

# Achieving Governance Excellence: Developing Exemplary Board Practices

Santa Clara Valley Water District

Santa Jose, CA

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# Desired Outcomes for Today

- ▶ Understanding concepts in D.E.I.B. (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging), and implicit and explicit bias
- ▶ Examine our current Board practices for continuous improvement opportunities
- ▶ Identify and agree upon strategies for improved Board operations

# Agreements for Our Training

- ▶ **Be present**
- ▶ **Be willing to share, but make space for others**
- ▶ **Be open to possible new ideas and viewpoints**
- ▶ **Respect people's truths; Debate ideas, not people**
- ▶ **One voice at a time**
- ▶ **To manage our time, be as concise as possible and limit your comments to once per topic (when needed)**

*“Facts and opinions are not the same; We are always entitled to our own opinions; We are never entitled to our own facts”*

## *Mission*

Valley Water's mission is to provide Silicon Valley safe, clean water for a healthy life, environment, and economy.

## *Vision*

Valley Water is nationally recognized as a leading water resources management agency.

## **Values Statement (Board Governance Policy - Governance Process GP-7)**

- 1) Valley Water is entrusted to serve the public by carrying out its mission for the benefit of the community.**
- 2) Valley Water is committed to providing excellent service to all customers.**
- 3) All individuals are unique and important, and will be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.**
- 4) Valley Water takes pride in its work and is accountable to carry out its responsibilities safely with honesty and integrity.**
- 5) Initiative, leadership, personal development, and training are vital for continuous improvement.**
- 6) Open communication, cooperation, and teamwork are shared responsibilities and essential to the successful performance of Valley Water.**
- 7) Valley Water is committed to creating an inclusive work environment, which reflects and supports the diversity of the community and enriches our perspectives.**
- 8) Valley Water strives to support a work culture and workplace environment that attracts and retains superior employees empowered to make decisions about, and take responsibility for, how they do their jobs.**
- 9) Valley Water is committed to its employees and supports market-based competitive compensation that is equitable and rewards accomplishment and encourages high performance.**
- 10) Valley Water is committed to sustaining a healthy work-life balance for its employees and places a high value on all the things that provide enrichment and fulfillment, including work and career, health and fitness, family and relationships, spirituality, community service, hobbies and passions, intellectual stimulation, rest and recreation.**

# *The New American Reality...*

- Currently, 53% of Americans under the age of 18 are NOT classified as Caucasian
- Currently, 42% of all Americans are classified as non-Caucasian, including 19% Latino, 14% African American, and 6% AAPI
- By 2030, Latinos are projected to comprise 25% of the American population
- In California, the demographics currently are 40% Latino, 34% Caucasian, 16 % Asian; 7% African American

(Source: 2022 population estimates, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov))

*If we are to live Values #3 & #7, DEIB is ESSENTIAL for business relevance, effectiveness, and excellence...*

*“If you want to go fast, go alone;  
if you want to go far, go together”*

*“None of us is as smart as all  
of us”*

Diversity...Equity...  
Inclusion...Belonging...

What is it, and  
why/how did we  
get here?

## What is Racism?

1. a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race
- 2.a. the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another
- b. a political or social system founded on racism and designed to execute its principles

## What is Prejudice?

2. a.(1) preconceived judgment or opinion  
(2) an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge
- b. an instance of such judgment or opinion
- c. an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics

([www.Miriam-Webster.com](http://www.Miriam-Webster.com))

# Racism vs. Prejudice

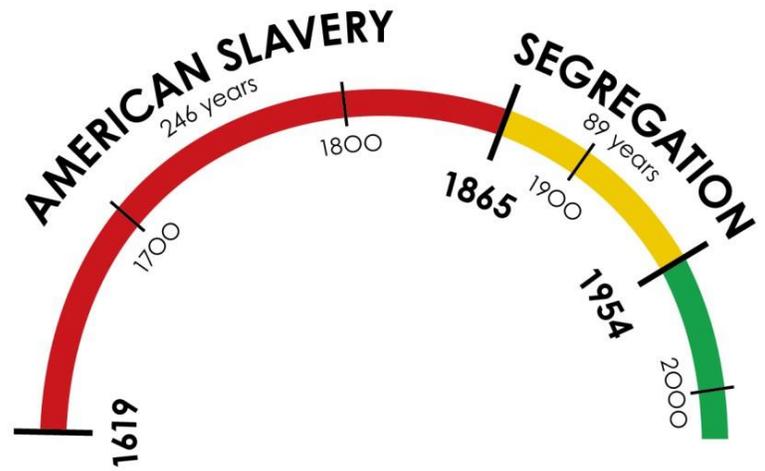
**Racism is power dynamic; it can only be manifested by the race controlling the ultimate/majority of levers of “power” (money, laws, etc.) in a particular society.**

