



October 21, 2021

To: Legislative and Communications Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Update on Diversity Outreach and Inclusion Efforts

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority is continuing its effort to conduct comprehensive and meaningful outreach to Orange County's growing diverse communities. This report provides an update on the progress of the diversity and inclusion efforts as well as plans to meet the future needs of community members who are increasingly diverse.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) is continuing its effort to work with historically disenfranchised communities of color and other underrepresented community members and organizations that represent diversity in Orange County. More than a decade ago, OCTA's diversity efforts primarily centered on working closely with ethnic business groups to conduct procurement outreach at business expos, conferences, and other events. OCTA has leveraged those strong relationships with diverse business organizations over the past few years by engaging with the business community on OCTA's other transportation programs, projects, and plans. OCTA's diversity outreach and inclusion efforts have now expanded significantly to provide public involvement opportunities with Orange County's other diverse stakeholders, which include communities of color that now make up approximately 60 percent of Orange County's population. These demographics, combined with the fact that 46 percent Orange County's residents do not speak English at home, highlight the importance of effectively engaging with diverse audiences to effectively deliver on OCTA's mission.

Discussion

With presentations, community meetings and celebrations, outreach events, business organization meetings, expos, and conferences severely impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, OCTA's Diversity Outreach Team (Team) continues to adapt its outreach strategies to connect and engage with diverse audiences virtually and more recently, in person, consistent with guidance from local and state public health officials.

Through these continued outreach efforts, the team fosters relationships with numerous civic, social, faith, and business communities to serve an increasingly diverse population in Orange County, with Latinos or Latinx community members making up more than 34 percent of the population and Asian Americans making up 22 percent of the population. The challenges and opportunities of diversity outreach are further heightened by the fact that 46 percent of Orange County's residents do not speak English at home.

Multilingual COVID-19 Updates

COVID-19 has had profound impacts on Orange County's diverse communities, especially the front-line and essential workers that continued to rely on OC Bus, Metrolink, and other transit services throughout the pandemic. The Team's priority was to help ensure that essential workers and vulnerable community members, many of whom are not proficient English speakers, were provided with critical information about COVID-19 and OCTA's numerous responses and updates to the pandemic in both Spanish and Vietnamese.

Since March 2020, the Team continues to fulfill an essential role with the OCTA communications team by quickly executing virtual in-language outreach and by providing trilingual communications in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The fast-evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic demands a sense of urgency on the turnaround time in which these items are needed. The team provided in-language messaging on more than 70 different types and versions of communications pieces in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese from the OCTA website, emails, and social media, bus signs, and voice messages on buses – with continual updates necessitated by local, state, and federal public health officials.

Diverse Community Leaders Group

For nearly seven years, OCTA has hosted a quarterly meeting with diversity leaders representing business, community, civic, faith, education, and nonprofit organizations. The group has been helpful in sharing information with their

respective audiences and providing valuable feedback on numerous planning studies, capital construction projects, and transit marketing campaigns.

The Diverse Community Leaders Group participated in quarterly virtual meetings throughout 2020 and this year with meetings via Microsoft Teams in February, June, and September. In February 2021, staff created a meaningful and memorable virtual experience to commemorate Black History Month and the Lunar New Year that included music, historical photos, and cultural videos. Since going virtual, these meetings garnered greater participation, with more than 70 participants attending the February meeting and breaking other attendance records since then. At the September 2021 meeting, staff created a special multimedia presentation to observe Día de la Independencia, a major holiday for Mexican Americans, as well as a commemoration of Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15.

The quarterly discussions provide the diverse community leaders with opportunities to share their input, ask questions, and identify ways they may better connect transportation plans, projects, and programs with their respective constituencies and/or members. The Diverse Community Leaders Group continues to be a highly effective way to receive valuable comments on many transportation projects and issues. The influential group is also an efficient way to share transportation updates to diverse constituencies throughout Orange County.

