



SUPPORTING FAMILIES and CHANGING LIVES

## Equity Plan Draft

DRAFT

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## A note from Director Patton

This plan is the culmination of 3-plus years of learning from a group of trusted people who made a commitment to transforming the culture of JFS. The learning was not easy. We were challenged by our Intersections leaders to have uncomfortable conversations about topics of race and gender and identity that the agency, and our country for that matter, had been unwilling or unable to have.

Let's face it: We have just not done a good job of finding effective ways to deal with issues of human difference and the treatment that comes from it. In fact, at one point, the viability of the entire group came into question. I share this point to illustrate just how difficult this work can be. But the work desperately needs to be done.

The group weathered the storm and stayed focused on moving diversity, equity and inclusion forward. Questions remained, however: How would we get there? How would we be able to make sure that an organization as large and diverse as ours could transform its culture into one that values the principles of DEI? Where do we start?

Well, I will tell you. Intersections and the Core Team reached out to even more people in the organization for their help developing a new JFS Culture statement, identifying 5 key priority areas and providing recommendations in those areas that will show us how to live the values outlined in the culture statement. They are all laid out here.

This is our roadmap. I encourage you to read it and, if you are so inclined, participate in opportunities to make our organization more inclusive and equitable. This work is not supplemental. It is not an add-on. It is the building block of good, respectful and honest relationships. Our best work can only be done when we commit to nurturing our own good relationships. Our community deserves and demands it.

This will not be perfect. We will have some setbacks. We might also have disagreements along the way. But I am asking everyone to be willing to listen, learn and have uncomfortable conversations, while being respectful and constructive in all our interactions. This work is not a destination. It is a way of living.

Including all types of people, voices and perspectives makes us better.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Patton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "M" and "P".

## **JFS Culture Statement**

### **Our People**

*At Hamilton County Job & Family Services, our most valuable resource is our employees: their backgrounds, ideas, voices and life experiences.*

### **Our Commitment**

*We invest in our employees by equipping them with the skills to pursue personal and promotional growth and the support to flourish and maintain a safe, healthy work-life balance.*

### **Our Approach**

*A positive approach that values diversity, equity, and inclusion where employees are trusted and respected leading to genuine and supportive relationships through intentional, transparent communication and action at all levels of the organization.*

## Overview of the Core Team

**The Core Team** has served as the principal employee-driven vehicle for bringing DEI practices to the forefront since 2019. The Equity Core Team exists to guide JFS toward becoming a more inclusive workplace that values the diversity found within its administration, staff, and the clients we serve. Core is dedicated to embedding equity in JFS's operations and service delivery and instilling collaboration across JFS.

- The Core Team initiated revising the Director's Letters review process, which allows all employees to give input into how policies should change to ensure equity.
- The Core Team influenced the launch of processing sessions, which gave all staff space to express thoughts and feelings about racism and systemic inequities.
- The Core Team formed the PREPARE team (Promoting Racial & Ethnic Preparation, Advancement & Recruitment) that is working to improve the promotional and hiring process.
- The Core Team inspired employee mentoring program (M.O.R.E.) and 4ACTION book club.
- The Core Team prompted conversations about race, gender and sexual orientation that weren't happening within agency walls before.
- The Core Team facilitated the Priority Area Workgroups, which developed recommendations for the JFS Equity Plan

## Working Definitions

What do we mean by equity? Below are two frameworks that informed the work of the Core Team and Priority Area Workgroups.

### Hamilton County Equity Framework

The word "Equity" means "justice according to natural law or right; freedom from bias and favoritism; fairness".

The Equity Framework, which is starting to be utilized across the Country, promotes taking a direct look at the various forms of bias and prejudice, which includes: individual, institutional and systemic forms of racism.

Equity mandates that a group's race, or any other demographic categories it belongs to, should not be the main determinant of its success.

Equity requires strategies that promote fair treatment, equal access, opportunity and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that are preventing the full participation of some groups.

Tackling Equity issues is not easy and it requires understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society. Because countless national and local studies have shown there are major health disparities for some groups in our society, we're confident that Proclaiming Racism as a Public Health Crisis is a great step toward achieving Social Equity in our region.

