

A Study of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts on the State Government Workforce

Policy Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Employee-driven diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are becoming more common in both the private and government sectors. Furthermore, diversity in the workplace has shown to be a major contributor to improving an organization's productivity and performance. This is especially important in California because it is culturally and socioeconomically the most diverse state in the nation.

The California Public Utilities Commission and Why I Focus on It

The California Public Utilities Commission is a state agency that regulates privately owned electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water, railroad, rail transit, and passenger transportation companies. It is also a public organization attempting to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. Being a large, complex organization, the lessons drawn may also be helpful to other government entities.

Methods and Data

I conducted research, sought feedback from graduate program professors, and collected data to complete my analysis. This included reviewing relevant academic literature, examining different entities, and interviewed subject matter experts. In particular, I draw upon information about King County, Washington's to assess diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts as a potential model for the CPUC

Research on Employment Diversity

I draw upon the limited research on government recruitment, applications, examination, and training from the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The qualitative data is synthesized and serve as a framework to determine how an administration level department like the California Public Utilities Commission can effectively address racial inequity within the workplace.

Administrative Challenges

State agencies such as the CPUC are subject to set criteria and limitation of resources. I consider such administrative challenges and how they affect matters such as recruitment of a more diverse workforce.

King County Model

King County is arguably one of the first local government entities to develop and implement an extensive equity and social justice strategic plan. King County also utilizes impact review tools, employee resource groups, and an office designated for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

What CPUC Does to Encourage Workforce Diversity and How It Compares to King County

I conducted interviews with three California Public Utilities Commission staff previously and currently involved equity working groups regarding past and current diversity efforts

within the organization. The organization utilizes an interdepartmental survey, workforce analysis, working groups, and employee resource groups.

Summary of Comparisons

The California Public Utilities Commission is consistent with King County on five out of the eight methods identified. The California Public Utilities Commission is currently in the process of developing a racial equity action plan.

Where Is CPUC Moving Now and What Should It Do to Promote DEI Goals?

The California Public Utilities Commission is in the process of developing a racial equity action plan, inconsistently conducts a type of equity impact review, and has plans to establish a designated office for purposes of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Based on the culture and structure of the organization, management involvement is crucial to following through with proposed diversity programs and/or policies.

Conclusion

The diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts California Public Utilities Commission has made thus far are heading towards the “ideal model” of King County and can be used to address and implement changes reflective of future social policies.

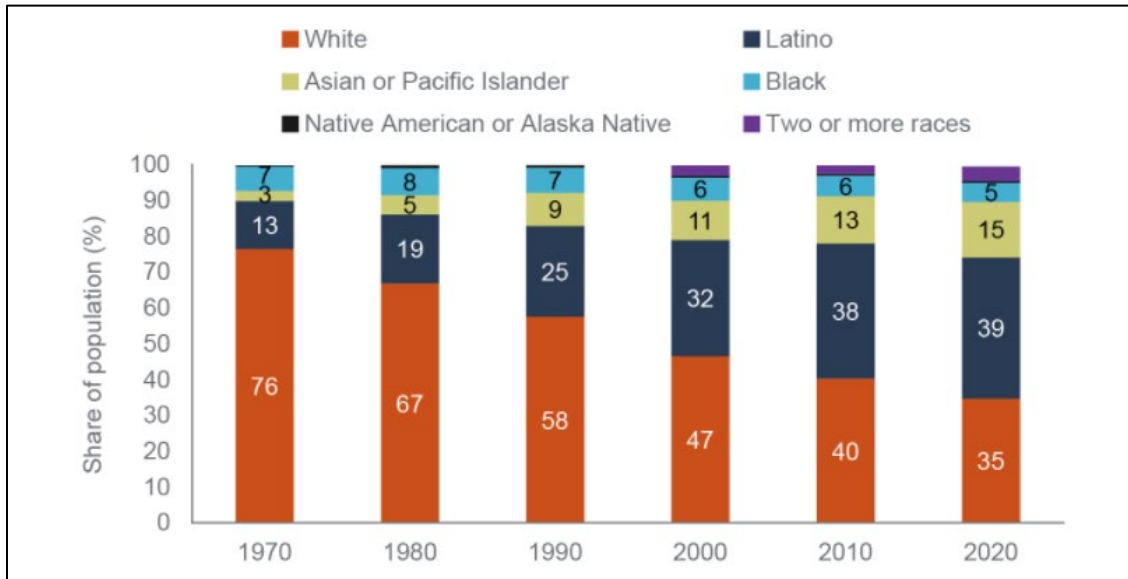
Introduction

Workplace diversity has been in the forefront of human resources management in recent years. Employee-driven diversity, equity, and inclusion (also known as DEI) initiatives are becoming more common in both the private and public sectors to ensure employers are fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. Not just with employers, but DEI has also gotten attention from governmental leaders. In September 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 979, requiring publicly held corporations located in California to include individuals from a minority or underrepresented background on all boards of directors (1). In January 2021, President Biden signed an executive order on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government (2). Then in June 2021, he signed another executive order on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the federal workforce (3).

Why is it important to ensure we promote an inclusionary and equitable workforce? For example, in California, although population growth has slowed in the recent decades, it remains the most populous state (4). Culturally and socioeconomically, California is also the most diverse state in the America and becoming increasingly more so (5). According to the Public Policy Institute of California, in 1970, non-white races made up of 24 percent of the state population. In 2020, non-white races increased to 65 percent of the population (Figure 1). In 2018, 39 percent of California residents were Latino, 37 percent Non-Hispanic Caucasian, 15 percent Asian American, 6 percent African American, 3 percent multiracial, and approximately 1 percent American Indian or Pacific Islander (6). In California, “minorities” are no longer the minority, and our state policies and programs should be reflected as such.

