



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

LEGISLATIVE, FUNDING, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

R-20-116
October 20, 2020

AGENDA ITEM 2

AGENDA ITEM

Website Structural Upgrade and Design Refresh Project Update

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

Receive a presentation on updates and improvements to the openspace.org website and the software system that runs the website. No Committee action required.

SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) website content management system software must be upgraded due to the upcoming end-of-life of the existing software version. Significant development is required on the structure and code of the existing website to prepare for the upgrade. Because many parts of the site must be rebuilt for the upgrade, there is an opportunity to review and update the current structure and design, which has remained virtually unchanged since 2006, even as the District has experienced significant growth and changes and as websites and user interface platforms have improved based on new best management practices and user preferences.

DISCUSSION

The District's website is built on the Drupal open source content management system (CMS). The District migrated to Drupal (version) 7 in 2015. Drupal 7 kept largely the same user interface features as those first introduced in 2006 when the website was last significantly revamped. Drupal 7 is now scheduled for end-of-life in November 28, 2022 (delayed one year due to COVID-19). Following end-of-life, bug fixes, security patches and routine code maintenance will be discontinued, making it difficult, time-consuming and potentially expensive to keep the District website up-to-date and functioning properly.

Because website technology has advanced significantly since 2011, upgrading to Drupal 8 requires changes to both the structure and code of the District website. Those changes will improve the site for both users who are retrieving information and learning about the District, and staff who update content to keep the website current. Website technology continues to advance, and Drupal 9 was recently released in June 2020. However, Drupal 9 is similar enough that once the site has been converted to run on the Drupal 8 platform, staff will be able to seamlessly upgrade to Drupal 9 before November 2021, the planned end-of-life date for Drupal 8. There is not a migration pathway available to move from Drupal 7 to Drupal 9, without first moving to Drupal 8.

Background

With the 2015 Drupal 7 upgrade, the basic layout of most content pages remained the same: a single content block with limited options for formatting or displaying images and other content. Minor changes were made to the design and layout of the home page, preserve pages and site header and footers. A new event registration system was implemented, and an integrated calendar was developed to show and filter events, meetings and activities.

Since that update, visits to openspace.org have increased by 22%, from 32,700 visits per month in 2015 to 46,000 visits per month in 2019. In 2020, following COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders, traffic doubled to an average of just under 105,000 sessions per month compared to the same five month period in 2019 with 52,000 sessions per month. Today, about 46,000 visitors per month view the website on a mobile device, an increase of 310% compared to the 11,400 visitors per month in 2015. This shift reflects a worldwide trend toward mobile-first experiences and reflects the critical need for website information to be optimized for mobile devices.

Today, the site contains more than 230 content pages, plus pages for each board meeting and event (docent-led activities, volunteer projects, community and District events). While the current site design has served us well, website technology and best practices have evolved beyond the capabilities of our current site structure and design. For example, our current page layout limits options for creating compelling content, so that most pages end up as long blocks of type separated by the occasional photo, video or green background highlight box. Drupal 8 is built with components, which are blocks of content that can be arranged in ways that fit best different types of content and which are also much more well received and sustain the viewing interest of website users.

In preparation for the upgrade to Drupal 8, District staff worked with our contract web development consultant, Rootid, to evaluate the current website navigation, layout and functionality to develop an improved structure that takes advantage of new features and incorporates current best practices. We are currently developing the graphic design layer for this new structure that will update the site's look and feel to increase the visual appeal, including an expanded color palette and additional photography and graphics, to align with current brand guidelines.

Together, the new platform, structure and design will create a user-centric online experience by allowing staff to:

- Build flexible page layouts and design elements that deepen user engagement through more effective content pathways to communicate the District's braided mission;
- Leverage responsive design, which displays webpages based on a user's device: desktop, smartphone or tablet;
- Filter and present District preserve, program/activity and project information based on user interests;
- Efficiently create and edit a library of components that can be displayed on multiple pages of the website and directly in Google and other search engine results;
- Integrate with digital marketing technology and other business applications; and;
- Develop and maintain content that adheres to accessibility guidelines for web content.

Liberatory Design Process

The Liberatory Design process is a collaboration between Stanford University's school design thinking process and the National Equity Project. Centered around equity, this human-centered design process creates opportunities to notice and reflect on the identities, experiences and biases inherent in the design process (see Attachment 1 Liberatory Design Cards).