[https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/departments/economic\\_inclusion/equity\\_framework](https://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/government/departments/economic_inclusion/equity_framework)

### National Association of Counties (NACo) Definitions

**Diversity** – The presence of different and multiple characteristics that make up individual and collective identities, including race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, socioeconomic status, language, and physical ability.

**Equity** – The process of identifying and removing the barriers that create disparities in the access to resources and means, and the achievement of fair treatment and equal opportunities to thrive. *See also equality.*

**Inclusion** – Is creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued to participate fully.

<https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/key-terms-definitions-diversity-equity-inclusion>

# Priority Area Workgroups

## **Building Trust/Healing Trauma**

- Creating space and support structures for staff to process their experiences and ways to establish a culture that is transparent

## **Communications**

- Broader ways to share updates on the work throughout the agency; how communication can be consistent across departments/levels

## **Conversations about Racial Equity**

- Implement tools and resources to support staff in leading conversations at all levels of the agency

## **Equitable Policies**

- Support the development, implementation, measurement, and accountability of equitable policies and procedures

## **Emerging Leadership**

- Strategies for mentorship, leadership training, & deeper investment in staff

## **How did HCJFS arrive at these Priority Areas?**

**Fall/Winter 2019:** Core Team identified initial areas for consideration

**February 2020:** Joint retreat of Core Team members, Exec Team, and Section Chiefs where additional potential areas for the equity plan were discussed

**April/May 2020:** Agency wide survey was completed by 352 people asking staff to determine what should be the areas of focus for the JFS for the Equity Plan

**Late 2020/Early 2021:** Core Team initiated a process to equitably review existing Director's Letters; Main focus was DL38 to bring equity to hiring & promotions

**June 2021:** Joint Retreat #2 brought together Core Team, Exec Team, and Section Chiefs to continue discussion of Priority Areas

**Summer 2021:** Core Team Development of Culture Statement

**November 2021:** In Pursuit of Equity sessions provided an update on the work of the Core Team and invited whole agency to join workgroups

**December 2021:** Present: Priority Area Workgroups developed equitable recommendations that can move the agency towards making the Culture Statement a reality

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**As recommended by the Core Team and Priority Area Workgroups:**

### **Building Trust/Healing Trauma**

Establish a culture of trust that has been damaged as a result of racial disparities, microaggressions, and misunderstanding of cultural communications

Healing unresolved systemic trauma within the agency and among staff

### **Communications**

Development of a Director's Letter establishing best practices for agency wide communications

### **Conversations About Racial Equity:**

Hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director and create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team to provide ongoing training, tools, and engagement

### **Emerging Leadership**

Strategies for mentorship, leadership training opportunities, & fostering staff development personally and professionally.

### **Equitable Policies:**

Development of Equity Lens & Applying the Equity Lens

**You can view PowerPoint presentations and additional supporting documentation about these recommendations at this [link](#) or by scanning the QR Code.**





## **Priority Area: Building Trust/Healing Trauma #1**

### **Condition(s) Being Addressed**

Building Trust and Healing Trauma as a result of racial disparities, microaggressions, and misunderstanding of cultural communications.

### **Aspect of Culture Statement Addressed by this Recommendation**

Our Approach – A positive approach that values diversity, equity, and inclusion where employees are trusted and respected leading to genuine and supportive relationships through intentional, transparent communication and action at all levels of the organization.

### **Conditions that need to Shift**

Currently within the agency, there is a fear or reticence engaging in conversations about racial differences. This results in misunderstandings of cultural communications and intentional and unintentional acts of microaggressions at all levels of the agency. In addition, fear-based management practices and being satisfied with the way things are currently done has led to trust being broken between staff and managers.

### **Vision for Culture After One Year**

The goal is to create and understand what a psychologically safe and trusting environment would look like at the Agency, with support from all, even when we are all not in agreement.