Beyond race and ethnic diversity, other types of diversity include but are not limited to languages spoken, immigrant status, and economic status. California ranks number one in linguistic diversity (7), and according to the U.S. Census, from 2016 to 2020, approximately 44 percent of Californian residents over the age of five spoke another language besides English at home (8). As such, state programs may require multilingual and/or interpreter services in order to communicate critical information or to reach certain demographics. Another facet of diversity is immigrant status. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the state is home to almost 11 million foreign born residents, approximately 53 percent are naturalized U.S. citizens, and another 25 percent have some other legal status, including permanent residency (9). Furthermore, approximately 22 percent of immigrants in California are undocumented. Depending on an individual’s experience, this may reflect different needs from services resulting from state programs. Finally, the California population consists of a wide range of economic statuses, ranking third in socioeconomic diversity (7). With a median household income of less than \$79,000 and a poverty rate of almost 12 percent, there are a lot of high-income households and a lot of very low-income households which may present different expectations of what the government should provide to the public.

Figure 1: California Population Percentage by Race from 1970 to 2020



Source: Public Policy Institute of California

Although encouraging a diverse and inclusive workforce is the moral and ethical thing to do, diversity has also shown to be a major contributor to improving an organization's productivity and performance (Figure 2). Based mainly on analysis of private sector organizations, diverse workplaces tend to have employees with varying skills and experiences which often leads to more creative and inventive solutions. According to a study published by the Harvard Business Review, workplace diversity also leads to faster problem solving (10). Studies show that diverse workplaces have happier employees and provides greater opportunities for personal and professional growth (11). Additionally, organizations that support diversity and inclusivity are more likely to attract and retain talent because they feel respected and valued for their contributions.

Figure 2: Benefits of Diversity – Based on Studies of Private Sector Organizations

Diverse employees have different talents, experiences, and skillsets to help develop creative and inventive solutions.	⇒	A group made up of individuals with similar backgrounds and skillsets may use a standard approach to problem solving.
Diverse teams are more productive and perform better.	⇒	Studies show organizations with a culture of diversity and inclusion are both happier and more productive.
Greater opportunity for personal and professional growth.	⇒	A diverse set of colleagues can expose individuals to new perspectives, skills, and approaches to work.
Supporting diversity in the workplace helps attract and retain talent.	⇒	Employees are more likely remain loyal when they feel respected and valued for their unique contribution.
Workplace diversity boosts an organization's reputation.	⇒	Organizations that promote diversity are considered friendlier and more socially responsible.

Source: Washington State University and Hult International Business School

However, diversity laws toe a fine line between affirmative action and biases versus supporting diverse and inclusive practices. This poses potential legal challenges. In 2020, taxpayers represented by a conservative advocacy group filed a lawsuit against the State of California in response to Senate Bill 826 on which Assembly Bill 979 was built. The bill, signed by former Governor Jerry Brown, required publicly owned companies to include females on their boards of directors. The group claimed the bill imposed an “unconstitutional gender-based quota and that the secretary of state's office should not use taxpayers’ money to implement the statute” (12). In April 2022, the Los Angeles Superior Court found the law violated the California State Constitution (13). Although challenges may impede progress, it is imperative to ensure government policies meets the diverse needs of the state and its residents. This begins with having those who develop, implement, and administer government policies be representative of the diverse population the policies impact.

In recent years, private companies have aimed to increase diversity within their organizations by implementing new recruiting strategies. Examples of such employers include Apple, Infosys, and Yelp. As part of its Racial Equity and Justice Initiative, Apple opened the Propel Center in 2021 which provides students of color with mentorships, learning support, internships, and career opportunities (14). Infosys, an information technology company, is unique in its diverse workforce for the technology industry where women make up 25 percent of its board and 38 percent of its workforce. Furthermore, Infosys recruits from community colleges and candidates without college degrees for a significant portion of their hiring (14). On the other hand, Yelp’s approach is to expand campus recruitment to historically black universities, women’s colleges, and Hispanic serving institutions (14).

However, based on my research discussed in a subsequent section, there is not a lot of information on diversity programs within state and local governments. Furthermore, there is no general guidance on the best methods to assess the effectiveness of these programs on recruiting and hiring potential state employees. With limited information on whether certain methods or programs are effective, it proves to be a continual trial and error. As such, I think it is important to identify any successful methods that are being used by other entities related to recruitment, training, and hiring practices. Then we can use that information to compare those methods to what our agency is doing and learn from others' successes.

The California Public Utilities Commission and Why I Focus on It

The California Public Utilities Commission ("Commission" or "CPUC") is a state agency that regulates privately owned electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water, railroad, rail transit, and passenger transportation companies. With offices across the state in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Natomas, the Commission's mission is to "empower California through access to safe, clean, and affordable utility services and infrastructure" (15). This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring wildfire safety, consumer protection, rail safety, utility audits, and safety enforcement. The Commission It is made up of five governor-appointed commissioners, including the President, with the Executive Director reporting to the Commissioners. The Executive Director oversees eight divisions that each serve different purposes (Appendix A). The Commission employs law judges, attorneys, engineers, auditors, information technology specialists, human resource specialists, and various types of analysts.

The reason why I selected the Commission as a case study is because, as a current employee, I am aware the Commission is taking steps to promote a more sensitive and inclusive work environment. This includes, but is not limited to, taking part in the Capitol Collaborative on Race and Equity and developing an Environmental and Social Justice Action Plan. Being a large, complex organization, the lessons drawn from the Commission may also be helpful to other government entities. As a current employee, my goal is to recommend suggestions for improvements, by reviewing research and successful methods employed by other entities, conducting interviews with subject matter experts, and supply first-hand knowledge and experiences related to the Commission's progress.