Using this process, District staff and our consultants interviewed various stakeholders representing diverse web audiences and users. Those stakeholder interviews offered recommendations for improvements to the site structure, page layout and design, and informed the creation of core personas based on what users were seeking from their website experience. The personas that emerged from this research include:

- **Outdoor Ambassadors** - those who introduce others to outdoor experiences and play a key role in creating an entry point for others to engage in District activities. Ambassadors may be influential in their communities as someone who understands nature with a passion for connecting people to the larger benefits of nature through direct experience. They likely use the website for “why” information to understand more deeply the significance of the District's role in land management within the greater ecosystem of conservation agencies. These people may include docents or volunteers or community leaders.
- **Nature Recreator** – those who are part of a preserve user group. Nature Recreators use the website primarily for their own personal information gathering about where to go and what to do. These are the avid hiker/bicyclist/equestrians who likely have “their” favorite place to go. Their primary goal is likely transactional, such as seeking direct information about whether a preserve or trail is open/closed, directions, etc. They prioritize their individual health and well-being and seek information that supports their own personal goals.
- **Environmental Insider** - those who view themselves first and foremost as environmentalists or conservationists, who are passionate about ensuring net benefits and catalyzing change. They may be “insiders” who are part of partner organizations or other highly involved individuals who seeking connections with like-minded organizations where they can learn more. They seek deeper, sophisticated information about the District's work and how it relates to a larger regional environmental protection vision.
- **Land Reconnector** – are those who have newly connected or reconnected to nature and local open spaces. This group includes those who may be new to outdoor experiences or may be looking to rekindle their connection to nature. They are primarily in discovery mode, seeking basic information and an understanding of the natural environment as a whole, as well as introductory information on how to access outdoor experiences. This group may not see themselves reflected well in the current website, which is focused on traditional users, and may not experience as strong a welcoming or inclusive feeling from the current website as some other groups.
- **Neighborhood Guardian** – those with interest in public process, outcomes and impacts. This group includes people who carefully track government activities and public processes. This group also includes members of conservation groups and land management agencies who are interested in tangible facts, project deliberations and decisions, and detailed project information and outcomes. They seek information about how District actions may affect their lives and interests.

Updated Site Organization, Layout and Other Improvements

Our web development team is using these general personas to ensure that different categories of website users can effectively find the information they are seeking. We are adjusting the site outline and structure to create a website that better meets the needs of community members, with clear navigation and appropriate tools for all users. This user-centric approach to content strategy is new, as our current site is organized to align more with the District's internal organization (circa 2006) upon which we have sometimes struggled to add new pages, photos and other content. This new approach will help users find the content they desire, while inviting them along a pathway to learn more about the full District story.

The expanded functionality and component capabilities of Drupal 8 (and 9) make it easier to create content blocks that can be integrated into site pages in various visual ways. This added functionality encourages users to explore more deeply into site content, including expandable text sections, photos, videos, notices, and calls-to-action that increase engagement with District activities, projects and programs. Interactive components will enable expanded categorization of content, allowing users to filter and search for information about preserves, programs and projects based on their interests. The structural changes and these component layouts will change the look of our site pages from long, gray lines of text to a cleaner, more graphic and visually appealing design that is optimized for display on both desktop and mobile devices.

These changes in structure and layout will be accompanied by a refreshed look that includes an expanded color palette for better visual contrast and increased use of photography and graphics, while aligning to current brand guidelines. See Attachment 2 Moodboard, which represents the expanded color palette the site will use with the new component-based structure.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item. The contract for website design and development, content migration, and four years of ongoing maintenance and strategic support (\$138,218) was previously approved by the Board in May 2020.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This is the first time this item is coming before a Board Committee.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Pending LFPAC feedback, staff will present this information to the Board at an upcoming meeting in Fall 2020. The Board will be invited to provide user feedback during the testing phase prior to site launch, anticipated for June 2021.

Attachments:

1. Liberatory Design Toolkit
2. Moodboard

Responsible Department Head:

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Prepared by:

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LIBERATORY DESIGN

your toolkit to design for equity

version 1.0



What is this card deck?

This deck is your handy toolkit to practice Liberatory Design. It includes 3 sections:

1. Liberatory Design Process

We've adapted the design thinking process to include steps that we believe are essential to practice design for liberation.

2. Liberatory Design Mindsets

To practice Liberatory Design authentically, it is important to carry certain mindsets in all the work you do.

3. Liberatory Design “Do Now”s

These hacks are small actions you can take now to start practicing Liberatory Design.

