

# Gardens of Golden Gate Park

## 2024–2025 IDEA Cohort Project Scope of Work

---

### Executive Summary

**Chief Executive Officer:** Stephanie Linder

**Board Director & Governance Committee Chair:** Carol Izumi

**Director of People & Culture:** Ahmad Anderson

---

### Preamble: Background and Intentionality in Board Recruitment and Diversification Strategy

This document outlines the Governance Committee’s strategic direction and action plan for board recruitment for the 2024–2025 cycle. November 18, 2024, the Gardens of Golden Gate Park (GGGP) needed to fill five board seats—two currently vacant and three more anticipated in July 2025 due to term limits. This process is designed to support both immediate organizational needs and long-term goals related to leadership development, continuity, and inclusive representation.

Board Chair Sarah Ryan, Governance Committee led by Chair Carl Izumi and Chief Executive Officer Stephanie Linder-opted to implement a **modified open search** process. Rather than a fully public call, the approach is rooted in four interlinked strategies:

- Leveraging internal staff and board member networks ("closed loop");
- Conducting targeted outreach to priority communities;
- Designating board recruitment as GGGP’s primary project in the American Public Gardens Association’s 2024 IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) Cohort;
- Applying for inclusion in BoardLead’s nonprofit board search program.

This process is modeled in part on Potrero Group’s “*Open Board Search Process*” (September 2023) and reflects a growing organizational commitment to equity-centered governance practices.

This recruitment effort builds on lessons learned. Over the past year, the board welcomed several highly qualified new members who strengthened its professional capacity and brought greater diversity across age, gender, and cultural background. However, the departure of GGGP’s only African American board member—and a lack of current Black candidates in the recruitment pipeline—underscores a critical gap in representation. While the situations have varied, this

marks the second occurrence of such a gap, reinforcing the need for sustained, proactive outreach and engagement strategies.

In response, GGGP is emphasizing **cohort-style onboarding**, peer mentoring, and intentional relationship-building for new board members to foster a sense of inclusion, shared purpose, and long-term engagement.

Simultaneously, the organization faces **external pressure to recruit individuals with significant financial capacity**—a reflection of fiscal realities, including a projected \$500 million budget shortfall in the City, pressing infrastructure needs, and GGGP’s commitment to free admission for San Francisco residents. While important, this emphasis on financial contribution can unintentionally constrain outreach to younger professionals, individuals from BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, and other historically excluded groups. GGGP must carefully balance fundraising needs with its equity and inclusion goals.

Finally, increasing **board turnover**—due to term limits and personal/professional transitions—is an ongoing challenge that will affect leadership continuity. To mitigate these effects, the Governance Committee is prioritizing succession planning, onboarding innovation, and leadership development.

In sum, the 2024–2025 Board Recruitment Action Plan is both a tactical response to emerging needs and a values-driven step toward a more representative, resilient, and inclusive board.

---

## Overview

In 2024, GGGP was selected to join the **American Public Gardens Association (APGA)** Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Cohort Program for the 2024–2025 cycle, following a successful proposal. This milestone reflects GGGP’s deepening commitment to embedding IDEA principles across governance, culture, and daily operations. It also directly supports GGGP’s long-term strategic goal of becoming a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally reflective institution.

As part of this initiative, GGGP is also partnering with **BoardLead** to strengthen and diversify its Board of Directors. The objective is to build a board that better reflects the full spectrum of Bay Area communities—across race, ethnicity, gender, age, professional expertise, lived experience, and leadership style. This aligns with national best practices in nonprofit governance, enhances organizational legitimacy, and ensures greater relevance to GGGP’s diverse audiences and stakeholders.

Through participation in the IDEA Cohort and collaboration with BoardLead, GGGP is engaging in a **year-long, equity-centered learning and action program** that includes facilitated training, peer learning, and the development of an actionable IDEA implementation plan.