Methods and Data

After I settled on the goal of my culminating experience project, I developed my methodology and clarified the type of data I needed to collect. I filtered through scholarly literature obtained through online databases that were relevant to my research purpose. To identify organizations that may serve as criteria for success in DEI program development, I conducted online research and sought feedback from my graduate program professors on the applicability of the organization. Based on these discussions, I selected King County, Washington as an entity that has shown extensive efforts to address the racial and socioeconomic diversity within their jurisdiction. Then I

selected the Commission as my case study to compare the ongoing efforts made by the Commission to the methods used by King County. As previously mentioned, my rationale for selecting the Commission is that the lessons drawn may also be helpful to other government entities due to the size and complexity of the Commission.

This policy report serves to evaluate how well state government DEI initiatives compare to an “ideal type”, by using King County, Washington as the ideal and the Commission as a case study. I used the following methods to collect data and complete my analysis:

- Reviewed relevant literature and drew implications
- Identified administrative challenges based on my own experiences
- Examined King County, Washington as an “ideal model”
- Interviewed subject matter experts at the Commission

The type of data collected includes information available on the Commission website, first-hand knowledge obtained through interviews and my own experience as a Commission employee, information and documents presented on the King County website, qualitative data from scholarly literature, and quantitative data from research organizations and news sources.

Research on Employment Diversity

I conducted most of my literature review from the California State University, Sacramento library website. This included using research databases such as EBSCO and ProQuest to search for academic articles related to employment diversity, candidate recruitment methods, applications and interviews, and DEI training. During my research, due to the limited information currently available, I expanded the scope to include private and not-for-profit organizations in addition to state and local government. Although the specific practices and procedures of private and not-for-profit sectors may differ from the government sector, I decided it would be helpful to gain an understanding of what other employers are doing and identify any relevant study results.

Administrative Challenges

I identified administrative challenges related to developing, implementing, and enforcing DEI strategies within the Commission based on my own experience working in the state government. It is important to be aware of the challenges specific to the Commission when comparing it to King County.

King County Model

Per the recommendation of one of my graduate instructors, I examined the DEI efforts of King County, Washington as a potential “ideal type” model comparison to the California Public Utilities Commission. This is a common type of “gauging” research that uses the literature to identify a practical model for a policy or administrative effort, and then compares that to a specific real-world effort (16). I subsequently conducted research on the strategies implemented by King County and the engagement processes involved to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the county’s daily operations.

California Public Utilities Commission

Next, I matched the King County approach to what the Commission was doing in the DEI area. To do that, I identified individuals determined to be subject matter experts on areas such as diversity, environmental and social justice, and employment issues within the context of the Commission. Then I interviewed three of the subject matter experts in March 2022 utilizing a specific set of questions (Appendix C).

Research on Employment Diversity

The implications of an effective DEI model within a state department ties to the issue of racial inequity within state service, specifically, the access to examinations and interview process, promotional opportunities, and candidate outreach. It is imperative to promote racial diversity in state service because it not only benefits the well-being of public employees through equitable representation in the workplace, but the diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences further encourages discussions on future policies that have a proportional impact on California residents. In the subsections below, I summarize the relevant research and discuss the implications of the findings related to racial inequity within the context of human resources. The information can be synthesized and serve as a framework to determine how an administration level department like the Commission can effectively address racial inequity within the workplace.

Candidate Recruitment

First, let us look at candidate recruitment. Aneeta Rattan, Jennifer Steele, and Nalini Ambady, from London Business School, York University, and Stanford University, respectively, conducted a study to evaluate social group memberships and intergroup relations, specifically, the role of race versus sex in hiring and discussed the impact of gender versus race in hiring. For this study, the authors focused on historically male-dominated fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) to evaluate interviewer response to an Asian-American, female candidate. The results showed the interviewers positively associated the candidate's race to overall skill, willingness to hire, and higher negotiated wages compared to the candidate's sex. The authors discussed the implications of racial versus gender bias in hiring practices but noted there are limitations to the results due to the social stereotype of Asian-Americans and the STEM field (17).

The study by Rattan and colleagues suggests there are implicit and explicit biases in candidate recruitment, especially in industries typically dominated by a particular race and/or gender. It may be important to be cognizant of potential biases and take purposeful steps to mitigate this issue during the candidate recruitment, application, interview, and training processes.

In another study, Elizabeth Hirsh and Youngjoo Cha from the University of British Columbia and Indiana University, respectively, studied the data of approximately 500 high-profile employee discrimination lawsuits, specifically, using sex and race in employment decisions. Hirsh and Cha assessed the impact of court-mandated policy

changes on increasing white women, black women, and black men in managerial positions within the organizations. Their studies found the success rates of addressing workplace discrimination through court-mandated policy changes were lower compared to practical interventions. These interventions include, but not limited to establishing specific recruitment, hiring, or promotional plans. Furthermore, they found affirmative action or targeted recruitment practices resulted in long-term impacts up to five years post litigation (18).

The Hirsh and Cha study compares the success of mandated policies versus practical interventions to increase the recruitment and promotion of women and people of color to managerial positions. Furthermore, this study suggests diversity recruitment methods positively affect diversity hiring, but it important to implement specific recruitment plans, hiring practices, and continual monitoring to ensure actions executed encourages diversity in the workplace. However, the authors' findings on the benefits of affirmative action or targeted recruitment may not be applicable to the Commission due to the current employment laws in California prohibiting affirmative action policies.

Finally, an article written by Patrick McKay and Derek Avery of University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and Rutgers University, respectively, suggests common diversity recruitment initiatives may contribute to increased turnover among new minority hires if the work environment does not follow through to promote diversity. McKay and Avery claim the organization motives for diversity recruitment stems from labor shortages, avoiding legal scrutiny, enhance public image, gain access to minority consumers, and increase organizational creativity and innovation. However, since the workplace culture may not be minority friendly, the reality often results in pay inequity, poor advancement opportunities, exclusion from special assignments, and social isolation. As such, they suggest incorporating diversity audits, diversity training, and recruitment evaluation to increase accountability (19).

