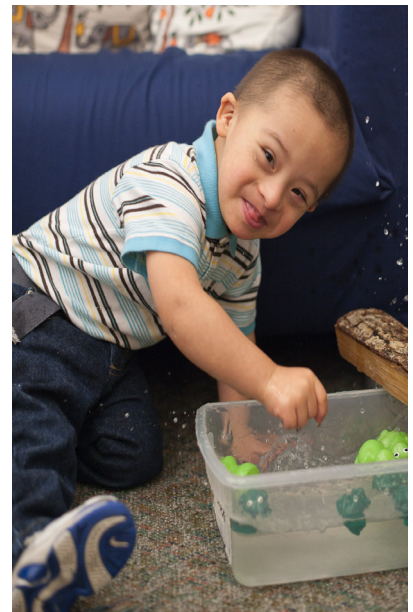


Special Focus Area:

The Diversity Advantage Plan



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Bellevue welcomes the world, our diversity is our strength.

Over the past several decades, Bellevue has grown from a quiet suburban bedroom community into a dynamic, international, and multi-cultural city. Bellevue is Washington's fifth largest city with a resident population of 134,000 and a daytime population (including workers, students and visitors) of approximately 190,000. As Bellevue has grown, the population has diversified in age, race and ethnicity, income, ability and other factors. There are over 80 languages now spoken in our schools¹, people of color represent over 40 percent of the resident population² and a growing multi-cultural population with our workforce. Bellevue's diversity is a defining characteristic of the City.

Bellevue's diversity is an enormous asset. Diversity provides our economy with a competitive advantage; it enriches our culture, enhances our arts, broadens our educational experience and provides new leadership to help our community thrive. The City of Bellevue is an international city. Its business community provides economic opportunity for the region. Bellevue's schools are nationally acclaimed, providing children with opportunities for success in life. Bellevue is a fantastic place for families to live, work, serve and play. Wherever one goes in Bellevue, the entire city reflects an attractive and interesting mix of cultures. This increased diversity has profoundly reshaped Bellevue's identity, bringing both new gifts and new challenges around diverse cultures, languages, and communities.

Bellevue's diversity increases the complexity of our community. Increased diversity is not limited to one or two areas of Bellevue. Diversity has occurred throughout Bellevue's commercial and residential neighborhoods. Collectively, we must be open to find new ways to build inclusion into our community and economy and strengthen equitable access to basic needs,

such as public safety, education and human services. Bellevue's demographic changes also reflect the changing landscape of community needs and how services are delivered. The City understands that the advantages associated with growing diversity do not simply materialize with increased diverse demographic data but instead come from a concerted effort to make the City and human services equitable, inclusive, and accessible.

Equitable:

Systemic inequality exists due to historical practices in our country that have benefited some at the expense of others. The consequences of these actions have had a substantial impact on many of the communities that face social and economic disadvantages. One of our commitments is to review, enact and uphold equitable policies and practices in the city to ensure the diverse needs of the community are met. Our equity lens acknowledges and contextualizes the challenges certain groups face and is grounded in the principles of justice and fairness. Equity is achieved when social and institutional barriers are removed, and access -- to economic resources, adequate healthcare, education and opportunities -- are provided. Sharing opportunities with communities who are institutionally marginalized moves everyone forward. Addressing the educational achievement gap, culturally responsive public safety, and supporting women and minority entrepreneurs through economic development are examples of efforts that address systemic inequality.

Inclusive:

As an integral piece of feeling connected, all people who come to Bellevue should feel that they are in a safe and welcoming living and working environment where they are able to thrive and partake in all aspects of community life. Inclusion takes on many forms from supporting efforts that remove barriers towards civic engagement to building opportunities for

residents to share and learn with each other. The end result is a citizenry, built on mutual respect, inclusive of differences, and empowered to impact influential decisions that shape the city. As a multicultural community we are committed to respectfully engaging cross-culturally in community life which is reflected in our public programs. Equally important is the City models inclusiveness through our city planning and implementation of city processes; written materials made available in multiple languages and other formats; and the development of a variety of programs that reinforce that all people are considered valued members of society.