**Therefore, “reverse racism” does not/cannot exist.**

Systemic Racism described as a children’s game:

I Declare War

**Systemic/Institutional Racism**

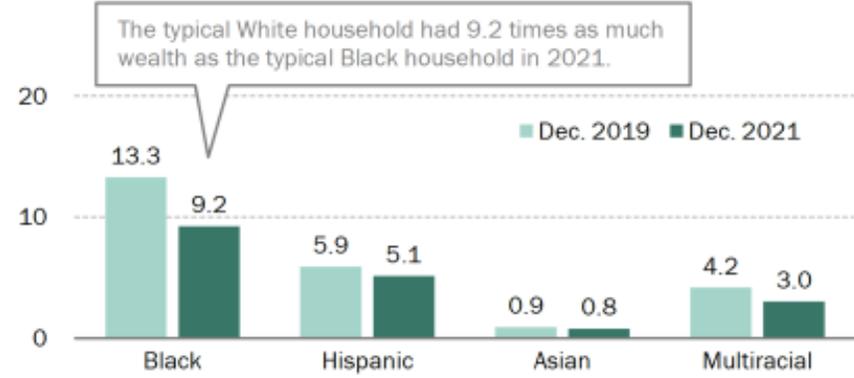


Zerflin 2022

# Racism Timeline...

### White U.S. households have significantly more wealth than all but Asian households

Ratio of the median wealth of White households to the median wealth of other households



Note: The median divides households into halves, half with more wealth than the median and the other half with less. Households are grouped by the race and ethnicity of the survey reference person. White, Black and Asian include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Multiracial includes non-Hispanics of two or more races. Hispanics are of any race. American Indian or Pacific Islander not shown because of small sample sizes. Ratios are computed before the estimates of wealth are rounded.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 and 2022 Surveys of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).  
"Wealth Surged in the Pandemic, but Debt Endures for Poorer Black and Hispanic Families"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# Creates persistent inequities...

# BREAK

**Mission:** The Valley Water Office of REDI seeks to ensure equity, inclusion, and belonging principles are embedded into all existing policies, programs, and practices.

**Overarching Goals:**

- 1) Systemic Equity:** Assist the agency and its employees in the achievement of goals to address institutional inequities.
- 2) Workforce Representation:** Advance efforts to ensure equitable access to career opportunities and attract and retain a diverse workforce through all levels of the organizations that reflect the communities they serve.
- 3) Culture of Inclusion:** Create and maintain a work environment that acknowledges diversity and values it through proactive, inclusive, and equitable practices.
- 4) Justice:** Advance initiatives to improve equity of Valley Water work and outcomes that reflect the community's needs and priorities.
- 5) Community Partnership:** Provide support, education, resources, and access to empower early community engagement to help Valley Water be a good neighbor to communities in which it works and operates.

# It is possible to have...

- ▶ *Diversity without Equity*
- ▶ *Equity without Inclusion*
- ▶ *Inclusion without Belonging*

## Why D.E.I.B. Now?

**D.E.I.B.**

# Let's Plan a Party!

**We invite all types of people to the party, especially those who have been systematically excluded and prevented from attending in the past**

**Diversity**



**At the party, we make sure everyone is provided what they individually need to fully and equally participate in the party**

**Equity**



**During the party, we try to make sure everyone participates in the party we've always planned, or we offer some limited music, games, and food that honors the various tastes and preferences of the attendees**

**Inclusion**

**As the norm, in the design of our party, we make sure we include music, games, and food that honors the various tastes, experiences, and preferences of the attendees so they are comfortable enough to party at their highest ability**

**Belonging**

# LUNCH

- 1) Committed to the organization, through consistent engagement and involvement
- 2) Actively prepares for, and participates in board meetings
- 3) Has open, honest, and respectful communication with BAO's and other directors
- 4) Protects confidential discussions and uses the proper channels for those conversations
- 5) Understands strategic time management and operates with a sense of urgency

**Five characteristics of great board members**

The professional and personal conduct of Directors must be above reproach and avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Directors shall support the maintenance of a positive and constructive environment for Valley Water Employees. Directors will refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges, or verbal assaults upon the character or motives of other Directors, Valley Water employees, stakeholders, or the public.

