRO is included in our discussions related to recruiting a diverse workforce and provides input whenever possible.

Since 2021, OCB's talent pipeline has been hovering around 30% BIPOC (excluding candidates who decline to answer). Comparison data on an average racially diverse talent pipelines were not readily available. However, according to the QualityInfo.org "The private sector of the U.S. workforce in 2021 included 24% non-white employment compared with Oregon's 14%." While OCB's BIPOC pipeline is double that of the labor force, the agency will look for ways to continue to increase those efforts.

In preparation for this report, the agency also analyzed at which point in the recruitment process BIPOC candidates were unsuccessful. 94% of BIPOC applicants were not successful in passing the check for minimum qualifications. For context, most of the agency's positions are highly specialized and require specific degrees for which the MQs have minimal ways for which entry is possible. This data leads the agency to believe that connecting with HBCUs and minority serving institutions is the best way to source candidates that will pass MQs and make it to the interview stage.

Goal #3 On-Going DEI Training

Goal: develop a resource bank and calendar for DEI related education and training opportunities for OCB staff. The group will investigate and share training opportunities with OCB staff.

Progress: The agency has shared trainings via email to staff on behalf of professional associations. In the past two years the agency has offered several trainings including The ABCs of Cultural Competence; LGBTQ+ experiences; diverse learning styles; and trauma and racial informed care. Many of the trainings involved some sort of simulation which served as a learning outcome measure. If employees were able to successfully apply what they learned, the training could generally be considered to have worked. Employees also completed feedback surveys after training and results were shared with management and presenters to fine tune future trainings. As well, the agency leadership team reviewed the qualitative comments related to DEI on the biannual employee engagement survey and determined that by and large, employees feel they work in a culture where DEI is embraced, and they want to learn more. The overall tone of the written responses has become overwhelmingly positive since coming out of 100% remote work and implementing intentional DEI trainings. The agency plans to continue these efforts which are reflected in the 2025-2027 Affirmative Action Plan.

Plan Alignment

The agency's Affirmative Action Plan, DEI Plan, and Strategic Plan work in unison supporting the governor's commitment to equity. We view each of these documents supporting each other starting with elements of DEI in the strategic plan and flowing down to both the DEI plan and finally the affirmative action plan.

Examples of alignment include:

- OCB's strategic plan has equity woven through as a means of ensuring the clients experience is geographically accessible and available. Statewide access aligns with the governor's desire to close the urban/rural divide and OCB has offices throughout the state that can meet both highly populated and rural areas.
- Through the State of Oregon's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan, state government has a unique opportunity to lead by example in hiring qualified job seekers who are blind into positions throughout state government. Our work as an agency providing education and support to hiring managers

expands opportunities and eliminates perceived barriers to employment within state agencies. With the advancement of technology, there are very few positions that individuals who are blind cannot do with the right training, technology, and opportunities.

- The Affirmative Action plan defines the roles of managers/supervisors related to DEI work
- The agency's DEI plan details community outreach and education related to serving the public and raising awareness about OCB services.

Leadership Evaluation Report

Management evaluation occurs on a quarterly basis using the established quarterly check in process which resulted from The Oregon Management Project. Managers are provided with feedback on their goals (including DEI and affirmative action efforts).

Workforce Demographic Data and Analysis

The Oregon Commission for the Blind has less than 100 employees and is not subject to reporting workforce demographic data.

Next Biennium Affirmative Action Plan

The Oregon Commission for the Blind acknowledges that creating an employee culture that is inclusive and culture-centric can be an ongoing journey and requires milestones along the way.

Given the 23-25 plan feedback, the agency's 25-27 plan takes a strategic approach to this work. Our current staff have completed foundational DEI type trainings and may be ready for more advanced topics. The most recent employee engagement survey overwhelmingly suggested team members are respected in their day-to-day interactions and satisfied with the DEI training they participate in. Some areas to explore include intersectionality of blindness and other identities, how to go the extra mile, and increasing staff cultural diversity. We recognize that the agency does not have a staff member dedicated to DEI and will need to carve out time from the leadership's teams duties to support these efforts.

While the Oregon Commission for the Blind's plan addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion broadly, there is an intentional effort to prioritize racial equity. This focus addresses the historical and ongoing disadvantages faced by people of color in Oregon and across the US. By centering racial equity, the Commission acknowledges that racism can create additional barriers for blind or visually impaired individuals who are also people of color. The agency's aim is to dismantle these barriers and ensure all Oregonians with vision loss have equal opportunity to access services and achieve full inclusion in society.