*This card deck is the result of a collaboration between the Stanford d.school's K12Lab and The National Equity Project.

Tania Anaissie, Victor Cary, David Clifford, Tom Malarkey, Susie Wise



1.

**LIBERATORY
DESIGN
PROCESS**

Liberatory Design Process

The Liberatory Design Process is adapted from the Stanford d.school's design thinking process.

We've adapted the original framework to create the opportunity for designers to **NOTICE** + **REFLECT** on what they are bringing to a design thinking challenge.

Noticing and reflecting through the process allows designers to redesign themselves as equity-centered. These new designers emerge self-aware of their identity, beliefs, biases and values. They are able to make authentic connections between who they are and who they're designing with. They co-create and co-construct a new paradigm of design, one that is diverse, inclusive and equitable.

Tania Anaissie, Victor Cary, David Clifford, Tom Malarkey, Susie Wise



NOTICE

NOTICE

What?

The NOTICE phase helps designers develop social-emotional awareness before entering any context. This phase is about practicing self-awareness of one's own identity, values, emotions, biases, assumptions and situatedness.

Noticing what one brings to any context allows for authentic user-centered design, not “you”-centered design.

Key Questions to Ask

Identity: Who am I/we? Who are our users?

Power: How are we respectively situated (relative to opportunity, institutional power)?

Context: What is our situation, our equity challenge?

Partnership: Given the above, how can we create a partnership that is liberating for all in the process?



EMPATHIZE

EMPATHIZE

What?

The EMPATHIZE phase of the process is focused on understanding the experiences, emotions and motivations of others. Designers use specific empathy methods to learn more about the needs of the users for whom they are designing.

Key Questions to Ask

How does my identity and role in this project affect how and what people share with me?

How do I maintain awareness of my biases and challenge them in order to see this community more authentically?

What do people in this community identify as their needs?

How do systemic oppression and/or privilege affect this community, and how does that relate to this project?



DEFINE

DEFINE

What?

The DEFINE phase of the process is focused on developing a point of view about the needs of the community. It is especially important in this phase to work alongside community members. In this phase, you search for patterns or insights from your interviews that reveal deeper needs of the community. Using what you've distilled from the conversations, you narrow the project focus.

It is important to notice and reflect on what comprises the team of “We” when creating “How might we...” problem statements.

Key Questions to Ask

How can we insure we are reaching a point of view that is authentic and not distorted by biases?

What is the larger ecosystem in which our project focus lives? What influences it?



IDEATE

IDEATE

What?

The IDEATE phase of the process is focused on generating as many inclusive solutions to a problem as possible. Once many solutions have been generated, the team selects the top ideas and moves them forward to prototyping.

Key Questions to Ask

How can we ensure we have designed for optimal collaboration and have invited multiple perspectives?

How can we create an environment that encourages people to share ideas without fear of judgment and also maintains an awareness of biases?



PROTOTYPE

PROTOTYPE

What?

The PROTOTYPE phase involves iterative development of tangible artifacts or experiences intended to elicit feedback and answer specific questions about a concept.

In this phase, we Build to Think. Building out an idea raises new questions and pushes the team to refine ideas.

Key Questions to Ask

What assumptions are we making that we want tested in this prototype?

How can we quickly build a representation of our idea that does not require a lot of explanation?



TEST

TEST

What?

The TEST phase of the process is focused on getting specific feedback on our prototype, checking our assumptions, and learning how to improve our design. It is important to remember during this phase that prototypes are imperfect and feedback is a gift.

Key Questions to Ask

How are we creating the right environment so that it is truly safe to fail?

Have we included all the voices and identities necessary into the room to receive feedback?



REFLECT

REFLECT

What?

The REFLECT phase of the process is ongoing and transparent throughout the design thinking process. It allows you and your team the time to reflect on your actions, emotions, insights and impact as designers and humans. It is called an “Equity Pause” by EquityXDesign. It is a time to share our learning and see what we can do better* next time.

*To make it more inclusive, equitable and aesthetic.

Key Questions to Ask

What evidence do I have that I am becoming more self aware and self correcting as an equity leader using Liberatory Design?

How is my emotional state affecting how I show up with my team? How can I share or release those emotions with my team?

2.

