



San Antonio Botanical Garden | IDEA Cohort Project Summary 2022-2023

San Antonio Botanical Garden participants: Sabina Carr, CEO; Omar Akhil, Board President; Katie Erickson, Director of Programs

Project: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Policy – The mission of the San Antonio Botanical Garden (SABG) is *enriching lives through plants and nature*. The Botanical Garden fulfills its mission through a commitment to Inclusivity as a core value and practice. San Antonio Botanical Garden celebrates diversity in all forms. The commitment to IDEA guides SABG’s decisions on staffing, programming, outreach, and communications and requires an ongoing commitment that finds full expression in the organizational culture, values, norms, and behaviors. SABG aims to lead by example and be accountable to encouraging diversity as a fundamental and abiding strength of public gardens in South Texas. (Adopted May 2023.)

Context for Project: As of early 2019, the Botanical Garden transitioned into privatization after a 30-year partnership with the City of San Antonio. This 43-year-old Garden continues to operate on City property. The Garden is operating under a 5-year strategic plan concluding in 2026. The full document can be viewed at this [link](#). Supporting the Garden’s Strategic Priority 3: Organizational Sustainability and Excellence, the Long Range Planning Committee of the Board took the lead to create an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Policy, which was adopted in May of 2023. Establishing an IDEA Policy for the Botanical Garden was an essential step to achieving our Strategic Priorities.



Change: The Garden previously had nine core values. During the strategic planning process Garden staff and board collaboratively updated the core values to create more concise language to foster shared language and value-based decision-making. The Garden’s new core values are:

- Conservation** – We protect and preserve plants and habitats
- Education** – We educate guests to enrich their lives and connection to plants
- Inclusion** – We are a Garden for all and treat people with dignity and respect
- Innovation** – We embrace bold creativity, change, and excellence
- Stewardship** – We are socially, financially, and environmentally responsible

Similarly, Garden board and staff felt strongly that creating and adopting an IDEA policy would take us one step further in enacting our core values for our guests, community, volunteers, and staff, and foster shared language policy-based decision making.

Approach: With strong interest and support from the Botanical Garden Board, the Long Range Planning Committee led by one SABG’s IDEA Cohort participants, Omar Akhil, Board President, spearheaded the process of drafting the policy. Several members of the committee contributed expertise from their industries and the committee was guided by SABG’s mission and vision. The policy was drafted over the course of several meetings. The final policy was approved by the Executive Committee as well as the full Board.



Challenges & Lessons Learned: The Board-led creation and adoption of the IDEA policy places the policy in a predominant space in the organization. Following the Board's adoption of the policy, Sabina Carr, CEO, presented the policy to staff at an all-staff meeting. The next challenge/step in the process is to identify a training program that provides staff with a common foundation for IDEA concepts. We learned from other cohort presenters and members that requiring training can decrease buy-in and genuine participation; we will have to be mindful of that and adjust accordingly. Being a part of the Cohort and undertaking the project were excellent reminders that staying up to date on IDEA training, discussions, topics is essential; it's important to take time to consider new research, resources, recommendations when beginning new people-centered initiatives.

Recommended Resources: The resources provided throughout the IDEA Cohort are incredible. Being able to dive deep into a variety of topics was an excellent reminder that keeping IDEA principles at the center of operations is a complex, changing, and daily process. Additionally, our experience was that leaning into the expertise of the board members, especially those who had participated in institutional IDEA work was invaluable to the process of creating the policy.

Next Steps for the Botanical Garden: Incorporating IDEA concepts to support the Garden's work. Here are samples of the efforts that Garden staff and board are undertaking related to our new policy.

- **Mindful Program Development/Planning:** Providing accessible programming is a priority for the Garden. A recent example of such programming began in March 2023; a six-session pilot program called *GROW: Gardening Rooted in Occupational Wellness* began. GROW is a dementia-friendly gardening project produced in partnership with UT Health San Antonio's Caring for the Caregiver program, taught by a Doctor of Occupational Therapy student at UT Health San Antonio. The reception from the participants was excellent, each class reached capacity, and the program was evaluated to determine if/how the program benefited both the caregivers as well as the those experiencing dementia. Educators, Guest Experience staff, and the volunteer manager participated in a dementia-friendly training provided by staff from UT Health San Antonio's Caring for the Caregiver program. Funding was secured to continue the pilot program and to test additional accessible programming.
- **Seeking Funding for Shuttle Access Program:** Inspired by a similar program at the Denver Botanic Garden, the Garden developed a Shuttle Access Program proposal designed to reduce a variety of visitation barriers. The project is partially funded to date and includes a budget for a wheelchair-accessible shuttle and a program coordinator who, through continuous outreach to community partners, will coordinate visits for their clients/audiences. Guests will be picked at community partner sites, brought to the Botanical Garden for a day of (based on their choice) nature exploration, nature-based classes, and exhibitions, and then returned to their point-of-origin. The program also provides accommodations as needed, such as language interpreters. All facets of the program, including accommodations, are free to participants and collaborators, which eliminates the financial and transportation barriers.
- **Budgeting:** Budget planning begins in the summer for a calendar year FY. Each department will keep in mind the IDEA Policy to identify any budgeting needs to support the policy including professional development, operationalizing accessible programs, and marketing to expand reach to diverse audiences and increase visibility.

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Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA)
Policy**

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