



Tackling Racial Disparities

The San Francisco District Attorney's Office recognizes that the fair and equal administration of justice requires tackling racial disparities within the criminal justice system.

In a big city rich in diversity like San Francisco, the goal of eliminating racial disparities is complex, layered, and involves looking both outwards and inwards.

As biases operate at the conscious and unconscious levels, the office has committed itself to identifying and tackling all forms of racial disparities within the criminal justice system, both locally and nationally.

Implicit Bias Training

Beginning in August 2016, DA Gascón arranged the first of two opportunities for all office staff and employees to attend a mandatory training on implicit bias led by an expert in the field, Kimberly Papillon. Ms. Papillon presented on emerging neuroscience and academic studies showing that bias can, and does, operate within each of us at an unconscious level. Members of the office were led through interactive exercises to show that visual markers—race, age, class, perceived sexual orientation, and gender, among others—can trigger internal processes in our brains to create positive emotions for some groups, and negative or no emotions at all for others.

The training was widely attended, with numerous members of the office attending multiple times, and prompted further discussion and efforts within our office.

Implicit Bias Workgroup

Following the office-wide training, a collection of attorneys and staff from across the office formed an Implicit Bias Workgroup. The workgroup discussed methods for advancing the dialogue around the impact of implicit bias on the work of the office.

Important areas of discussion included ways to continue educating the office about implicit bias, strategies for identifying our own biases, and effective tools at our disposal to combat any such biases. As a result, the workgroup disseminated office-wide emails with information about trainings held by other offices. It raised awareness about





opportunities to attend conferences on the issue.

The workgroup and District Attorney Gascón also created a department-wide competition, the Implicit Bias Challenge, to encourage members within the office to think critically about the role of implicit bias in their work.

Implicit Bias Challenge

Inaugurating the SFDA's Office's very first Implicit Bias Challenge, District Attorney Gascón challenged 11 units within the office to think critically about the role of implicit bias in their work and to submit a collection of images to identify and combat our implicit bias perceptions.

The idea for the competition grew from numerous meetings between the Implicit Bias Workgroup and District Attorney Gascón. Both recognized the importance of providing members within the office with an outlet to identify our own unconscious biases, unpack their impact on our work and the communities we serve, and create tools for combating them.

The 11 units produced amazing displays, many of which were exhibited for the community to experience as part of the office's first-ever Implicit Bias Challenge Art Showcase hosted at the beautiful 111 Minna Gallery in downtown San Francisco.

2017 Racial Disparity Study

Supported by a grant from the Frank and Denise Quattrone Foundation, the San Francisco District Attorney's Office commissioned a report by Steven Raphael, Professor of Public Policy at the UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy and Professor John MacDonald, Professor of Criminology and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, to better understand the effects of our policies and practices in two key ways: to identify the different decision-making points within the office where racial disparities exist, and explore the causes of such racial disparities in outcomes for criminal cases presented to and/or prosecuted by the office.

Importantly, the researchers concluded that nearly all of the identified disparities can be attributed to case characteristics that are determined prior to a case being presented to the SFDA's Office.

When conducting this analysis, the authors also found the implementation of Proposition 47 has had a narrowing effect on racial disparities for nearly all disposition outcomes in San Francisco. Proposition 47 has minimized the impact of certain case factors in case outcomes, specifically reducing the impact of a suspect's pre-trial detention and criminal history in court dispositions.





Notably, the percent of African Americans booked in jail in San Francisco declined from approximately 43 to 38 percent. In general, the representation of certain racial groups within the criminal justice system, especially African Americans, has declined considerably.

For more information, please visit the [Racial Disparity Study](#) section of the SFDA's website.

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