**LIBERATORY
DESIGN
MINDSETS**

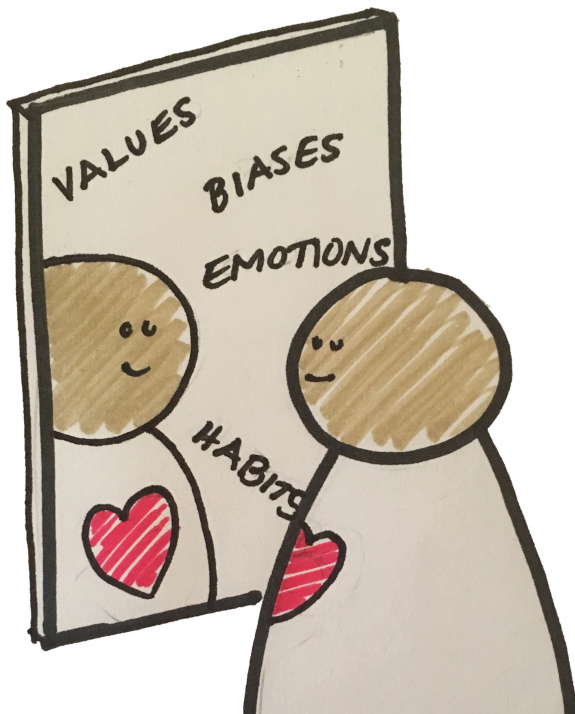
Liberatory Design Mindsets

The Liberatory Design Mindsets are evolutions of the design mindsets commonly used at the Stanford d.school.

They have been enhanced with the explicit intention of building Liberatory Design leaders through a collaboration between the National Equity Project and the Stanford d.school's K12 Lab.

The goal is to develop the Liberatory Design muscles held within us all. As we build our own muscles, it allows others who work with us to develop the **equity-centered creative agency** to solve their own problems in community with others.

Tania Anaissie, Victor Cary, David Clifford, Tom Malarkey, Susie Wise



Practice Self-Awareness

We design from who we are. So we need a clear "mirror" to better see how who we are shapes what we see, how we relate, and how we design.

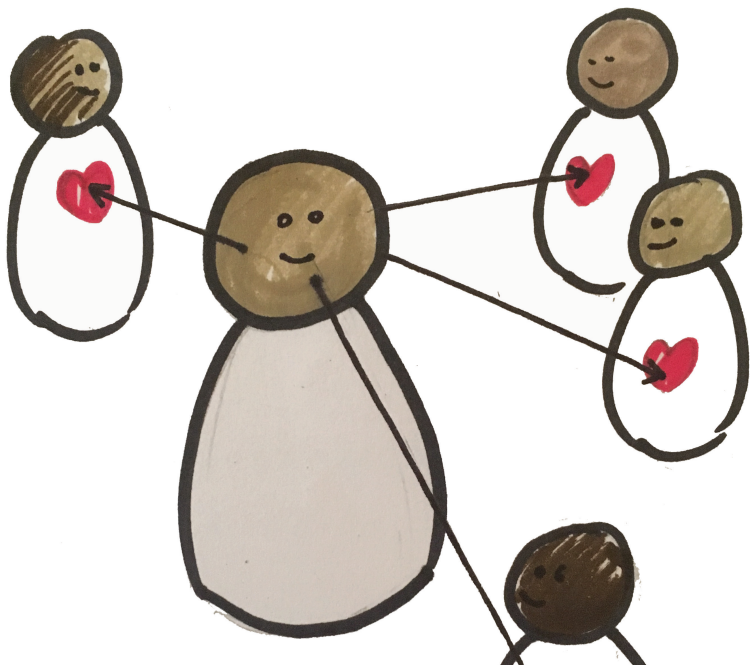
Practice Self-Awareness

Why?

Liberatory Design requires we minimize the harmful effects of our blind spots and maximize the potential for non-oppressive partnerships. Liberatory Design has the potential to change us to the extent we work with humility, curiosity and courage.

How

- Ask yourself, “How am I positioned (relative to privilege and/or oppression) in all aspects of my identities (e.g. race, class, gender, language)?”
- Ask yourself, “How might these identities impact people and our process?”
- Surface what you don’t know. Ask yourself, “What is unfamiliar to me here?”
- Challenge your assumptions.
- Expand your equity consciousness by seeking out new information about privilege and oppression.



Focus on Human Values

Seek as many ways as possible to get to know your end users including immersion, observation, and co-design.

Focus on Human Values

Why?