By prioritizing racial equity, the OCB recognizes this intersectionality and aims to dismantle these interwoven barriers. Their goal isn't just to ensure all Oregonians with vision loss have access to services, but to ensure equitable access. This might involve creating culturally sensitive programs or outreach materials, diversifying staff to better reflect the communities OCB serves, or actively identifying and addressing racial disparities in service delivery. Ultimately, the OCB's focus on racial equity is a recognition that true inclusion requires not just a level playing field, but actively leveling an uneven one.

Goals

Goal 1: Utilize employee engagement survey to solicit more detailed feedback about their ideas regarding the agency's DEI efforts.

- **Outcomes:** the purpose of the additional questions on the employee engagement survey is to gain a deeper insight into employee feedback on the

agency's DEI efforts. The feedback from the previous plan submission suggested that the agency dive deeper and put a definition as to what belonging and inclusion looks like in practice. Employee feedback is crucial so that the DEI culture has buy in rather than a top-down management prescription. A qualitative report will be produced as a result of a feedback session which will then assist the leadership team in further direction for 2025-27 plan. If additional information is needed agency leadership may consider actions such as a listening session as a catalyst for continued feedback in this area so employees don't have to wait for the biannual survey.

- **Measures:** the agency will need to decide whether or not to bring in an outside facilitator to help develop thoughtful questions in this area or use internal resources. Successful participation in the survey would garner around a 40% participation rate. A positive outcome could be informative and actionable feedback that can give the leadership team direction. Hypothesizing on the content of the outcome is ill-advised so as to not bias the results, but the insights should help inform future actions.
- **Implementation:** unless a consultant is brought in, the agency's leadership team (n=8) would need to take responsibility for writing the questions. While the executive director and affirmative action representative can lead the charge, all members of the leadership team will need to participate in digesting the information gleaned from the survey and agreeing upon a direction.
- **Strategy Area: employee engagement, retention, and surveys.** Involving employees in conversations about DEI can significantly boost employee engagement and retention. These conversations can make employees feel valued by giving them a voice in shaping the workplace culture. Additionally, including diverse perspectives leads to a richer exchange of ideas and fosters a sense of belonging. Open discussions also allow employees to raise concerns about bias and discrimination, which can be addressed to create a more equitable environment. Overall, by involving employees in DEI conversations, organizations can create a more positive work environment where employees feel valued, heard, and engaged, ultimately reducing turnover and building a stronger, more loyal workforce.

Goal #2: Increase operationalization of executive order 22-11. The agency can commit to implementing the affirmative action plan using professional development and performance evaluations.

- **Outcomes:** The agency will add additional DEI related resources during onboarding by Spring 2025. Examples include the agency's DEI and AA plan, The Inclusive Language Handbook, and links to previous DEI trainings. As well, the agency will continue its regular offering of DEI trainings into 2025-2027. The agency can seek consultation on how to add DEI topics into quarterly staff check ins (performance evaluations).
- **Measures:** some of the above items can initially be measured by completion (such as adding resources) and others will require more attention such as training and evaluations. The agency can set a goal of offering three DEI related trainings during the 25-27 biennium.
- **Implementation:** the agency's leadership team will be responsible for making sure these happen along with support from staff such as the executive assistant, OPA, and AS2. Based on feedback from the bi-annual employee engagement survey, many staff are ready for advanced training such as how to be an anti-racist.
- **Strategy Area:** Employee Engagement. Effective training empowers employees with the skills to navigate diverse situations and contribute more, boosting confidence and motivation. The exchange of ideas from a wider range of perspectives, facilitated by DEI training, fuels innovation and creativity, which can be highly engaging for employees who enjoy problem-solving. Finally, offering DEI training demonstrates an organization's commitment to values that resonate with many employees, particularly younger generations, leading to increased overall satisfaction and engagement. In short, DEI training is an investment in creating a positive, inclusive, and engaging work environment with a more satisfied and productive workforce.

Goal #3: Explore HBCUs and minority serving institutions in order to increase candidate diversity.

- **Outcomes and Measures:** the agency currently has about 30% of candidates who are BIPOC (excluding those who declined to respond). Given the small number of FTE the agency has (n=66) and the desire to increase retention (thus lowering the number of recruitments), a reasonable goal would be to increase diverse candidates by 5 per year which would move the needle 2% in the right direction.
- **Implementation:** like the goals before, each leadership team member may need to assume some of the responsibility and draft a list of HBCUs that offer

degrees in their respective functional areas. The time investment to this goal cannot be understated since each relationship is unique and will require regular tending. Workday will be the data holder. The agency could determine if this is a measure that could be measured quarterly so that it stays on the radar. To be completed by winter 2026.