### **Strategies and/or Activities Toward Vision**

- Setting expectations on how to discuss sensitive issues and microaggressions in a constructive way, while having a safe space where all employees can go to discuss issues in a private and confidential setting
- Line staff having a seat at the table when policy is developed

### **Person(s) Accountable and/or Responsible**

- Individual – Management and staff need to be held accountable for their behavior. Management must embrace conflict and address any issues
- Interpersonal – Section Chiefs have the opportunity to create change and address those issue and embrace it directly with management and line staff
- Institutionally – Agency will set policy and have a safe place for everyone to go to have concerns and allegations expressed and to ensure there is follow through

### **Resources Needed**

- Policy in place with input of all staff that establishes JFS as a workplace free from microaggressions and retaliation
- Within the policy, identify and contract a trained facilitator to support staff conversations
- Have a trained facilitator within a safe space that all employees can go that has the authority and responsibility to investigate situations, identify and report out results to those identified in the policy

## **Building Trust/Healing Trauma: Recommendation #2 Unresolved Systemic Trauma**

### **Condition(s) Being Addressed**

Unresolved systemic trauma within the agency

### **Aspect of Culture Statement Addressed by this Recommendation**

Our Commitment, Our Approach

### **Conditions that need to Shift**

There is limited working knowledge of trauma concepts (neurobiology of trauma and how personal and secondary traumatic experience gets expressed in daily communications and power relationships across the agency); fear-based management practices and reliance on retaliatory and punitive actions

### **Vision for Culture After One Year**

JFS will be a trauma responsive organization, where all employees are recognized as leaders who experience trusting, affirming relationships in the workplace. JFS will have a transformed, trauma responsive system of felt safety and resilience evidenced by trusting, authentic relationships and transparent communications at all levels of the organization. JFS will invest in building personal resiliency skills to promote personal and professional growth.

### **Strategies and/or Activities Toward Vision**

- Engage the Building Trust/Healing Trauma workgroup as JFS cross-functional advisory team.
- Perform an agency-wide trauma assessment.
- Expand awareness of the need for resilience building and cultivate commitment at all levels (e.g., Core Team's *The Equity Manifesto*) to the strategic plan;
- Implement mandatory, agency- wide foundational training in trauma/resilience concepts and practice (neurobiology of trauma, felt safety, regulation and leadership, empathy, compassion).
- Train-the-Trainer consultation to build capacity: (1) replicate the Core Team's exercises in trust and credibility; (2) establish the network of bi-weekly small group resilience sessions for all employees).

### **Person(s) Accountable and/or Responsible**

- Individual – All staff have working knowledge of trauma concepts and resiliency factors
- Interpersonal – Section Chiefs and Team Leads implement restorative practices that allow staff to be equipped with the resilience framework to navigate potentially traumatic experiences
- Institutionally – Develop supportive policies and practices based on the results of the agency-wide trauma assessment

**Resources Needed**

- Awareness of the agency's DEI policies & procedures
- Budget
- Training
- Trauma Specialist(s)
- Comprehensive Communication strategy
- Space
- Scheduling accommodations from section and line managers
- Staff to participate

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## **Priority Area: Communications**

### **Condition(s) Being Addressed**

Creating opportunities to make communications more accessible

### **Aspect of Culture Statement Addressed by this Recommendation**

Our People, Our Commitment, Our Approach

### **Conditions that need to Shift**

Too many JFS staff members are unable to access updates shared by the agency, leaving staff unengaged and missing opportunities that could benefit their personal and professional growth. The hybrid approach of staff schedules and time constraints means staff are not easily finding the news and information the agency disseminates. Capacity issues results in many staff not having the to read the Scoop, emails or to navigate to another news site, like the intranet or SharePoint.

### **Vision for Culture After One Year**

The culture at JFS needs to change to bring more equity and inclusion to the agency and its workforce. Culture includes everything from how staff members work with one another and whether they embrace opportunities to how they show up every day and the attitude they bring. Communication drives culture.

In one year, JFS will have implemented effective communication that is well planned, comes from a place of intention, reflects all views and is presented in ways everyone can easily and comfortably consume. There will also be an understanding that communication is everybody's job. Managers are responsible for disseminating talking points related to key happenings in the agency. Staff have the opportunity to contribute through bottom-up communication vs the current method where most communication is top down

Communications will be more clearly from a place of intention regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. The number of ways staff members can receive information will have increased. Analytics/surveys will show increased engagement with agency news and greater satisfaction with agency messaging. Effective communication will increase between section chiefs, managers and their employees. Staff members will have taken advantage of growth opportunities for better communication.