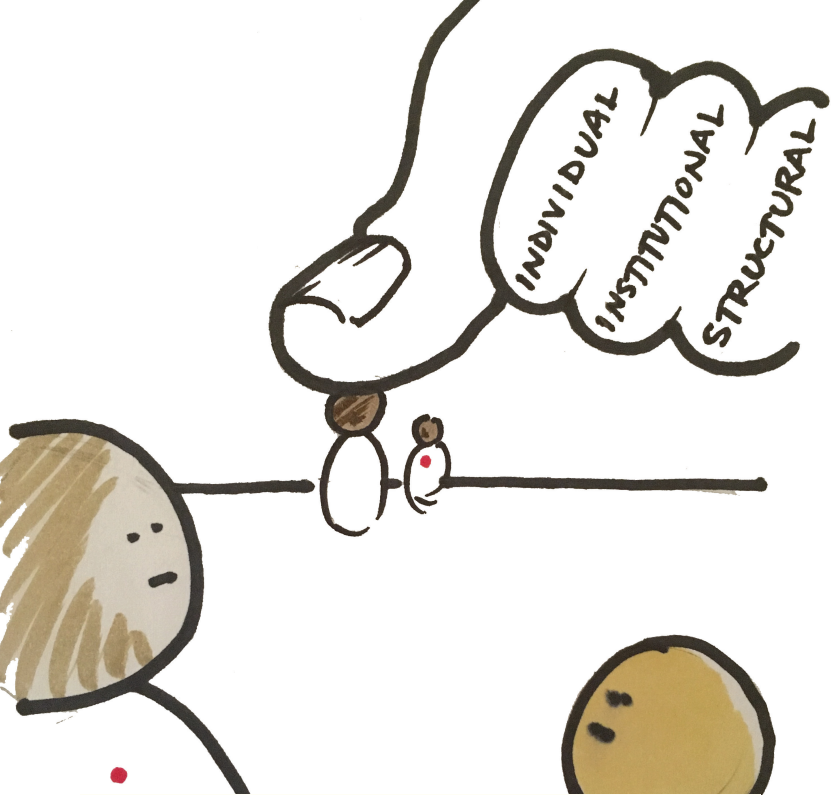
In order to create change that empowers communities from the inside-out, we must place users at the center of all our work. They are the experts on the challenges that face their community.

To do this as designers, we must invest in getting to know the community and honor the stories they share with us.

In addition, we must honor human values on our own design teams and make time for emotions.

How

- Listen from a place of love. Be humble and acknowledge that you are not the expert.
- Honor the stories, experiences, and emotions people share with you.
- Stay connected to the community in all phases of the project.
- Engage in collective sense-making.



Recognize Oppression

Our designs depend on how we frame a challenge. So we need a clear “window” to see how oppression may be at play in our context.

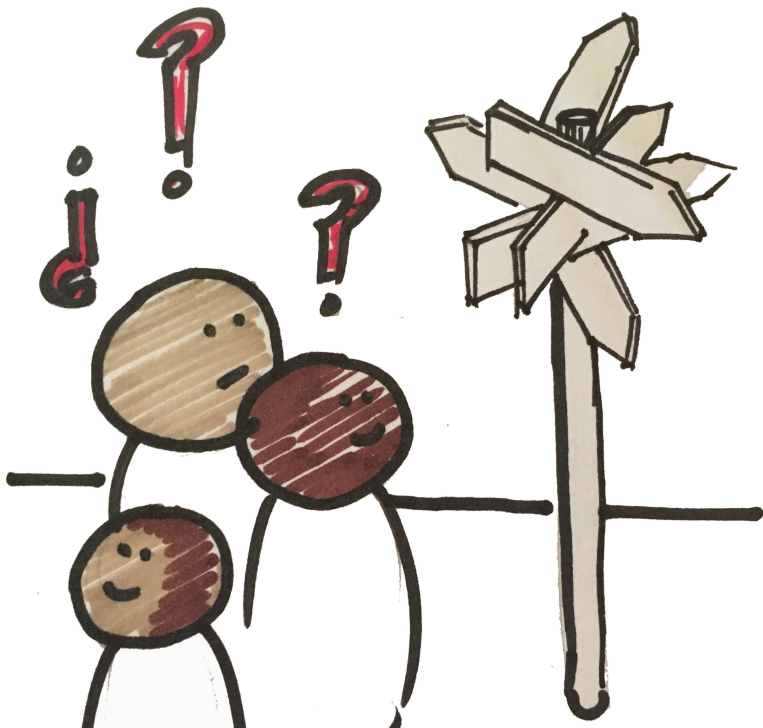
Recognize Oppression

Why?