McKay and Avery stress the importance of developing a culture and environment that is consistent with diversity hiring practices to mitigate ethnic minority employee turnover. Based on the current structure and values of the Commission, these steps can be incorporated to develop a framework for recruitment practices and growth opportunities to promote racial equity within the Commission.

Applications and Examinations

Next, I consider literature on the effects of applications and examinations on DEI within organizations. Authors Olof Åslund and Oskar Skans from the Institute for Labor Market Policy Evaluation in Sweden evaluate the impact of anonymity with the job application process. Åslund and Skans note that although equal employment opportunity policies aim at promoting the presence of women and ethnic minorities, discrimination remains prevalent. They discuss the applicability and effectiveness of anonymous application procedures which omits all applicant's name, gender, and country of origin during the initial stage of the hiring process. Their research found that while anonymous application procedures aided in addressing sex-based discrimination, such procedures did not have any effect increasing the probability of job offers for ethnic minorities (20).

Åslund and Skans presented an alternative for addressing an equally prevalent social issue of sex discrimination in the workplace. Although the study results found the anonymous application procedure is equally disadvantageous to ethnic minorities compared to conventional methods, the anonymous application procedure may be benefit for non-state service hiring. Based on my understanding of the California state service employment process, the application review process is highly procedural and stringent on specific academic and technical expertise required for a position. As such, an anonymous application process may be less beneficial within the Commission.

Internal Training

Finally, I consider the literature on the effects of internal training on diversity. In a study related to diversity training methods, authors Gislaine Ngounou and Nancy Gutierrez, from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation in Massachusetts and NYC Leadership Academy in New York, respectively discussed the value of interracial facilitators in diversity trainings. Ngounou and Gutierrez identified challenges of single diversity training facilitators or anti-bias educators on areas including, but not limited to, participant defensiveness and oppression comparisons, confronting guilt, fear, and anxiety, and finally, potential exhaustion from being a lone facilitator on sensitive topics. They stress the importance of incorporating interracial facilitators who can “demonstrate how to confront one another in productive ways that allow [uncomfortable] conversations to continue (21).

Ngounou and Gutierrez stress the importance of the method in which sensitive training information is delivered plays a major role in promoting and encouraging difficult, however necessary, conversations about race to create a more effective diversity training. This includes the individuals delivering the information. In terms of internal training, the Commission may benefit from identifying any potential issues or biases during the planning stage of training on sensitive topics.

Second, a study from Wright State University in Ohio evaluated the outcomes of diversity training. The study used a meta-analysis which is a statistical analysis that combines the results of multiple scientific studies. The researchers assessed how the diversity training and attitudes of an organization impacted the affective-based, cognitive-based, and skill-based outcomes. The article defines affective-based outcomes as measures of internal states that drive perception and behavior; cognitive-based outcomes as measures of verbal knowledge, knowledge organization, and cognitive strategies; and skill-based outcomes as measures of behavior and behavioral intentions. The analysis found that diversity training increased knowledge (cognitive) and behavior (skill) of the participants, but less so with internal perception (affective) (22).

How do the findings of the training literature apply to an organization such as the California Public Utilities Commission? They clearly suggest that internal DEI training *could* have potential benefits. Yet the literature also suggests some reason for caution in reaching such a conclusion. This is consistent with the experience of long-time

Commission employees, who stress the importance of accountability and follow through when considering the Commission's DEI goals and missions. It is also important to consider the specific administrative challenges faced by an organization such as the Commission in attempting to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. I turn to that issue in the next section of the paper. entity also pose administrative challenges.

Administrative Challenges

In addition to reviewing past and current research, when attempting to address racial inequity issue within the state service, we should also consider the administrative limitations of a public entity such as the Commission. Although as a non-supervisory employee, I was not able to obtain internal policies and guidelines related to recruitment and hiring, my analysis is based on my knowledge of the Commission goals and mission as a current employee and my background knowledge from working for the state of California going on nine years. However, the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) and the State Personnel Board (SPB) serve as major oversight authorities for California state entities related to hiring, examinations, and ethics. The CalHR supply oversight and guidance on human resource related matters and the SPB oversee areas such as examination process and personnel ethics.

The development and implementation of policies, such as those related to social and racial equity, can be broken down into three stages. The diagram in Appendix B shows a flow chart of entities and organizations involved in the three stages:

- 1) shaping proposed policies and/or regulations,
- 2) responding to the new policies and/or regulations, and
- 3) administering or implementing the new policies and/or regulations.
- 4) New legislation resulting from policy issues flows through the shaping and responding stages, and finally to the administering entities to implement.

First, shaping entities, such as the California State Legislature and advocacy groups, play a role in the development of the policy itself. Second, responding agencies, such as the Labor & Workforce Development Agency, serve as the oversight authorities over areas including general state operations, fair employment, and human resources. Responding departments, such as the SPB and CalHR, provide specific oversight and investigations over areas such as examination processes and racial discrimination. Third, responding departments also provide necessary guidance to the administering departments or local entities, such as the Commission.

As such, state agencies are subject to a specific set of criteria during hiring processes, such as candidate evaluation. As I mentioned in the Applications and Examinations section above, there are legal and financial limitations to state service hiring practices due to less flexibility in how an organization recruits potential applicants, processes and reviews applications, and interview candidates. The Commission is no different. There are limitations on how applications are reviewed in terms of criteria used and the type of

questions used to interview candidates that may not be present in the private or not-for-profit sectors.