*Valley Water Board of Directors Code of Conduct (9/12/23) p. 5*



# Respect

**How can you personally  
model and represent D.E.I.B.  
practices and awareness in  
your role as a Board  
Member?**

- ▶ On a scale of 1-5 with 1=Poor and 5=Excellent, how would you rate the the Board in regard to respectful communication?
- ▶ If you selected a rating less than 5, what was/were the reason(s)?
- ▶ What can you individually do to ensure respectful communications is our Board S.O.P. (standard operating procedure)?

## Self Assessment - Communications

**BREAK**

The powers and purposes of Valley Water include:

To provide comprehensive water management for all beneficial uses and protection from flooding within Santa Clara County; to protect Santa Clara County from floodwater and stormwater of the district, including tidal floodwater and the floodwater and stormwater of streams that have their sources outside the district but flow into the district; to protect from floodwater or stormwater the public highways, life and property in the district, and the watercourses and watersheds of streams flowing within the district; to provide for the conservation and management of floodwater, stormwater, or recycled water, or other water from any sources within or outside the watershed for beneficial and useful purposes, including spreading, storing, retaining, and causing the water to percolate into the soil within the district; to protect, save, store, recycle, distribute, transfer, exchange, manage, and conserve in any manner any of the waters; to increase and prevent the waste or diminution of the water supply in the district; to obtain, retain, protect, and recycle drainage, stormwater, floodwater, or treated wastewater, or other water from any sources, within or outside the watershed in which the district is located for any beneficial uses within the district; to enhance, protect, and restore streams, riparian corridors, and natural resources in connection with carrying out the purposes set forth in this section; and to preserve open space in Santa Clara County and support the county park system.

# Powers and Purpose

- 1. Understand their role and responsibilities**
- 2. Get the right information at board meetings**
- 3. Lead, not manage; provide strategic, rather than operational support**
- 4. Work as a team, but challenge appropriately**
- 5. Review their own performance**

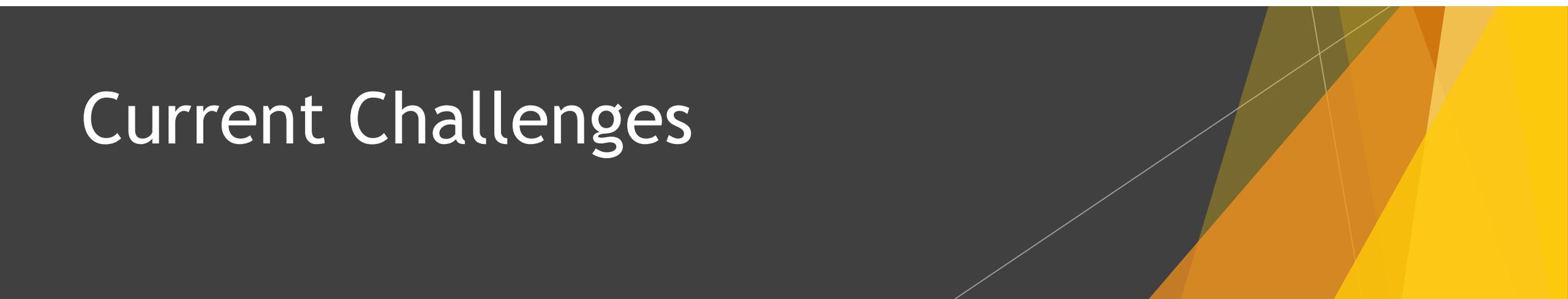
**Five characteristics of great boards of directors**

- ▶ It is the Board's role to develop, set, and abide by the Mission, Vision, and Values of Valley Water.
- ▶ It is the Board's role to prepare and propose the budget for Valley Water.
- ▶ It is the Board's role to supervise, interface with, and evaluate the performance of all Senior Staff (CEO, Chiefs, and VP's).
- ▶ When doing committee work, the Board should always copy the CEO (and/or his designee) on any requests made of staff.
- ▶ It is OK for Board members to request information from staff regarding the status of individual candidates or contractors for hire.
- ▶ It is the Board's role to periodically assess its own performance.
- ▶ It's OK for Directors to attend any staff or department meetings that they decide they should.
- ▶ It is Director's role to share positions and decisions of the Board with their Districts.

# Roles and Communications - T or F

**From your lens, what is one challenge that we are experiencing which compromises our Code of Conduct, or prevents us from exhibiting the identified characteristics of a great board?**

**Current Challenges**



- ▶ **What exists in our current policies that permits us to regulate/solve the challenges identified?**
- ▶ **What additional policy, practice, or process could be implemented to regulate/solve the challenges identified?**

**Solutions**

# Next Steps