- **Strategy Area:** Recruitment. Building relationships with HBCUs allows early interaction with students through internships and career fairs, fostering OCB awareness, and nurturing high-potential candidates before they graduate. Furthermore, actively recruiting at HBCUs demonstrates the agency's commitment to diversity and inclusion, enhancing the employer as a brand, and attracting a wider range of top talent. HBCU alumni networks can also be valuable resources, providing referrals and acting as advocates for the organization. By strategically connecting with HBCUs and making a long-term commitment, OCB can tap into a rich source of talent, build a diverse workforce, and achieve an edge in recruitment.

Goal #4: Explore intersectionality of DEIB and Disability

- **Outcomes and Measures:** using feedback from the OCC, OCB hopes to explore the space where DEI meets disability and specifically blindness. Our employees and clients embody this lived experience every day and yet it is not something that we currently discuss or train on. The topic of how disability (blindness) and DEIB relate to one another in a practical way could have a positive influence on the agency's metrics or change processes.
- **Implementation:** the agency will bring in external expertise in this area. The leadership team will ultimately be responsible for this initiative which could be started by fall 2026.
- **Strategy Area:** Employee Engagement and Retention. A traditional DEI approach might miss the unique challenges faced by employees with disabilities. Engaging in this area fosters a sense of belonging and empowers these employees to contribute their full potential, leading to higher engagement and lower turnover. Furthermore, a diverse workforce that incorporates the perspectives of employees with disabilities fosters a richer exchange of ideas and a more innovative approach to problem-solving, keeping everyone engaged. Finally, in today's competitive talent market, OCB strives to define itself with a reputation for true inclusivity and accessibility; we would want this to give us an advantage in attracting and retaining top performers.

Complaint Options

The complaint procedure provides a method of resolving complaints involving violation of the OCB nondiscrimination policy within the agency. Employees and applicants are encouraged to use the complaint process. Retaliation, coercion, reprisal, or intimidation against a person who has filed a complaint either internally or through an outside enforcement agency or other legal channels or serving as a witness is prohibited.

Informal Complaint Process

An employee may notify the Affirmative Action Representative of an issue or concern regarding discrimination in order to raise awareness or put the agency on alert without filing a formal complaint. In these situations:

1. The employee may ask the Affirmative Action Representative to keep the matter and identity of the employee confidential. (The agency will comply with the request, if possible.)
2. The employee will sign documentation stating that he/she wishes his/her identity to remain confidential.
3. The discussion will be documented.
4. The Affirmative Action Representative will review the information and notify management at the level sufficient to maintain confidentiality of the employee's identity when it is determined that action is necessary to correct the problem or to prevent a recurrence in similar situations.
5. The Affirmative Action Representative will offer suggestions to management on preventable actions such as training and changes in the environment.

Formal Internal Complaint Process

1. Any individual who believes he/she has been subjected to unlawful discriminatory actions may file a complaint within 30 calendar days of the alleged incident.
2. Represented employees may file a complaint either through the Collective Bargaining Agreement grievance procedure or by using the procedures provided by the agency.

3. An employee may submit a written complaint to Human Resources Business Partner (alternatively the Affirmative Action Representative) that explains the basis for the complaint, identifies the alleged discriminating party or parties, the date the discriminatory action(s) occurred, and specifies the relief requested.
4. HRBP will review/investigate the complaint and provide the complaint written notification of the findings within 30 days or upon completion. If additional time is needed for investigating the allegations or to issue a report of the findings, the agency will notify the employee in writing of the need for additional time.
5. If the investigation substantiates the complaint, appropriate corrective action will be initiated, including discipline if warranted.

External Complaint Process

If an employee is not satisfied with the complaint process within the agency and wishes to appeal an agency decision, they may contact one of the organizations listed below. Nothing in this policy prevents any person from filing a grievance in accordance with the Collective Bargaining Agreement or a formal complaint with the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). However, some collective bargaining agreements may require an employee to choose between the complaint procedure outlined in the agency's guideline for filing a BOLI or EEOC complaint.

Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries - Civil Rights Division

State Office Building
800 NE Oregon Street, MS# 32, Suite 1070
Portland, OR 97232
Phone Number: 503.731.4874
Fax Number: 503.731.4069

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries - Civil Rights Division is the Oregon state equivalent of the federal EEOC. As a designated Fair Employment Practices Agency (FEPA), the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries - Civil Rights Division may coordinate operations with the EEOC under a work-share agreement. Furthermore, the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries - Civil Rights Division investigates state claims that are not covered by federal law or exceed the basic protections of federal law. Individuals filing a charge of discrimination with the EEOC should also file a copy of the charge with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries - Civil Rights Division.