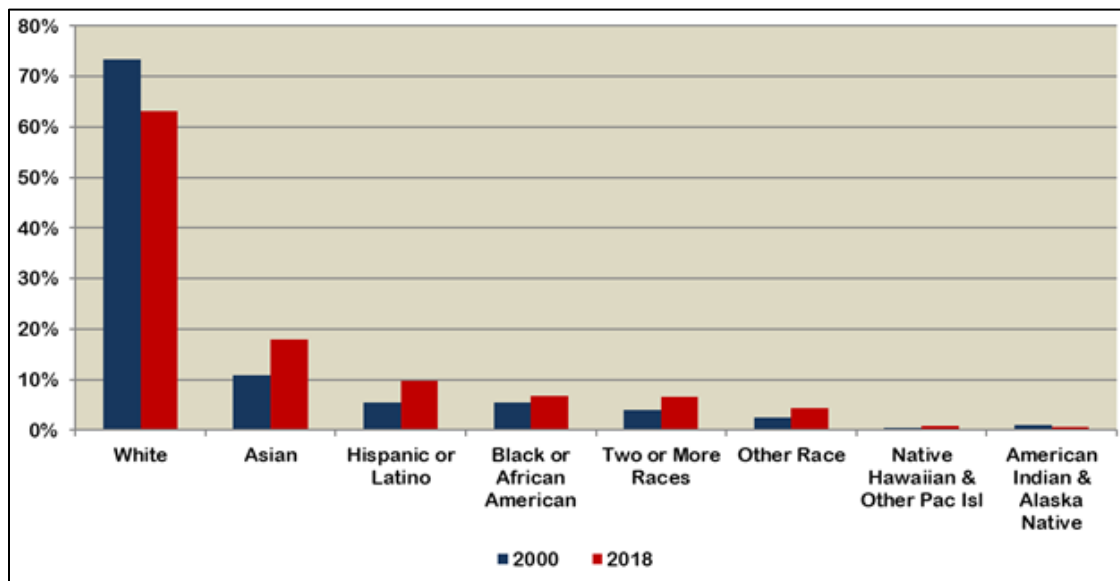
Another challenge the Commission faces is limitation of resources. From conversations with Commission staff involved in the Capitol Collaborative for Race and Equity and the Environmental and Social Justice work group, the biggest challenge in this work is the lack of funding allocated for this purpose. If employees cannot charge time to work on DEI or ESJ related initiatives, they are left to work on it on their own time. Furthermore, according to the same sources, the Commission previously submitted a budget change proposal requesting funding for DEI purposes, however it was denied.

California is a racially and socioeconomically diverse state. As such, it is important to ensure the state service employees should also represent the residents' interest. Improving hiring practices, delivering more effective diversity training, and developing policies to promote a more inclusionary workforce serves as a great starting point to encourage a racially and socially equitable labor force. In the following section, I examine what is being done in King County, Washington, and why it may serve as a standard model for local government DEI strategies.

King County Model

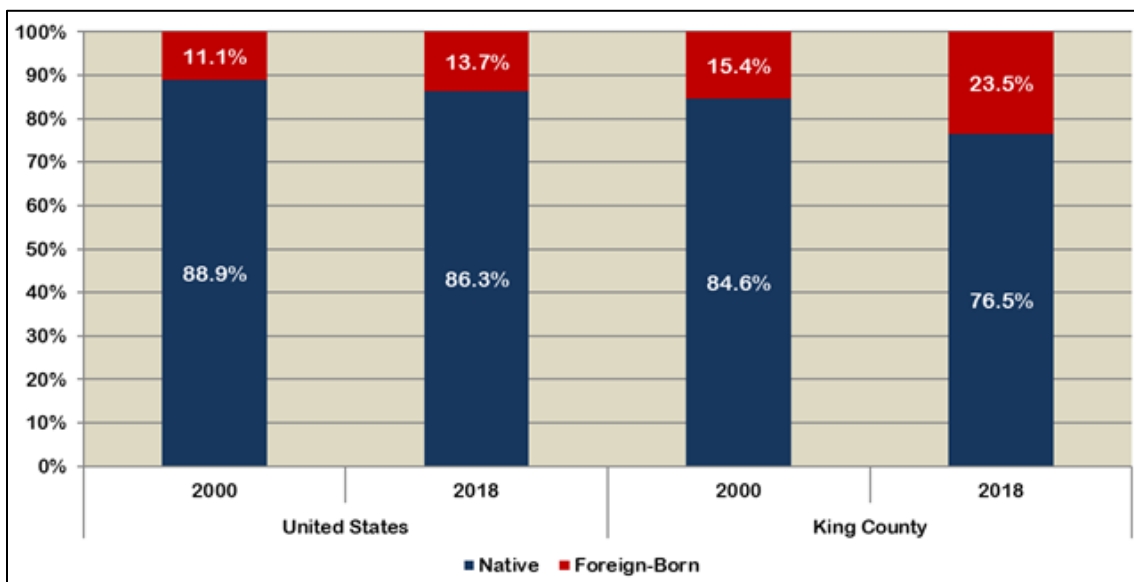
King County, located in the state of Washington, is arguably one of the first local government entities to develop and implement an extensive equity and social justice strategic plan. According to King County, one of the biggest drivers of developing a strategy to address social and racial equity in the county is the increasing diversity of its residents. The county reported a population of 2.26 million according to the 2020 Census (23). While the county remains predominantly white, the county saw a major increase in black, indigenous, and people of color from 2000 to 2018 (Figure 2). Furthermore, King County had a larger percentage increase of foreign-born residents in comparison to the rest of the country (Figure 3).

Figure 4: King County Population Percentage by Race



Source: King County website

Figure 5: King County Population Percentage by Origin of Birth



Source: King County website

Strategic Plan

In response to the evidence of the region’s increasing diversity, King County Office of Equity and Social Justice, a designated DEI office, released its Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan for 2016 – 2022 pursuant to a 2014 Executive Order to further advance equity within the county (24). This plan covers county-wide goals and strategies for each area such as housing, transportation, and mobility. The plan also includes an implementation plan for the goal areas, community engagement report, and

employee engagement report. King County maintains transparency in the strategic plan development by incorporating both community and employee engagement. These engagement workshops sought input on areas such as personal views on the county's commitment to equity and social justice, culture, human resources policies, resources, and training. Each area then addressed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

Impact Review Tool

The King County Equity Team developed tools and resources to “help [county] departments and agencies increase equity and social justice work” (25). This includes the Impact Review Tool which helps users identify, evaluate, and communicate potential impact, positive or negative, of a policy or program on equity.

