



NOVA Workforce Board
January 26, 2022 Retreat Minutes

PRESENT: T. Baity, D. Bini, R. Brunson, L. Dalla Betta, R. Foust, H. Goodkind, P. Guevara, B. Guidry-Brown, N. Leonor, S. Levy, J. Lind, J. Miner, J. Morrill, M. Nemits, L. Parris, S. Porter, A. Switky, K. Vartan, and N. Williams

ABSENT: M. Alvarado, S. Borgersen, C. Cimino, V. Dang, C. Galy, E. Hamilton, L. Labit, A. Manwani, and J. Ruigomez

ALSO PRESENT: M. Sessions, L. Anders, J. Cheyer, L. Jackson, C. Stahl and E. Stanly of NOVAworks staff

GUEST: Shireen Malekafzali, Chief Equity Officer, County of San Mateo

Meeting was held remotely via videoconference call.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chairperson J. Morrill called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

2. FRAMING THE SESSION AND EXPECTATIONS

New Board members J. Lind and M. Nemits were introduced and welcomed to the Board retreat, which was followed by introductions from the other Board members present. Board co-chairs Morrill and Switky framed the meeting and expectations. It has been a year of transition. The community is still coping with the pandemic but has moved from running from it to learning to live with it and addressing the economic impacts. NOVAworks has been on the front lines through it all, helping job seekers and businesses recover and reset. Over the past two years, the pandemic has revealed great disparities in the community in equity and access that will be important to address. The retreat will provide an opportunity to chart a new course for the coming year that builds on the successes achieved through innovation and perseverance and challenges the Board to find a better way forward in serving a diverse community. The theme of the retreat is equity, diversity, and inclusiveness. The conversation that begins at this meeting will continue at future meetings.

3. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

No public announcements.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

It was moved by P. Guevara, seconded by R. Foust and carried by voice vote to approve the agenda as submitted.

5. NOVAWORKS DIRECTOR MARLENA SESSIONS' PRESENTATION: 2021 YEAR IN REVIEW AND EXPECTATIONS FOR 2022

Director M. Sessions presented on the past year's accomplishments and expectations for 2022. To review the slide presentation, please click here: <https://novaworks.org/documents/Ongoing/2022BoardRetreatYearinReview.pdf>.

6. ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE IN CALIFORNIA, BOARD MEMBER STEVE LEVY

Board member S. Levy presented on the economic landscape in the “A Tale of Two Economies plus When Workforce Services are Not Enough.” To review the slide presentation, please click here: <https://novaworks.org/documents/Ongoing/2022BoardRetreatEconomicLandscape.pdf>

7. KEYNOTE SPEAKER: SHIREEN MALEKAFZALI, CHIEF EQUITY OFFICER, COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

Keynote speaker Shireen Malekafzali, Chief Equity Officer, County of San Mateo presented on “Journeying to Advance Equity.” To review the slide presentation, please click here: <https://novaworks.org/documents/Ongoing/2022BoardRetreatJourneyingtoAdvanceEquity.pdf>.

Following the presentation, comments included, but were not limited to: In beginning this journey, keep the process moving forward (keep the foot on the gas pedal.) There are different dimensions of this process: look at the internal system in the day-to-day operations (demographics of staff and Board), seek diverse points of view, identify who is bringing that true reality home and how do we incorporate that advice, determine if there are sentiments that are not being addressed, and explore trusted community partnerships. It will be important that there is a stated commitment to do the work and a metric of accountability. A living wage can be an indicator of equity with businesses. The County of San Mateo (an anchor institution) can partner with NOVAworks to build a pipeline that is sourced locally from disadvantaged communities. There is benefit in being intentional about the skills that are needed and placing value on these skills (e.g. child care). Given the significant transformations that need to occur, there was a recognition that the journey will not be achieved overnight and will take time. It will entail both systemic and programmatic interventions and shifting systems and structures that systems sit on. Thinking tactically and strategically will be important to this effort.