### **Strategies and/or Activities Toward Vision**

Broad

Creation of a Director's Letter about Communication values and best practices, including DEI best practices. The letter would emphasize transparency and also that all managers need to communicate more effectively and frequently with their staffs. It

would provide clear language on how our Communications unit can help others create and share messages that are diverse, inclusive and that help overcome barriers that create disparities. Accompanying the Director's Letter, would be the development of a Communications toolkit that provides Section Chiefs and managers with tools to effectively disseminate key information related to equity throughout the agency. The toolkit can also be accessed by staff throughout the agency to foster bottom up communications.

### Specific

Considering the biggest issue is access and engagement, we want to increase the methods we use to communicate and make them easier to access. Many of these were specifically requested by committee members as things that would make them feel more informed:

- **Biggest change – desktop news delivery**, via AlertMedia or another vendor. Important news would come up on all desktops as soon as they are turned on. News can crawl across or stay. Addresses ease of access.
- **More videos**. Recorded interviews with Dr. O'dell Owens and others were well-received. Mix of important topics and shorts. Example: Terri Holley gives a 1-minute summary of this week's book club discussion.
- **More use of video screens**. This is already occurring. They had been mostly dormant since the pandemic.
- **More QR codes** – in our digital communications as well as on flyers in elevators as more people return to the building to work.
- **A news delivery system on Teams?** Looking into this as some work group members (especially call center folks) said the only communications vehicle they use is Teams.
- **Suggestion box in the cafeteria**.
- **More opportunities for the whole staff to hear from Michael and the executive team**. Many mentioned Tim McCartney's weekly show – not so much for the content, but they liked that it made them feel connected.
- **Revamping internal agency awards**. These are an easy way to make staff members feel special, though nominations are few. Freshen up Kudos and ROCK STARS into something that people are prouder of earning and more likely to go on their resumes.
- **Talking points for managers**. Many committee members said they want to hear more information from their managers. Create a Communications tool to help managers do more planned communicating with DEI in mind. Helps alleviate the gaps between what some managers impart and what others don't.
- **Communications department goes to orientation** to emphasize to new hires the importance of how we communicate, how we communicate about diversity, equity and inclusion. Lay the groundwork early that this is an issue extremely important to this agency. (Waiting for approval from HR)
- **Set up an ongoing communications support team** to help generate ideas, put up flyers, develop content.
- **Incorporating accepted recommendations** into agency Communications plan being developed.

**Person(s) Accountable and/or Responsible**

Everybody – Everyone should play a role in sharing out information and seeking information

Communications equity team work group

Communications department

Designated communications support team, content generators

Section Chiefs & Managers by ensuring information is shared within their departments and take an active role in encouraging staff to participate in development opportunities

**Resources Needed**

Decisions/commitment from the executive team

Resources to buy a desktop delivery system. Costs being collected now.

Additional Communications staff member to accommodate additional work, possibly video-focused only

Input from managers and staff about what communications are lacking between them, to develop a fix

Money to purchase new awards for revamped program

## **Priority Area: Conversations About Racial Equity**

### **Condition(s) Being Addressed**

Cultural competency within the agency. This includes but is not limited to increasing exposure, awareness and understanding among staff

### **Aspect of Culture Statement Addressed by this Recommendation**

Our Approach

#### **Conditions that need to Shift**

- Forum – Provide safe spaces to hold difficult conversations without retaliation or negative repercussions
- Awareness – Raise the consciousness of one's own implicit biases
- Priority – Increase urgency and focus on racial equity and cultural diversity
- Requirement – Introduce DE&I into major work objectives for all employees
- Accountability – Establish DE&I Director and DEI Team to promote racial equity and support ongoing DEI work
- Opportunities – Present pathways for all employees to engage in diverse cultural experiences