Affinity Groups

King County also has ongoing Affinity Groups, also known as Employee Resource Groups, which are employee-led groups that focus on addressing oppression against protected groups such as Black/African Women, Asian Pacific Islander, Latinx, and LGBTQ+. These are some of the most prominent resources and methods King County uses to address hate and bias. Although King County is a local jurisdiction, the elements of their DEI strategies seem readily transferrable to the state level, such as the Commission. Next, I will discuss what the Commission has done thus far related to DEI and how the Commission's efforts compare to those of King County.

What CPUC Does to Encourage Workforce Diversity and How It Compares to King County

In March 2022, I conducted interviews with three Commission staff previously and currently involved equity working groups to gather more specific data regarding past and current Commission DEI efforts (see the Appendix for the list of interview questions). In this section, I discuss what the Commission is currently doing in terms of DEI efforts, then assess how the Commission compares to what is being done elsewhere, specifically King County and how the Commission match against other standards within the state and local government.

The CPUC DEI Survey

The Commission is on its third year sending out the annual DEI Survey to all Commission staff. The survey questions cover topics such as employee's perspective on Commission management's handling of equity issues; whether they felt comfortable communicating grievances to superiors; and if they have experienced bias or discriminatory treatment in the workplace. According to one subject matter expert, the DEI Survey helps Commission management measure employee attitudes to current policies and serves as a resource for developing future policies.

How the CPUC's Survey Compares to King County Employee Workshops

Although the Commission's survey effort differs from King County's use of employee workshops that are more interactive, I think the intent is similar enough to draw a comparison. In the case of the Commission, the DEI Survey is released annually to all levels of employees, including management, to gauge employee attitudes on diversity within the Commission, communicate any positive or negative trends, and provide a space for input and feedback. In the case of King County, the employee workshops also operated on the intention to garner employee input. It appears both the survey and the workshops serve to obtain feedback in order to improve current DEI practices.

The CPUC Workforce Analysis

Every year, the Commission conducts a workforce analysis pursuant to CalHR requirements. This includes employee data obtained from CalHR across job classifications to gain an understanding of where the Commission stands in terms of race, orientation, etc. According to subject matter experts, this analysis communicates information to assist with determining strategies to improve outreach, recruitment, application screening, etc.

How the CPUC's Workforce Analysis Compares to a Similar Effort in King County

According to the Washington Office of Financial Management, the state performs a workforce analysis similar to the Commission that covers three areas:

- Workforce Metrics (age, service length, monthly salary)
- Human Resources Management Leader Briefing (diversity data, hiring and turnover trends, labor force data)
- Workforce Performance (workforce profiles, movement data, diversity profile)
- Employee Engagement Survey (year, agency, demographic group)

The CPUC Work Groups and Employee Resource Groups (ERG)

Currently, the Commission has three separate internal groups serve as the leaders of DEI efforts within the department.

- Capitol Collaborative on Race and Equity (CCORE) cohort
- Environmental and Social Justice (ESJ) work group
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work group

The CCORE is “a racial equity capacity-building program [...] to learn about, plan for, and implement activities that embed racial equity approaches into institutional culture, policies, and practices” (24). The ESJ work group develops considerations affecting unrepresented or underrepresented communities in the Commission's policies and programs (26). Finally, the DEI work group is made up of Commission management that identifies and discusses DEI related issues within the department. Furthermore, the Commission has a multitude of ERGs for groups such as African American, Latinx, LGBTQ+, and Hawaiian/Asian/Pacific Islander.

How the CPUC Work Groups and ERGs Compare to King County's Use of ERGs

King County also has ERGs, which they call Affinity Groups, which provide spaces for individuals with similar interests, passions, and/or concerns to meet and discuss relevant topics.

Summary of Comparisons

Table 1 draws from the discussion in the prior section to summarize the current DEI methods used by King County and the Commission (Table 1). The left column lists all of the known methods used by both entities that are geared towards promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within their respective workplace. The middle and right columns communicate whether King County and the Commission, respectively, uses such methods and provides high level details of what those methods entail. In the case of the Commission, there are certain caveats to three of the methods, which are addressed in the respective footnotes.

Table 1: Summary Comparison of King County and CPUC

Methods	King County	CPUC
Equity Impact Review	Yes – Equity Impact Review Tool as resource to assess equity in government policies and programs.	No ¹
Strategic/Action Plan	Yes – Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan	In Progress ²
Employee Workshops	Yes – Utilized to collect input on the ESJ Strategic Plan drafts.	Yes – Department wide DEI Survey to gauge employee attitude and perspective on diversity topics within the Commission.
Community Engagement Workshops	Yes – Utilized to collect input on the ESJ Strategic Plan drafts.	Yes ³
Designated DEI Office	Yes – King County Office of Equity and Social Justice	No
Employee Resource Groups	Yes – Affinity Groups (ERG)	Yes – Employee Resource Groups
CalHR Workforce Analysis	No	Yes – Annual data on employee demographics.
Diversity Training	Yes ⁴	Yes

¹ CPUC divisions engage in external programs addressing equity disparities as part of ESJ considerations. However, they are not related to CPUC internal operations and/or programs.

² CPUC currently in the second draft of the Environmental and Social Justice Action Plan. As of March 2022, CPUC is in the progress of developing a Racial Equity Action Plan.

³ Sought and incorporated stakeholder and public comments in the Environmental and Social Justice Action Plan.

⁴ This is an assumption, information not readily available on the King County website.

