



Commission on Human Rights **Work Plan 2007 – 2008**

MISSION STATEMENT: The purpose of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) is to promote better human relations among all people in Sonoma County through education, advocacy, and by initiating action that fosters the recognition of and an appreciation for the diversity of our community.

ROLE OF COMMISSION:

- Develop and strengthen ties among organizations working in the area of human rights.
- Study any conditions that present prejudice or discrimination against protected classes.
- Work to prevent discrimination by developing educational materials and programs to promote equal rights, understanding, inclusiveness and tolerance (based on the UNESCO's definition)*.
- Consult with and refer to the Board of Supervisors, federal, state and other governmental authorities any matters, disputes or controversies within their jurisdiction.
- Advocate for policy at local, state, and federal levels to promote equal rights, acceptance, understanding and inclusiveness.
- Make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on procedures, programs or policies that promote equal rights and an appreciation of human diversity.
- Provide information and referral resources on human rights issues to the community.
- Foster open communication about human rights issues within Sonoma County.

* *UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) defines "tolerance" as "respect, acceptance, and appreciation for the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal right.*

BACKGROUND: The Commission came to the close of the 2005-6 and 2007-8 biennium covered by its most recent Work Plan having completed a two-year process of restructuring its governance and their operational structure (conducted in collaboration with the Commission on the Status of Women) to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase operational efficiency and flexibility in developing and implementing projects and achieving the CHR’s goals.
- Create ways for effective and efficient communication and collaboration with other parties (individuals, public agencies and/or private organizations) involved in each Commission’s subject area within Sonoma County.
- Decrease the reliance on the General Fund and the need for administrative support.

With its new structure in place, the Commissioners evaluated CHR’s initiatives and activities and found that, while many of the programs have value, their effectiveness in answering the community’s needs had eroded over time. Faced with this shortfall, Commissioners determined that it would be appropriate to devote time and energy to redesigning programs with an eye to serving the community more effectively.

2007-2008 STRATEGIC PLAN: Therefore, the Commission has approved devoting the 2007 – 2008 Fiscal Year to an in-depth evaluation of how to best answer the community’s needs for support in the area of human rights. It has established goals in three broad, yet interrelated, categories. After working briefly with this new organizational structure, CHR has found benefits from workgroups that have a “focus” and yet are closely aligned that they support and benefit one another.

Therefore, the Commission has approved a single-year Work Plan focused entirely on honing its projects/initiatives and developing the partnerships with other agencies/organizations (both public and private) to ensure that it can develop a comprehensive Work Plan for the 2008 – 2009/2009 – 2010 biennium. The overall objective is to develop new programs that enhance the County’s appreciation of and acceptance of diversity, while ensuring that all projects have clear and measurable goals. This fiscal year’s efforts have been focused on developing programs and partnerships that fall in three broad categories:

STRENGTHENING THE COMMISSION: This is a three-pronged effort. The first is to ensure a body of Commissioners capable of fully supporting achievement of CHR’s goals. The second is to ensure that CHR’s programs are designed and carried out with an eye to delivering value. The third relates to the community’s perception of the Commission and its role as a resource to the community.

Internal Focus: To operate effectively, the Commission relies on a full membership of Commissioners dedicated to furthering the appreciation for and acceptance of diversity. Commissioners must have the skills and abilities needed to:

- represent the Commission and the County to the public,
- foster open dialogue and strategic partnerships with public and private entities working in the area of human rights, and
- develop programs (often in partnership with other entities) to effectively address the needs in our community.

The specific activities for effort are:

- recruiting new Commissioners.
- training Commissioners in the skills and regulatory requirements for public bodies and appointed officials.
- communicating with members of the Board of Supervisors to help ensure that candidates for the Commission are familiar with its role and its programs as well as the responsibilities (and time commitment) expected of those serving on CHR.
- strengthening the working relationships between members of the Commission through team building exercises designed to foster openness and understanding.

Project Measurement: CHR must also focus on ensuring that its initiatives are effective, and that they are, indeed, valuable services to the community. Therefore, all efforts must set objective goals as part of CHR's formal project design/approval process. The project leaders, officers and staff must periodically evaluate the projects in terms of progress toward measurable goals.

External Focus: The Commission must work to ensure that its positions, projects and activities support its mission and fall within its designated role. To be most effective, it must work to broaden the awareness of and appreciation for CHR as a valued resource for human rights issues throughout our community. This focus is the "synergistic link" between this broad area and the "Outreach" and "Partnership" categories.

OUTREACH TO THE PUBLIC: There are two focus areas for this grouping of initiatives.