The people we are designing with and the challenges they face do not sit in a vacuum. If we are able to see root causes and systemic inequities more clearly, our design work has the potential to address deeper needs. Our design process should build our capacity to recognize oppression at play at individual, institutional, and structural levels.

How

- Ask, “What identity-related patterns and inequities are we seeing in this context?”
- Ask, “What barriers are in the way of achieving equitable outcomes?”
- Ask, “What might be some unintended consequences of our designs?”
- Ask, “What is this community’s experience with ‘design’ and how does that affect how we do this work?”
- Ask, “How are relationships and power differentials affecting the truth that is told here?”



Embrace Complexity

When the going gets messy, stay open to possibility. Powerful design emerges from the mess, not from avoiding it.

Embrace Complexity

Why?

Equity challenges, by their nature, are complex, and moments of ambiguity are common when using the design process.

While it can be uncomfortable not knowing what's next or not having a clear answer, jumping to a solution out of discomfort risks defaulting to comfortable or reproductive practices.

Wading through the complexity and ambiguity of this kind of work with patience will allow you to develop more innovative and equitable outcomes.

How

- Acknowledge the confusion and discomfort of the uncertainty present in your work.
- Find ways to care for the team and yourself as you wade through the uncertainty.
- Welcome diversity of discourse even when it can feel complicating.



Seek Liberatory Collaboration

Recognize differences in power and identity.
Design “with” instead of “for.”

Seek Liberatory Collaboration

Why?

Design work is fraught with power and identity dynamics (e.g. designer as expert, who's generally situated with advantage). To fully realize the liberatory potential of a design process, both for the people we are designing with and for the designer, it's critical to reframe the relationship as one of partnership.

How

- Actively seek diverse identities and skill sets as you build your team.
- Acknowledge and build from the strengths, stories, and skills of each other.
- Set conditions for collective learning, risk-taking, and action.
- When framing the question, "How Might We...?" ensure the "We" is diverse and inclusive.



Build Relational Trust

Intentionally invest in relationships, especially across difference. Honor stories and listen for emotions.

Build Relational Trust

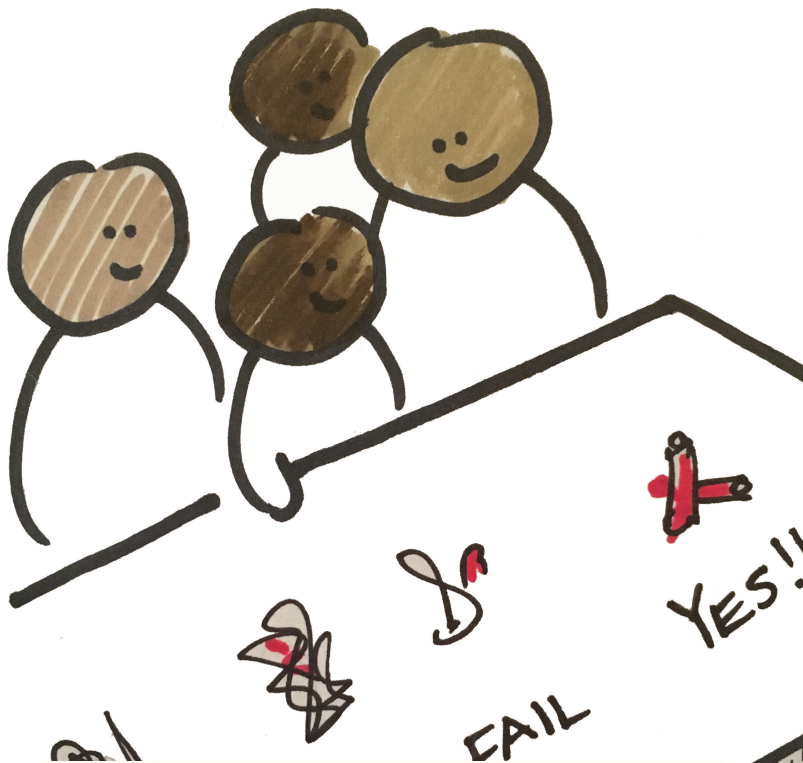
Why?

Relational trust is the glue in equity-centered design work. When working across difference on difficult challenges, teams must invest in developing emotional trust in order to authentically collaborate.