What can we learn from the Commission's actions, or lack thereof? Specifically, what are the potential lessons for other state agencies and what other departments should consider or think about when developing and implementing recruiting methods that is more cognizant of building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce? The major takeaway is the impact of lack of staff, resources, and coordination on following through with internal DEI programs. This accounts for insufficient funding necessary to carry out tasks such as completing the Racial Equity Action Plan and coordinating efforts between the CCORE and DEI work groups by establishing a single DEI office.

For example, Commission staff charges time to respective projects. This applied to the CCORE work group as well for developing the first steps towards future DEI policies and initiatives. However, when the CCORE training period ended, the Commission no longer had funding appropriated for continuing CCORE and other DEI related work. Furthermore, the Commission submitted a Budget Change Proposal requesting state funding for the purposes of diversity related activities but was denied. As such, in order to continue working on the Racial Equity Action Plan and other DEI modules, the Commission staff had to collaborate outside of work on an intermittent basis. The current administration places a lot of emphasis on the importance of equity and inclusivity. I think increasing resource allocations for DEI purposes can go a long way in accomplishing such goals.

Where Is CPUC Moving Now and What Should It Do to Promote DEI Goals?

Action Plans

Based on conversations with one subject matter expert, as of April 2022, the CCORE work group began developing the Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP). The goal of the REAP is to integrate race and equity considerations in the Commission's day-to-day operations including policies, procedures, and programs. As the CCORE work group continue to make progress on the REAP, I think it is a step in the right direction for the Commission's DEI efforts.

Equity Impact Review

Currently Commission staff refer to CalEnviroScreen 4.0 to determine whether an impacted community is under the disadvantaged community classification or is low-income. After figuring that out, ideally, staff should do an equity impact analysis, but there is currently no written procedure for how to go about completing such an analysis. Additionally, staff uses the ESJ Action Plan as reference to assess if a program or policy meets the goals outlined in the plan or creates more harm to vulnerable communities. If that is the case, the policy or program should be adjusted to mitigate that harm and achieve those goals.

Designated DEI Office

Early last year, the CCORE work group submitted a proposal to create a single office as a culmination of the CCORE and DEI work groups. Commission staff feels the two groups currently are replicating work and do not effectively communicate with each

other. Creating a single office will centralize department-wide DEI efforts. As of April 2022, the proposal is still being considered by Commission management.

Potential for Radical Change

The Commission has the potential to impart radical change throughout the organization. However, internal sources identified recurring issues with lack of management involvement in proposed racial equity programs. In an organization where there is a strict hierarchy, it creates a culture that may value management input and approval. The Commission can use this structure to its advantage by ensuring executive management involvement and demonstrating that the management has “skin in the game” by encouraging accountability to follow through on proposed DEI programs and policies.

Conclusion

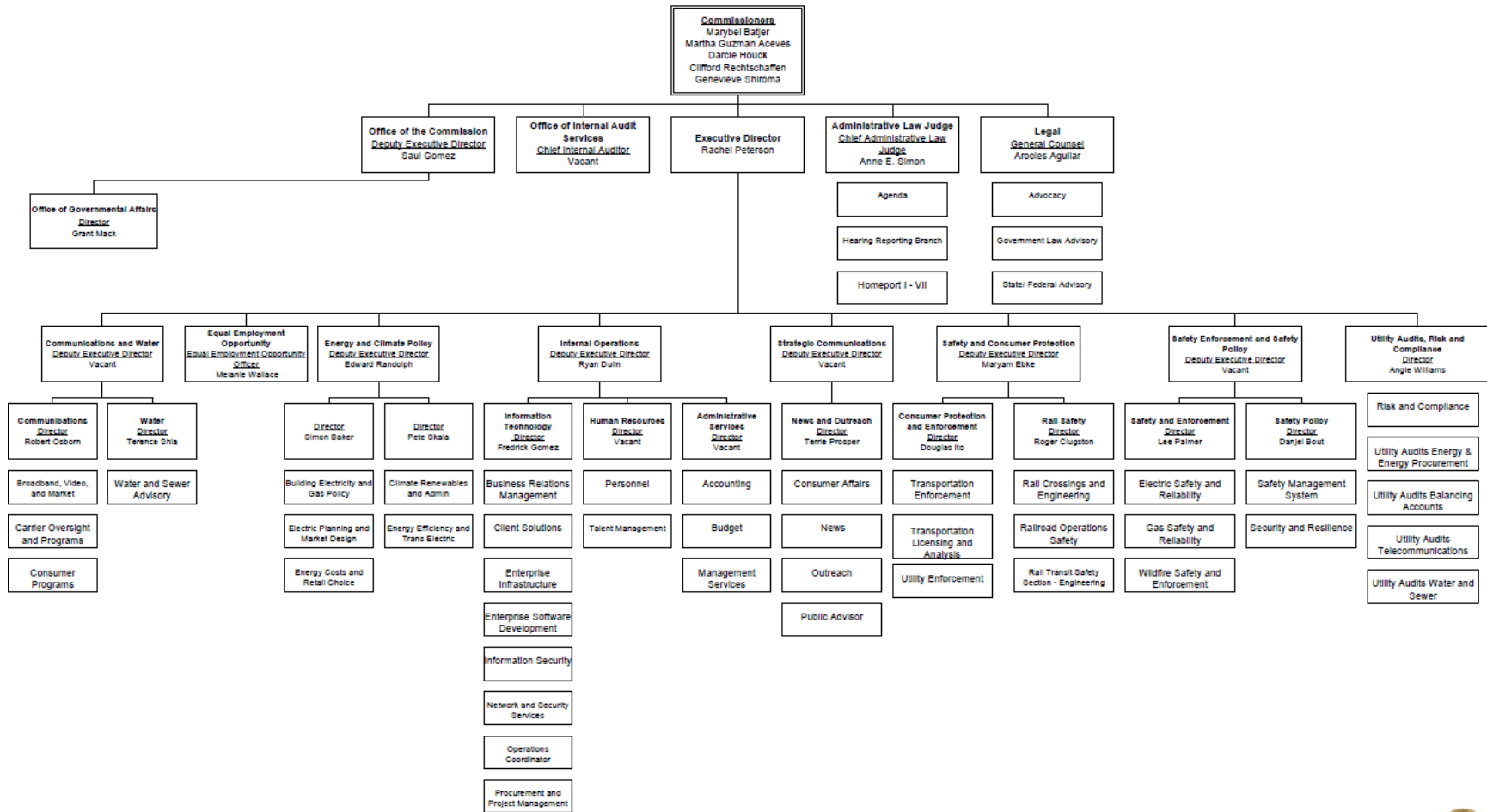
California is a racially and ethnically diverse state. As such, it is important to ensure the policies and procedures in place encourage an equally diverse public workforce. A racially diverse workforce not only benefits the well-being of public employees through equitable representation in the workplace, but the diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences it brings further encourages discussions on future policies that have a proportional impact on California residents. Per my earlier discussion, public organizations such as the California Public Utilities Commission face strict limitations that may hamper their DEI efforts. However, my analysis also shows that the DEI efforts the department has made thus far move it in the direction of the “ideal model” of King County and can be used to address and implement changes reflective of future social policies.