Communicating with the Public: Communicating with the public has been a challenge for CHR. Finding effective and efficient ways to share information about CHR, its role and projects is critically important. CHR must find ways to share information with and to obtain feedback from the public on human rights issues and the work of the Commission. The current initiatives within this area are:

- Develop media database. CHR has set an objective of learning how to communicate effectively with all facets of the local media for the purpose of expanding dissemination of information about CHR and its programs. Therefore, the workgroup will strive to learn about the appropriate method(s) and format(s) for reaching each "player" in this arena as well as identify most appropriate "outlet" for CHR's varied publicity needs (e.g., publicity of the Coffee Awards vs. airing of an educational program).
- Continue to work with its community partners (Listening for a Change and the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County) to produce the Human Rights Awards program. These awards recognize those individuals, businesses and organizations whose human rights work strives to make Sonoma County a welcome home to a diverse population. Beyond the recognition and celebration of these important achievements in human rights, these awards serve as an important opportunity to bring human issues to light in our community.
- Enhance the CHR's website to include tools that members of the community can use as resources to understand and foster open dialogue and diversity.
- Develop resources to assist Commissioners and the public in identifying the appropriate organization or agency to address their concerns on human rights issues.

Educating the Public: This workgroup is collaborating with our partner, Listening for a Change, to develop educational programs for both schools and the public at large. The objective with this effort is threefold: first, to draw on local organizations' existing programs/resources; second, to develop a sustained support network for the programs once established; and third, to evaluate other approaches to meeting these goals.

- For the school programs, CHR's new focus for high school programs will be to work with on-campus diversity clubs. This model offers the potential for an efficient delivery of training programs that augment existing campus initiatives, an ongoing interaction between students/teachers from several different schools/districts, and for a sustained presence for CHR on a widespread basis.

CHR will also evaluate proposals to expand our educational programs in two ways. First to work at the district level to ensure that our public schools have appropriate policies, tools and resources to deal effectively with diversity issues. Second, CHR will consider expanding educational programs to reach students at younger ages in our schools.

- For community education, the workgroup will first focus on supporting the efforts of the "Outreach" group by developing educational opportunities for members of local organizations and/or public agencies that not only open the dialogue (and hopefully increase understanding) between these factions, but also further disseminate fundamentals of acceptance and appreciation for the differences of others. The alignment between this and the "Outreach" areas is another example of the "interconnectedness" between CHR's current projects.

CHR will also evaluate sponsoring one or more educational forums designed to raise the community's awareness of an important human rights issue. CHR will probably collaborate and co-sponsor these events with the Commission on the Status of Women and/or another agency/organization for this effort.

- Regardless of audience, this workgroup will work to develop new and creative approaches that offer the flexibility required to respond effectively and efficiently to varied educational needs of groups within Sonoma County.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES: This area is dedicated to bringing various groups together, and its work is primarily focused on two "audiences." The first is other human rights organizations (e.g., human rights commissions throughout California) and the second is public agencies and private organizations within Sonoma County.

Human Rights Organizations: CHR's work in this area will be to improve communications with other organizations whose primary focus is human rights. The objective for these activities is to gain a greater understanding of how other commissions operate in hopes of discovering opportunities for increasing CHR's efficiency and effectiveness.

- Continue membership in the California Association of Human Rights Organizations (CAHRO) and attend the 2008 conference.
- Explore further opportunities for developing partnerships with human rights commissions in northern California.

Public Agencies & Private Organizations within Sonoma County: This group will work to bring the Sonoma County agencies/organizations working in areas related to human rights together to learn more about one another, fostering open dialogue between these

groups and, where appropriate, forging strategic partnerships to ensure the efficient use of resources to deliver effective programs.

- Develop strategic partnerships with local agencies and organizations dedicated to work in the area of human rights with an eye to:
 - developing a greater understanding of one another's objectives, programs and services,
 - eliminating duplication of efforts and expenditure of resources,
 - identifying unmet needs for additional programs and services, and
 - fostering collaborative projects that efficiently answer the previously unmet needs.
- Beyond the foregoing "practical" objectives, this group will strive to foster an open dialogue between various agencies/organizations in the hope of finding creative solutions to the community's problems.
- Establish a network of local government agencies, and private organizations that is both proactive and responsive to issues related to hate-based criminal behavior and incidents in our community.

CHR has already taken steps to develop a network of agencies/organizations. First, the workgroup will reestablish its partnerships with law enforcement agencies (Sheriff's Department, District Attorney's Office, and the Probation Department). As currently envisioned, the group will then look to developing partnerships with existing community-based and faith-based groups as well as business groups. The final stage will involve expanding to include a broad array of organizations and individuals who share an interest in human rights work. Through this network, CHR hopes to develop a flexible and sustainable resource for open dialogue, sharing of resources and community-based action.

CONCLUSION: The Commission believes that dedicating its efforts for the 2007 – 2008 Fiscal Year to developing the projects described above will allow it to meet the objectives with which it is charged and to deliver services to the public, private organizations/groups, and public agencies within our community more effectively and efficiently. The result should be a well-developed Work Plan for the 2008-2009/2009-2010 biennium that includes objective measures for effectiveness.