#### **Vision for Culture After One Year**

Agency Staff are Exposed, Aware, Engaged

- No elephant when discussing race and culture
- Cultural and racial differences are respected and valued
- Staff are relationally rich and thriving

Champions

- JFS is recognized for its intentional successful committed efforts to establish racial equity and cultural competency
- Staff feel they are culturally competent
- Staff are engaged

Tangible and Measurable Change

- DE&I Director and Team
- Racially equitable policies, procedures, and practices

#### **Strategies and/or Activities Toward Vision**

- STRATEGY #1: EXPOSURE & AWARENESS
- Define terminology
- Communicate and promote the importance of racial equity
- Offer staff culturally relevant presentations (Ex. Touching a black woman's hair)
- Racial equity curriculum

### Strategy #2: Tools

- Training (Ex. Listening Training)
- Use DE&I guidance to inform policies, procedures, and practices
- Establish clear, achievable and, measurable goals
- Collaborate with DE&I experts

### Strategy #3: Engagement

- Solicit staff input (Ex. Surveys)
- Staff dialogue sessions
- Activities (Ex. Silent interview)
- Celebrate and engage culture
- Participation incentives

### **Person(s) Accountable and/or Responsible**

#### **All Of Us**

Frontline Worker

Frontline Managers

Section Chiefs

Assistant Directors

Human Resources

Director

### **Resources Needed**

The resources that will be instrumental to achieving this strategy include:

- Financial Resources
- Training Schedule
- Training Curriculum
- Ongoing communication
- Willing participants
- Space/Rooms for training
- Equity Partners
- Support from Leadership



## **Priority Area: Emerging Leadership**

### **Condition(s) Being Addressed**

Bridging the Gap to Leadership by developing our future leaders

### **Aspect of Culture Statement Addressed by this Recommendation**

Our Commitment

### **Conditions that need to Shift**

Succession Planning - The agency does not have a clear plan in place to develop our current or future leaders.

Retention - Managers need direction on how to develop themselves and the staff that report to them. We currently have a retention concern and we acknowledge that we are losing good staff.

Unlocking the Potential of Staff - The agency needs to recognize that leaders are more than a title, everyone has the potential to lead.

### **Vision for Culture After One Year**

Commitment

1. In one year, managers have a goal in their annual evaluation holding them accountable for developing the leadership skills of their employees.
2. Develop a matrix that holds managers accountable to develop their employees.
3. Quarterly evaluations- develop a tracking mechanism for conversations with an employee or peer.
  - a. Understanding others perspectives or positions.
  - b. Guidance
  - c. Preparing for conferences with their manager.
4. Support: Managers are supportive and invested in their employees; Empowering managers to empower others with a diverse skill-set and inclusive work environment.
5. Results & Accountability: managers are growing, coaching, developing future leaders.

The process creates a uniform inclusive and equitable plan. Having the plan will change the culture of retention. Will provide a well-rounded platform for the front-line workers. It allows us to be more self aware of our unconscious bias.

### **Strategies and/or Activities Toward Vision**

- Professional Standard/ Evaluation goal on Paycor template for 2023 evaluation
- New Hire Checklist/ Employee matrix
- Monthly One-on One conference template
- Onboarding Tool Template
- Upward evaluation/ Assessment
- Lunch/Learn, YouTube commercials/ snippets

### **Person(s) Accountable and/or Responsible**

- Executive Team
- Human Resources
- AFSCME
- Quality Assurance
- Communications
- Section/Hiring Managers
- Information Systems

### **Resources Needed**

- Performance Evaluation, training, and matrix.
- Assessment questions - Data from exit interview (not be coached or, supportive - develop a exit interview survey on categories) &
- Plan, Study, Do, and Act - PSDA
- When do new hires take the assessment?
- Streamline Communication goal on emerging leadership
- Education: webinars, & training at the same time.
- Director Letter upward -Evaluation & Assessments
- Peer reviews
- Plan on how each section/unit addresses/accountable the agency culture statement on DEI and track it
- Yearly evaluation Objective clearly defined on DEI. Goal setting.