If we are comfortable identifying and processing emotions with our team, we create opportunities for healing and prevent distortion of our work.

How

- Enable personal connections through pair-shares (people share what matters to them).
- Make time and space for people to bring forward their fuller selves and identities.
- Emphasize the importance of non-judgmental listening.
- Hold space for community to reflect, express and process thoughts and emotions.
- Create culture that invites dialogue.



Bias Towards Experimentation

The complexity of oppression requires courageous action. Build to think and learn.

Bias Towards Experimentation

Why?

Oppression thrives on risk-averse behavior. It's important to fail fast. Small changes can have large effects - AND hacking oppression requires longshots. Liberatory Design is an ever-evolving craft that is never “done.”

How

- Co-design safe-to-fail experiments to learn more.
- Build trust through experiments increasing in scale or risk over time.
- Build agency and capacity in the community through co-designed and implemented experiments.
- Balance quick action with thoughtful reflection.
- Choose a direction, not a single or final solution.



Share, Don't Sell

Practice transparency of process and non-attachment to ideas.

Share, Don't Sell

Why?

When sharing your work, find ways to invite people in instead of trying to convince them of value. When you share your work humbly, it invites feedback and questions that could advance your work. In addition, it widens your circle of collaborators and invites those people to co-design with you.

Conversely, if we focus on selling or convincing, we are losing opportunities to refine our work and incorporate new perspectives.

How

- Be transparent about the team's process, mindsets, shared goals, expectations and co-constructed narratives.
- Share as an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Earn trust through actions and not just words.

Credits + an Invitation

Thank you, team!

Thank you to the wonderful people who put love, brain power, and intention into the making of this card deck (alphabetically):

Tania Anaissie (Content + Visual Design)

Victor Cary (Content)

David Clifford (Content + Illustrations)

Tom Malarkey (Content)

Susie Wise (Content)

We Want to Hear From You

This card deck is a work in progress. This is our first prototype of it, and we'd love to hear your feedback! What do you like about it? What do you wish was different about it? Any new ideas? Do you use it at work? Why or why not?