Accessible:

We are committed to building an environment where people feel comfortable accessing services, facilities, and government by reducing obstacles like physical, financial, and language barriers. Bellevue is a fantastic place for families to live, work, and play. The entire city is an interesting mix of public and private attractions, places for recreation, and robust services and businesses. Bellevue provides accommodations for people with disabilities which ensures equal opportunity to participate in activities and events. Bellevue has accessible city buildings, parks, recreation facilities and most city sidewalks have curb cuts. We provide an assortment of services including assisted hearing devices and interpretation. We are dedicated to being mindful of access issues that may impede people of a wide range of abilities to the availability and accessibility of basic needs, public safety, education, and human services.

What we learned from the community

In response to these opportunities and challenges, the City of Bellevue went through an inclusive two year planning process that resulted in the creation of Bellevue's Diversity Advantage Plan. Gathering information through four open community forums, discussions with community leaders, a review of similar efforts in surrounding municipalities, and research on best practices provided us the information needed to create the plan. Once drafted, Bellevue's Diversity Advantage Plan was reviewed by the City's boards and commissions and was

formally adopted by the City Council in 2014.

Through the public engagement process, we heard recurring themes around six focus areas; cultural competence, public safety, education, economic development, civic engagement, and human services. The community conversation about Bellevue's growing diversity has been lively, multi-faceted and full of new insights. This Diversity Plan and its recommendations reflect the input and discourse of different neighborhood residents, community stakeholders, organizations and City partners. The following is a summary of some of these recurring themes:

What we heard: Cultural Competence

Diversity is one of Bellevue's strongest assets. It creates a dynamic and rich environment that enhances the community's expressions of art, culture, community and civic pride. At the same time, language, age and cultural differences contribute to a growing sense of disconnectedness within the community. Building bridges across Bellevue's diverse communities has become a significant challenge. With an array of languages and cultures in Bellevue, people expressed the need for more resources and a stronger commitment to improving communication. This includes translations of certain important City documents and forms, interpretation services, improvement of the City website and greater access to information city-wide. Beyond written materials, residents also expressed the desire for greater outreach and engagement to build relationships with targeted communities and establish trust and mutuality. Relationships with open, honest and respectful communication are essential to help build bridges and strengthen civic engagement.

What we heard: Public Safety

The general public perception is that Bellevue is a safe place to live, work and raise families. There is considerable appreciation for the efforts of Bellevue's Fire and Police Departments to provide exceptional service and responsiveness. Bellevue's Police Department is noted for working with ethnic communities and different age groups to improve community relations and public safety.

Communities must overcome several challenges to improve public safety. The distrust of government by some immigrant communities remains a barrier for public safety officers to overcome. Some Bellevue residents may not report crimes because they are concerned about immigration status or they fear retribution (from employers, landlords, etc.) or they distrust public safety staff. There is also ongoing public concern about racial profiling at traffic stops.

What we heard: Education

All participants echoed a strong appreciation for schools in Bellevue and identified Bellevue's education system as a key reason families choose to live in Bellevue. Two educational institutions were repeatedly referenced during these discussions. The Bellevue School District and Bellevue College have taken leadership roles in strengthening cultural competence and addressing systemic issues that arise within Bellevue's diverse student body.

Educational institutions in Bellevue are weaving diversity and cultural competence into their programs, curricula, and policies. These organizations serve as a model for other community groups. We also heard consistently from community members that these educational institutions were some of the most appropriate places for continued dialogue and courageous conversations on questions of diversity, and for the purpose of forging a common understanding of key concepts related to diversity. As a result we have continued to build a strong partnership with these educational institutions to work in collaboration to actively address these issues and opportunities.

What we heard: Economic Development

Residents understand the concept of economic development from the standpoint of livability. It includes the ability to get to work, find housing and shop locally. For Bellevue's diverse workforce, transit availability and connections are vital, including improved bus connections internally within Bellevue and between other commercial centers. It is also economically important for employees relocating to the City

to know that they and their families will be embraced, accepted, and included.