8. BREAK-OUT GROUP DISCUSSION

Following the presentations, Board members were asked to break into four virtual breakout groups to discuss the following questions: How do we reach job seekers in the community who are being left out of jobs & opportunities and NOVAworks is not currently serving? How do we dive deep into these diverse communities? How can we remove barriers created by systemic and structural racism in the workplace? How is your company/organization looking at the question of diversity, equity, and access, and how might NOVAworks move forward with this? Highlights of the discussion included, but were not limited to:

Job Seekers: Define who we are not reaching and then do targeted recruitment. (Is it a specific community or specific industry?) Possible target populations could be farm workers or hospitality workers impacted by the pandemic. What opportunities can we connect them to that provide self-sufficiency? We should increase training opportunities that align with the need and can overcome barriers that a target population may be facing (e.g. language, access to location of program and technology.) We need to do more outreach to make sure we are hearing from the Latinx community, where the gap in need got wider after the recession and then got worse during COVID-19. It will be important to serve the “whole” person that includes housing and food assistance. How do we connect to resources? How do we expand the information that people have access to? What other things should we inform people about? Access to workforce services would be beneficial in one’s day-to-day life. Workers who did not attend college or possess a college degree should not be stigmatized. There should be better access to apprenticeship opportunities (e.g. TIP, TOP). The old model has been to attract people to systems that were not built for them. We need to give them power and

agency to reshape the systems. If folks don't feel they belong, invitations to join us will not work. We need to center the person, design for the person, and hear their voices. We have a lot of work to do toward creating environments where people feel like they belong. The first step in this direction is recognizing this. The education community has created "Learning Communities" for low-income, first-generation students with wrap-around services to ensure their success. Education can inform the path forward. Mentoring is another way to reach those we have not reached in the past.

Employers: We should take a step back and look at the employer needs and target an audience that could fill the need. We should provide training to employers on equity, inclusion, diversity, and access. Move employers away from job descriptions requiring college degrees. Workers are staying home because they are no longer willing to work for substandard wages. Employers need to address this with livable wages. We need to identify how to engage employers more effectively. Companies also need to share important information with their team to keep them informed. Consider extending outreach to small businesses that need help and who might employ people that need help? Share keynote speaker's data with businesses to show the advantage of a diverse workforce.

Community Partnerships: We can learn from how the U.S. Census went out into the communities. Connect with the trusted individuals and organizations for each community. Ask who the trusted messengers are within communities. How is NOVAworks conducting important conversations with the community? How do we want to be accountable to our community? We are asking the community to come into our space. Why not meet them in other spaces? There are hurdles to entering our space. Could we consider asking an ethnographer to collect stories that we need to hear in our community? We need to share power and ensure that the voices of the diverse community members are heard and included in key decisions (budget, programs, new board members, etc.). Resources should be placed more in the hands of the people involved in the work, in the community. Form action committees to work on policy. Good resource: [Jennifer Loving's Lived Experience Advisory Board \(https://destinationhomesv.org/centering-lived-experience/\)](https://destinationhomesv.org/centering-lived-experience/)

Systems: Current funding streams do not align with current needs. How are we leveraging funds to address the barriers we cannot address with the regular funding we receive? Make a "commitment to equity" (example, College of San Mateo <https://collegeofsanmateo.edu/statements/solidarity.php>). Education can inform the path forward. Review organization's existing policies and procedures with an eye to inclusiveness. Measure progress toward equity. Some questioned whether social issues are the appropriate areas for which NOVAworks should be involved.

Board meetings: Agendize stories from a diverse community about their lived experiences and struggles. While some Board members are open to having these discussions and willing to be uncomfortable, we need to be sensitive to those who are not. How do we bring everyone on this journey? We want to have all voices.

9. WRAP-UP

Members were thanked for their contributions to the conversation. The information collected will be used to build on subsequent conversations that will take place during future Board meetings and guide the Board's work going forward.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:05 p.m.