End Notes

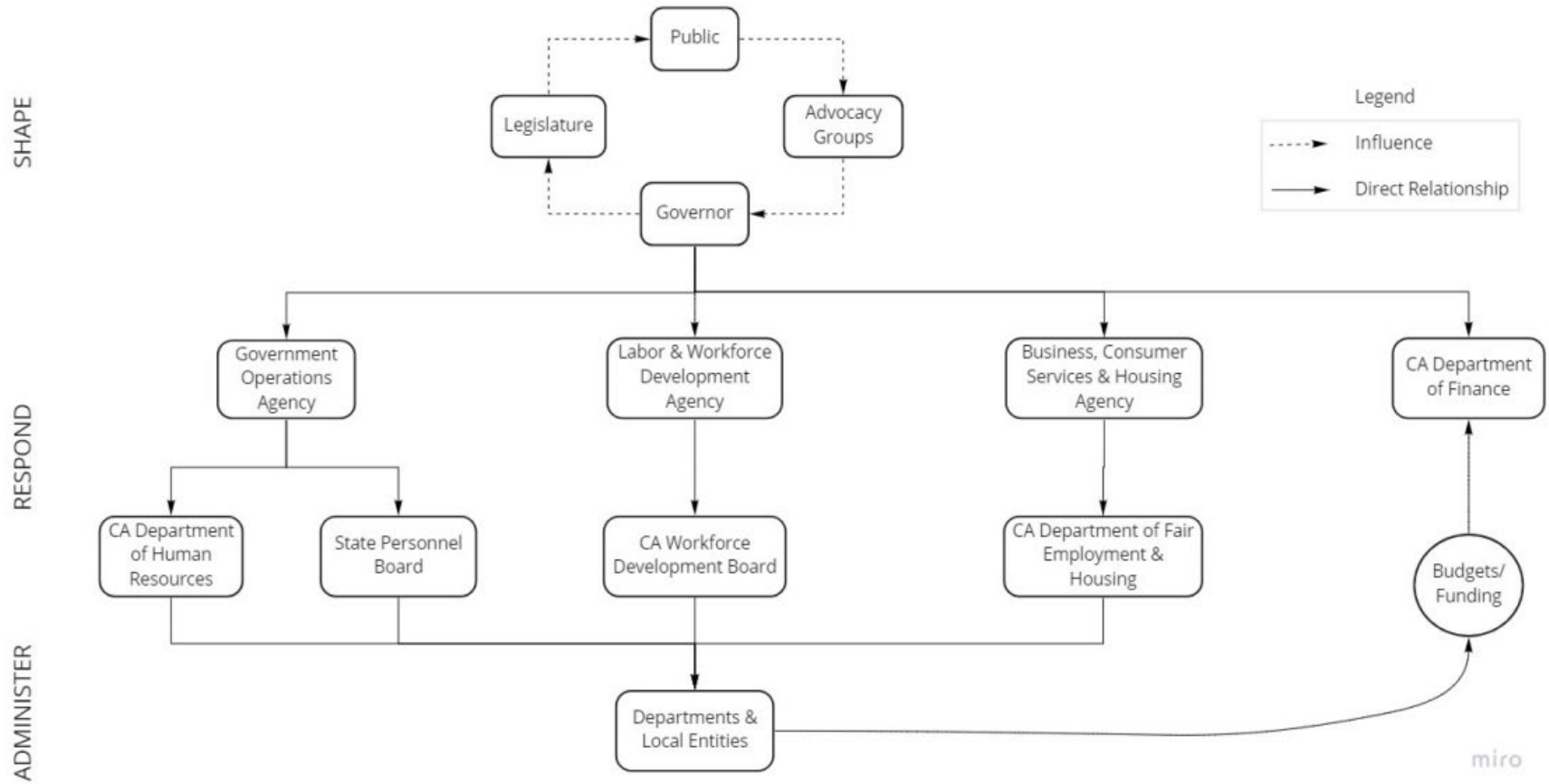
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Appendix A: CPUC Organization Chart



Appendix B: Process for Development and Implementation of Policies



Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. To which areas within the department is the diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan applied? What is the goal or mission of the department in this regard?
2. What metrics are put in place to assess whether DEI efforts are working? If yes, what triggers the assessment and how often? If not, why not?
3. What are the biggest challenges in developing and/or implementing DEI models within the department? What steps have the department taken to address these challenges?
4. Has the department developed, implemented, and/or evaluated DEI efforts since completion of the CCORE program? If so, how? What has the department learned or the takeaways from the CCORE program?
5. Does the department seek out successful methods used by other entities? If yes, which ones? If no, why not?
6. Are there any other individuals who may have the background to provide additional input?