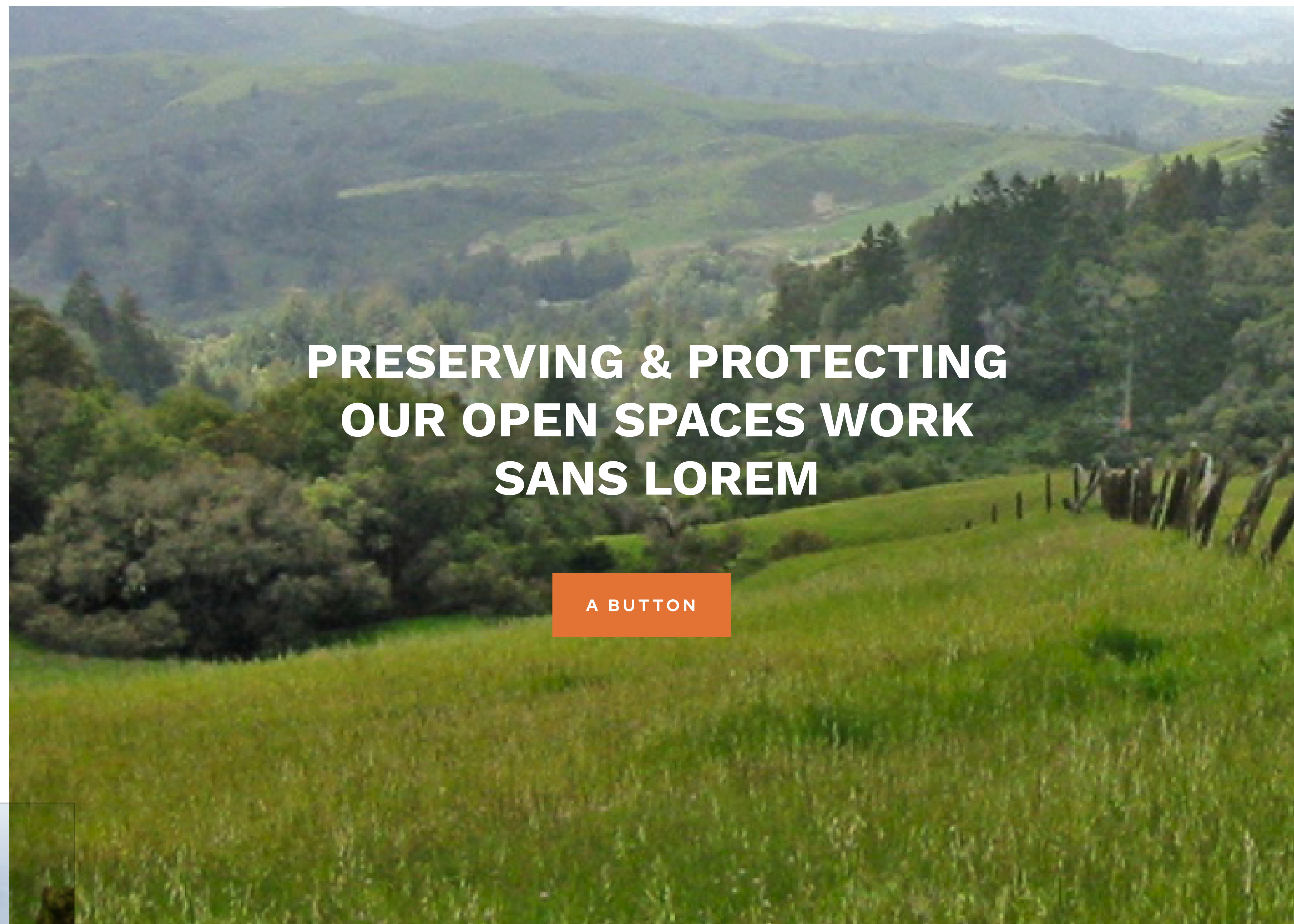
Email us at liberatorydesign@gmail.com





NATIONAL
EQUITY
PROJECT

d. **K12 LAB**
NETWORK



HIKING / SUMMER

Discover all you need to know to help you get the most of your experience when visiting your..



Are you a new visitor?

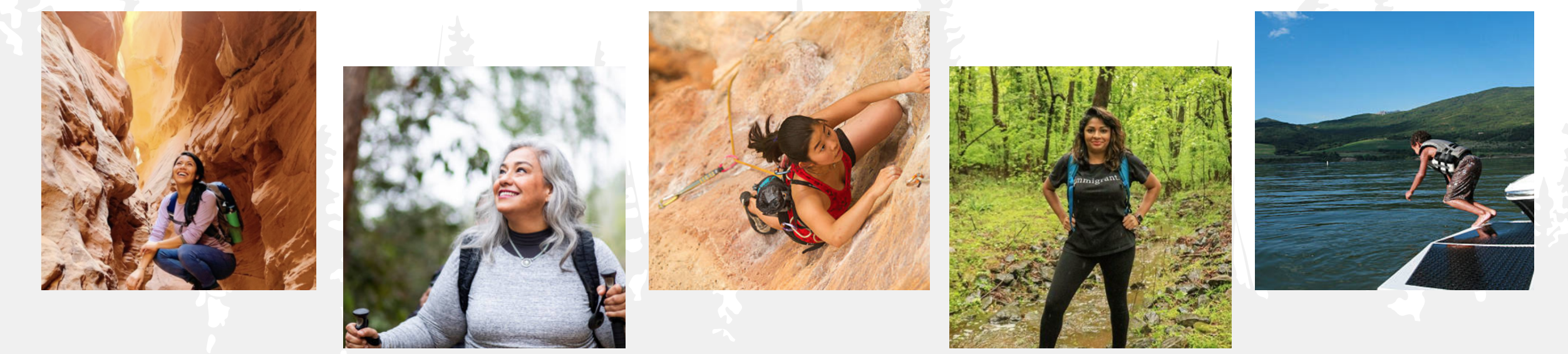
Discover all you need to know to help you get the most of your experience when visiting your..

WELCOME TO

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

We are an independent special district in the San Francisco Bay Area that has preserved a regional greenbelt system of nearly 65,000 acres of public land and manages 26 open space preserves.

ACTIVITIES



A HEADLINE



FERNS & OTHER ANCIENT PLANTS



WONDERS OF CHERRY SPRINGS

Saturday, May 3
10:00 AM - 2:30 PM
Sierra Azul Preserve
Approximate Total Miles: 3



EARTHQUAKE HIKE



WORK SANS BOLD

Work Sans Bold Subheading

Work Sans Regular body text independent special district in the San Francisco Bay Area that has preserved a regional greenbelt system of nearly 65,000 acres of public land and manages 26 open space preserves.