Translations, Trans-adaptations, and Beyond

With renewed efforts to reach non-English speaking communities in Orange County, language becomes key to providing culturally appropriate materials that resonate with those communities OCTA serves. Having information in various languages is a baseline to the success of OCTA's projects and programs.

Families, businesses, and places of worship want to be informed about many important projects such as the Long-Range Transportation Plan, OC Streetcar, and the Interstate 405 (I-405) Improvement Project. There are also new OC Bus promotional discounts like the Welcome Pass and Youth Ride Free Pass that benefit families, especially transit-dependent community members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, OCTA's top priority of safety was tested as customers and stakeholders depended on OCTA's ability to convey important COVID-19 messaging. However, with 56 percent of the community's population being either Hispanic or Asian American and 46 percent residents not speaking English in their homes, the work of the Team becomes most important in helping to ensure that OCTA messages reach under-served communities.

The Team provides important in-language messaging and reviews all materials translated by other departments and consultants for accuracy and cultural competency in Spanish and Vietnamese. In February, new mask mandates constituted a need to quickly provide in-language content and review five different COVID-19 messages for the web, email blasts, and social media. The Team also worked diligently to get information in Spanish and Vietnamese for milestone projects like the I-405 Improvement Project, 405 Forward business promotions, OC Streetcar, OC Bus app, the Hazard Mitigation Plan, transit training, the Long-Range Transportation Plan, and OCTA's 30th anniversary.

The largest effort this year in terms of translations was the June service change, with the Team translating and reviewing more than 29 items for multiple platforms, including but not limited to text alerts, web landing pages, social media posts, print collateral, and email blasts. A virtual meeting via Zoom for the June service change conducted all in Vietnamese garnered more than double the attendance of the regular meeting with many Vietnamese American seniors on their first-ever Zoom meeting thanks to a grassroots community outreach effort targeting the younger generation to help their elders.

The Comeback Campaign, featuring the Welcome Pass and the Youth Ride Free Pass is underway and will carry into next year. Since its approval by the OCTA Board of Directors in August, the Team has already developed in-language messages in Spanish, Vietnamese, and other languages beyond just translating content from English. More than a dozen different materials are now paired with photos, graphics, and other visuals that further connect diverse audiences. Staff continues to share the program with many influential community leaders and organizations representing diversity via mailings, emails, and at various in-person events.

Trust-Building Campaign

To continue with these community outreach efforts and forge ongoing relationships with the diverse population in Orange County, OCTA is executing a program centered on cultivating trust with diverse communities, increasing awareness of OCTA beyond its transit services, and enhancing engagement among diverse community members.

Many individuals who have come to the United States from other countries live in hard-to-reach communities. Because of their backgrounds, these individuals may have limited engagement and awareness of government agencies and the public services they offer.

One of the priorities of the new campaign is to demonstrate to these communities that OCTA is a transparent and trustworthy public agency.

The program consists of leveraging existing relationships with influential members of the Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking communities, media partners, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders. The goal of the program is to help OCTA strengthen engagement with diverse communities and increase awareness of OCTA's projects and plans with Spanish- and Vietnamese-language speakers, the two largest non-English language populations in Orange County. The Team is working to plan, implement, and evaluate a multicultural and diversity strategy to engage with these communities as part of an effort to build trust and increase general awareness of OCTA. Key elements of the trust-building campaign include virtual/hybrid and in-person community events, public relations, grassroots efforts, advertisements in ethnic media, culturally relevant information, and an ambassador program of influential Vietnamese and Spanish speakers.

Summary

Staff continues outreach efforts to build upon existing relationships of trust cultivated prior to COVID-19 with numerous diverse organizations throughout Orange County. Because of the importance of OCTA's leading role in planning, funding, administering, and delivering transportation projects and programs, it is increasingly important to create new opportunities for meaningful two-way dialogue with historically disenfranchised and underrepresented diverse community members. As Orange County grows even more diverse in the coming years, building upon that solid foundation of trust will ensure a more engaged public to help steer Orange County toward a brighter transportation future.

Attachment

None.

Prepared by:

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