People who work in Bellevue, including teachers and retail workers, want to be able to afford to live in Bellevue. A strong theme when discussing economic development was the need for additional affordable housing within Bellevue to support its workforce.

What we heard: Civic Engagement

Leaders exist within every community and Bellevue hopes to capitalize on this leadership to help inform, guide, and share with others the City's direction. Leaders who develop a voice within their own communities are most likely to engage on a larger stage – as neighborhood leaders, gatekeepers, public issue advocates and City leaders. The City's role includes identification and mentoring of potential leaders wherever they exist. Paving the way for increased involvement by these potential leaders will add perspective to public decision making and help to build a stronger, more diverse leadership pool in Bellevue.

While the benefits of broad civic participation remain clear, there are several barriers that provide challenges to expanding public engagement. We cannot assume that activities such as volunteering and civic participation are highly valued or understood in every culture. Related to public service, a suspicion of government can be common among certain immigrant communities and some age groups. There are also groups, like individuals with physical disabilities that need higher levels of support in order to facilitate their civic engagement. Our goal is to minimize those barriers towards participation and support the development of a thriving group of diverse people who are committed to making Bellevue a wonderful place to live and work.

What we heard: Human Services

As Bellevue continues to grow we also see an increasing need for an array of human services. There is a growing homeless population with limited access to shelters on the Eastside. Additionally, human service providers have noticed an increase in domestic violence and a limited

number of ‘safe houses’ for domestic violence victims. Providing culturally competent services to an increasingly diverse client population is challenging for mental health professionals and social workers. Recognizing these challenges, human service providers have been on the forefront for gaining greater skills in cultural competence and in advocating for more equitable service delivery for under-served communities. As a best practice, many require their staff to develop cultural competence skills in workshops and trainings. These trainings are understood as a vital piece of the puzzle for developing a culturally competent staff. There is also awareness that the human service organizations – its leadership, board, policies, and practices – must also demonstrate cultural competence to truly embed this as a value.

Human service providers often are confronted by barriers due to a client’s strong cultural distrust of government. To begin overcoming this distrust, individuals often benefit from trusted advocates who both understand their culture and can help them navigate the service providers’ systems of forms, eligibility requirements, and deadlines. The existing Cultural Navigator program active in East King County was identified as a best practice that provides this service for residents. Similarly, programs specifically designed to engage youth and young adults can provide the same type of culturally-relevant care.

The Diversity Advantage Plan

The Diversity Advantage Plan has sixty recommendations in six initiative focus areas. The City clearly heard that Cultural Competence is the lens through which we need to adopt new practices within each of these initiative focus areas. Addressing Economic Development, Civic Engagement, Public Safety, Education, and Human Services with equity, inclusion, and accessibility in mind will bring to life the City Council’s vision statement, “Bellevue welcomes the world. Diversity is our strength”.

The Diversity Advantage Plan Recommendations for Human Services

No individual or community can achieve their full potential until their basic needs are met. For this reason, it is critical that Bellevue’s public and non-profit service providers emphasize the importance of providing culturally competent human services that are easily accessible to all.

Recommended Actions

1. Support the establishment of a year-round homeless shelter on the Eastside.
2. Translate materials on human service resources and referral programs available in Bellevue into the most commonly spoken languages where need exists.
3. Assist non-profit human service agencies to provide culturally competent care and support to Bellevue residents of all ages, abilities and ethnic backgrounds.
4. Engage the Eastside Human Services Forum in regional discussions of diversity in human services.
5. Promote bicultural and bi-lingual programs that help individuals access public and non-profit human services systems, such as the Cultural Navigator Program.
6. Support human service organizations in providing cultural competence training for their staff.
7. Recruit diverse community volunteers to support programs and services that meet human service needs in Bellevue.

The City’s adopted Diversity Advantage Plan provides 60 recommended actions that address each of the six focus areas. To read the full plan please visit:

http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Parks/Bellevue_Diversity_Advantage_Plan_12-08-14.pdf

ENDNOTE

1. Bellevue School District: About <http://www.bsd405.org/about/>
2. City of Bellevue: Demographics <http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/demographics.htm>