## **Priority Area: Equitable Policies: Developing an Equity Lens**

### **Condition(s) Being Addressed**

The lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in decision making

### **Aspect of Culture Statement Addressed by this Recommendation**

Our Approach

### **Conditions that need to Shift**

Currently, there is limited consideration for DEI in decision-making processes caused from a lack of guidance and knowledge.

### **Vision for Culture After One Year**

After one year, there will be a process that leads to building trust and transparency at all levels of the organization.

### **Strategies and/or Activities Toward Vision**

To realize our vision, we recommend:

- Developing a new Director's Letter (1a?) that can be used as guidance and encouragement of equitable decisions
- Providing the necessary tools, such as online or in-person DEI Training

### **Person(s) Accountable and/or Responsible**

The people we envision being accountable and/or responsible for resolving the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in decision making are all agency staff and HCJFS leadership.

### **Resources Needed**

The resources that will be instrumental to achieving this strategy include:

- Training
- Policy
- Guidebook/Toolkit
- DEI Liaison (New position)

## **Priority Area: Equitable Policies: Applying the Equity Lens to Review Policies**

### **Condition(s) Being Addressed**

Reviewing new and existing policies/procedures through a DEI lens.

### **Aspect of Culture Statement Addressed by this Recommendation**

Our People, Our Commitment, and Our Approach

### **Conditions that need to Shift**

Currently, there is no oversight of policies and procedures as it relates to DEI.

### **Vision for Culture After One Year**

After one year, there will be a process that includes all individuals in the reviewing and suggesting of policies and procedures (i.e., DL) from an equitable standpoint and the continuation of the “Open Comment” process for agency wide director’s letters in addition to beginning unit specific open comments for program specific policies.

### **Strategies and/or Activities Toward Vision**

To realize our vision, we recommend:

- Reviewing policies and procedures through a DEI lens
- Using a non-standing review panel selected from a pool of individuals that are DEI trained
- Creating a mechanism where staff can submit recommendations for new policies and policy updates to a DEI panel for review
- Making suggestions towards policies at a section/unit level

### **Person(s) Accountable and/or Responsible**

The people we envision being accountable and/or responsible for providing oversight for incorporating a DEI lens into the review of new and existing policies are non-standing review panels, a DEI liaison, and HCJFS leadership.

### **Resources Needed**

The resources that will be instrumental to achieving this strategy include:

- Training
- File access / HR Transparency
- Operating procedures for review panel

**Thank you to the JFS Staff for their commitment and passion  
for advancing equity.**

**JFS CORE TEAM & PRIORITY AREA WORKGROUPS**

**Building Trust/Healing Trauma**

Joyce Brockman (Core Team)  
Kathy Buschbacher (Core Team)  
Christy Schneider (Core Team)  
Raquel Giles  
Nina E. Lewis  
Neatra Lockett-Foreman  
Morgan Langford  
Johnna Roark  
Chelcia Colbert  
Lora Wolfe

**Communications**

Dali Amador (Core Team)  
Melissa Helsinger (Core Team)  
Jane Prendergast (Core Team)  
Sophia Workman  
Jen Koetter  
Ta'Yana Edwards

**Conversations about Racial Equity**

Michelle Heist (Core Team)  
Linda Hudson (Core Team)  
Edwina Smith (Core Team)  
Christine Wallace (Core Team)  
Sarah Reis  
Bryana Hogan  
John Rogers  
Emily Jackson

**Emerging Leadership**

Susan Adkins (Core Team)  
Melissa Graves (Core Team)  
Bonita Wood (Core Team)  
Aaron Slovin  
Tameka Jackson  
Davona Jeter  
Pamela Smith  
Michael DiFabio  
Mesha Long Long  
Dominique Roberson-Pearce

**Equitable Policies**

Dustin Kendall (Core Team)  
Julian Wagner (Core Team)  
Miles Hensley (Core Team)  
Allie Cohen  
Abria Drummonds  
Talia Bryan

**Thank You to past Core Team Members for their participation and service.**

Michael Patton  
Kathy Pflum  
Sandra Carson  
Michelle Vargo  
Brittanie Dudley

Dionne Barnett  
Kevin Brewer  
Ebonie Byndon-Fields  
Amy Story