---

## Why We Chose This Project

This initiative aligns directly with the following pillars of GGGP's Strategic Plan:

- **Pillar 1.5:** Ensure inclusivity across all audiences—visitors, staff, volunteers, board, and participants.
  - **Pillar 1.6:** Recommit to antiracism and anti-discrimination in partnership with SF Rec & Park's Racial Equity Action Plan.
  - **Pillar 5.7:** Deepen outreach and programming to reflect Bay Area cultural diversity through community partnerships.
- 

## What's Changing

- Implementation of a **Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Resource Toolkit** to support board and staff with planning, accountability, and learning.
  - A redesigned **board recruitment process** that prioritizes diversity in identity, lived experience, leadership style, and sector knowledge—over traditional definitions of “culture fit.”
- 

## Board Governance Transformation

### The Imperative

GGGP is committed to reshaping its Board of Directors to better reflect:

- The demographics of the San Francisco Bay Area
- Organizational equity goals
- The evolving needs of its mission
- Best practices in nonprofit board performance

### Key Steps

#### 1. Commit to an Open, Inclusive Search Process

In partnership with BoardLead, GGGP is conducting a modified open search focused on identifying board-ready professionals from underrepresented communities.

#### 2. Prioritize Culture Add Over Culture Fit

Annual board composition priorities emphasize:

- BIPOC and historically excluded communities
- Finance and investment expertise
- Marketing and storytelling
- Philanthropy and capital campaign experience
- Public-private partnership strategy

### 3. **Market and Publicize Board Opportunities**

Recruitment materials and outreach efforts will include:

- Elevator pitches and digital recruitment packets
- Targeted outreach via:
  - Business and affinity networks
  - Bar and finance associations
  - Cultural and community-based organizations
  - Staff and board referrals
- Email, social media, and personalized outreach

### 4. **Design an Equitable and Transparent Screening Process**

- Anti-bias interview rubrics
- Inclusive and accessible communication methods
- Flexibility for access needs and self-identification

### 5. **Reimagine Onboarding for Inclusion**

- Cohort-style onboarding
- Board buddy/mentorship program
- IDEA-aligned retreats and orientations

---

## **IDEA Cohort Learning Implementation: Board Focus Areas**

### 1. **Engage Community Stakeholders**

Build authentic, reciprocal partnerships with cultural and neighborhood organizations.

### 2. **Promote Continued Learning**

Integrate IDEA learning modules into staff and board engagement opportunities.

### 3. **Monitor and Report Progress**

Track goals and benchmarks via quarterly dashboards and progress reports.

---

## **FY25 Board Recruitment: Outreach Targets**

### **Local Business Groups**

- SF Bay Area Hispanic, African American, Chinese, Filipino, and General Chambers of Commerce

### **Bar Associations**

- Asian American Bar Association of the Greater Bay Area
- San Francisco Bar Association (BASF)
- APABA Silicon Valley
- Latino, Arab American, Muslim, and Black Women Lawyers' groups

### **Financial Services**

- Urban Financial Services Coalition
- National Association of Black Accountants (NABA)
- Association of African American Financial Advisors (AAAA)
- Financial Women of San Francisco

## Other Sectors

- Tech Industry
- Public Sector (commissioners, policymakers, agency leaders)
- California Board Alumni Networks (NorCal)
- Horticulture and Garden Groups (e.g., Master Gardeners)
- Disability and Neurodiversity Networks

---

## Glossary of Key Terms

| Term                        | Definition  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Justice</b>              | Fair treatment of all, especially historically excluded groups      |
| <b>Equity</b>               | Fairness through differentiated support based on need               |
| <b>Diversity</b>            | Presence of a wide range of identities and experiences              |
| <b>Inclusion</b>            | Ensuring all individuals feel welcomed, supported, and valued       |
| <b>Unconscious Bias</b>     | Implicit beliefs and assumptions that shape behavior and decisions  |
| <b>Decolonization</b>       | Dismantling colonial legacies and supporting Indigenous sovereignty |
| <b>Psychological Safety</b> | Creating space for authenticity, vulnerability, and expression      |
| <b>Cultural Humility</b>    | Ongoing self-reflection and openness to learning from others        |
| <b>Neurodiversity</b>       | Recognition of natural differences in brain function and cognition  |
| <b>Access/Equity Zones</b>  | Areas prioritized for outreach due to systemic underinvestment      |

---

## Key Takeaways & Lessons Learned

- IDEA principles must be fully integrated into core operations, not treated as standalone efforts.
  - The emotional labor of equity work must be acknowledged and supported.
  - Partnerships like BoardLead offer essential expertise and sustainability.
  - Transparency, shared accountability, and cultural humility are essential for meaningful progress.
- 

## Advice for Other Organizations

Treat IDEA work as **central** to your mission. Begin early. Invest in **authentic relationships**.  
Make space for \*\*growth, discomfort