Eugene Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries 1400 Executive Parkway, Suite 200 Eugene, OR 97401 Phone Number: 541.686.7623	Portland Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries 800 NE Oregon Street, Suite 1045 Portland, OR 97232 Phone Number: 971.673.0761
Pendleton Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries 1327 SE 3rd Street Pendleton, OR 97801 Phone Number: 541.276.7884	Salem Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries 3865 Wolverine Street NE; E-1 Salem, OR 97305 Phone Number: 503.378.3292

Office of Cultural Change, Department of Administrative Services

155 Cottage St. NE
U10
Salem 97301-3965
Email: cultural.change@das.oregon.gov

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Seattle Field office EEOC Office/ Federal Office Building
909 First Avenue, Suite 400
Seattle, WA 98104
Phone Number: 206.220.6883 Phone Number: 206.220.6882 (TDD)

The EEOC does not maintain an office in Oregon. The Seattle Field Office is open Monday -Friday
File a Charge of Discrimination: <http://www.eeocomplaint.com/>

Department of Labor, Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCC)

1315 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 1030
Portland, OR 97201
Phone Number: 503.326.4112

The U.S. Department of Labor

Pacific Regional Office 71 Stevenson Street, Suite 1700
San Francisco, CA94105

Phone Number: 503.848.6969

The Civil Rights Office of Health & Human Services

Office of Civil Rights, Region D
2201 Six Avenue, Mail Stop RX-11
Seattle, WA 98121

Phone Number: 206.615.2290 Phone Number: 206.615.2296 (TDD)

Succession Plan

The Agency has a succession plan which has been filed with the governor's office.

Contracting

The Oregon Commission for the Blind began tracking contracts awarded to minority and women owned businesses within the past three years. When contractors apply, they now disclose minority or woman owned but more than 75% of contracts have been in place since this data began to be collected. The actual number of contracts held by minority or women owned businesses may be higher but this number is accurate as requested.

The agency has 36 vendors. Three vendors have disclosed they are minority owned and two have disclosed they are woman owned.

Appendix A – State Policy Documentation

http://www.oregon.gov/gov/policy/Documents/State_Affirmative_Action.pdf

1. ADA and Reasonable Accommodation Policy (*Statewide Policy 50.020.10*).
2. Discrimination and Harassment Free Workplace - (*Statewide Policy No.50.010.01*)
3. PENDING FINAL APPROVAL: Statewide Workforce Learning and Development (Statewide policy 10-040-01) from Employee Development and Implementation of Oregon Benchmarks for Workforce Development (*Statewide Policy 50.045.01*) Veterans Preference in Employment (*105-040-0015*)
4. Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Rule (*105-040-0001*)
5. Executive Order 17-11

Appendix B – Federal Documentation

http://www.oregon.gov/gov/policy/Documents/Federal_Affirmative_Action_TitleVII.pdf

1. Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA)
2. Disability Discrimination Title I of the Americans with Disability Act of 1990
3. Equal Pay and Compensation Discrimination Equal Pay Act of 1963, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
4. Genetic Information Discrimination Title II of the Genetic Information Non-discrimination Act of 2008 (GINA)
5. National Origin Discrimination Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
6. Pregnancy Discrimination Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
7. Race/Color Discrimination Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
8. Religious Discrimination Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
9. Retaliation Title VII of the Civil Agency Affirmative Action Policy
10. Sex-Based Discrimination Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
11. Sexual Harassment Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Appendix C – Agency Affirmative Action Plan

Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Rule (105-040-0001)

Appendix D – Additional Federal Documentation

Agency Specific Federal Reporting

ED(RSA)-7-OB Form

Grant: Independent Living Services for Order Individuals who are Blind

OCB reports each fiscal year in the RSA-7-OB report on the agency staff agency that worked in the federal grant. Specifically, in Part II: Staffing, the following data is reported:

- Full-time Equivalent Program Staff
- Employed or Advanced in Employment
 - Total number of employees with disabilities, including blindness or visual impairment
 - Total number of employees who are blind or visually impaired *and* age 55 and older
 - Total number of employees who are members of racial/ethnic minorities
 - Total number of employees who are women
 - Total Number of employees who are ages 55 and older

Executive Order 11246 (OFCCP regulations) – Equal Employment Opportunity

The Executive Order prohibits federal contractors and federally assisted construction contractors and subcontractors, who do over \$10,000 in Government business in one year from discriminating in employment decisions on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or national origin. The Executive Order also requires Government contractors to take affirmative action to ensure that equal opportunity is provided in all aspects of their employment. Additionally, Executive Order 11246 prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from, under certain circumstances, taking adverse employment actions against applicants and employees for asking about, discussing, or sharing information about their pay or the pay of their co-workers.

https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/ca_11246.htm