



The Equity Newsletter | April 25, 2022


CELEBRATING MIDDLE EASTERN HERITAGE MONTH: JOIN US AT *HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?*

Tomorrow, **Tuesday, April 26 from 12:30 PM – 2 PM**, all staff are invited to a virtual dialogue in commemoration of Middle Eastern Heritage Month. *How Do You Identify? Middle Eastern People Are Not A Monolith* is an interactive conversation which will center the voices of Middle Eastern staff across the Agency. The discussion will include a mix of educational media which highlights the diversity of Middle Eastern identities, perspectives and lived experiences.

The SFMTA Office of Racial Equity and Belonging presents:

How Do You Identify? Middle Eastern People Are Not A Monolith

An Interactive Discussion featuring Guest Speakers from across the Agency



**April 26, 2022
12:30 PM – 2:00 PM**

[Click Here](#) to Join the Virtual Microsoft Teams Event

To join by phone, call:
415.915.0757
Phone Conference ID:
168 445 724#

Contact equity@sfmta.com for more information.

Educational Resource: The Middle East is an incredibly diverse region, home to many different peoples and cultures. This [9-minute video](#) provides background on some of the diverse languages, religions and ethnic groups of the Middle East.

[Click Here to Watch](#)

Share Your Story At Upcoming *How Do You Identify?* Events

How Do You Identify? is an interactive discussion series focused on connecting staff and fostering a workplace of belonging. In 2022, the discussion series will commemorate a series of history and heritage months through conversations about identity and equity. If you are interested in being a speaker for an upcoming event, please email equity@sfmta.com and CC Jeremy.Brooks@sfmta.com by the respective deadlines listed below:

- **Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month:** Email by May 2
- **Pride:** Email by June 6

PEOPLE OF THE SFMTA



Soroush Roback
Engineer
Streets Division

What do you love about being Middle Eastern?

The Middle East is one of the oldest and most diverse parts of the world, where generosity and hospitality are visible traits across the region. I love impressing family and friends with a table full of Persian food. Thanks Mom!

What does it mean to be a Middle Eastern professional in transportation?

Being blessed with a multi-ethnic background of both Middle Eastern (Iranian by father) and Latin (Mexican-American by mother) heritage, but with a Middle Eastern first and last name, was at times a curse in the mainly transportation/mobility sector of aviation. During my travels, the fear, and possible/likely concept of being randomly pulled to the side for extra scrutiny, questioning and baggage checks were a constant anxiety/stress factor while waiting in line at the US customs border. Many of my Middle Eastern friends and family also have experienced this fear and anxiety when entering the US customs lines.



Bijan Ahmadzadeh
Principal Civil Engineer
Streets Division – Capital
Program & Construction

What do you love about being Middle Eastern?

What I love about my Middle Eastern culture/heritage is the strong family commitment/value/connections along with the hospitality/generosity that is extended and practiced in the region. I also love the variety of food!

What does racial equity mean to you?

Racial Equity to me means when, as a society/culture, we have reached a state where race is no longer a factor, and that equal treatment, access, and opportunity is the common practice/denominator no matter where we live or how we identify.

APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SAFETY EQUITY INITIATIVE

As a transportation agency and vital resource to the community we serve, it is imperative to prioritize the quality and safety of our services. Being a first-rate transit provider means ensuring that all people have access to safe and dependable modes of transportation. As of now, this is not entirely true for women and girls of color in the city of San Francisco.

The SFMTA is proud to announce that we are developing the Safety Equity Initiative, led by Security, Investigations and Enforcement in partnership with the Office of Racial Equity and Belonging. This project will include collaboration across the agency and community partnership to reduce and eventually eliminate gender-based harassment and violence on Muni.

Why is this the starting point?

As we approach the end of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, it is important to highlight the role transportation has had in the pervasive rape culture and assault against women and girls in San Francisco. From Muni, to BART, to the Metro Train and even walking or scooting down a street, transit can be a vulnerable and unsafe experience for women and girls who are trying to get from point A to point B safely.

Three of the main findings gathered from research done at [New York University](#), [LA Metro](#), and [San Jose State University](#) conclude:

- Transportation is the second most common place where sexual harassment occurs
- Women have complex travel patterns and specific mobility needs
- Reliable data is lacking, making it difficult to respond to this persistent problem

Who are we centering?

The Safety Equity Initiative takes an intersectional approach centering girls and women, especially Black, Indigenous, women of color. Here is a table outlining communities of priority in the initiative:



Phase 1: Racial Equity-Driven & Gender-Responsive Systems Change Consultation Defining Priority Communities for Engagement

Racial/Ethnic Peer Groups	*Intersectional Identities
Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian & Pacific Islander Girls*	Cis, Trans, Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, in Foster Care, Youth, Justice Involved, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander Women*	Cis, Trans, Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, Foster Parents, Elders, Justice Involved, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, Veterans, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian & Pacific Islander Boys*	Cis, Trans, Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, in Foster Care, Youth, Justice Involved, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian & Pacific Islander Men*	Cis, Trans, Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, in Foster Care, Youth, Justice Involved, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, Veterans, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian & Pacific Islander Gender-Expansive Youth	Cis, Trans, Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, in Foster Care, Youth, Justice Involved, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian & Pacific Islander Gender-Expansive Adults	Cis, Trans, Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, Veterans, Justice Involved, Foster Parents, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, Veterans, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder

Phase 1: Racial Equity-Driven & Gender-Responsive Systems Change Consultation Defining Priority Communities for Engagement

Gender Identity Peer Groups	*Intersectional Identities
Cisgender Girls*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, White & Multiracial Youth • Cross sexual orientation • Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, in Foster Care, Justice Involved, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Transgender Girls*	
Cisgender Boys*	
Transgender Boys*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, White & Multiracial Adults • Cross sexual orientation • Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, Veterans, Justice Involved, Foster Parents, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Gender Expansive Youth	
Cisgender Women*	
Transgender Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, White & Multiracial Adults • Cross sexual orientation • Exp. Homelessness, who Survived Gender Violence, w/Disabilities, Veterans, Justice Involved, Foster Parents, live/school/work in SF, live in Bay Area counties, w/mental health illness, w/substance use disorder
Cisgender Men*	
Transgender Men*	
Gender Expansive Adults	

What is the hope?

The overall goal is to create partnerships and systems that ensure the safety of women and girls who rely on San Francisco's transportation infrastructure for their quality of life. The hope is that not another woman or girl will suffer any form of violence because of their gender or race.

Call in for participation.

If you have any feedback for how to strengthen the initiative, please reach out to the following email MuniSafe@SFMTA.com or number **415-646-2110**. If at any point you want to share experiences in which transportation has not been safe or dependable for you or someone you know, please share. Information will be kept confidential. If there are any instances that indicate harm, whether self-inflicted, endured or of the desire to inflict on another person, proper protocols for reporting will be followed.

RACIAL EQUITY CABLE CAR | MIDDLE EASTERN HERITAGE MONTH



The Office of Racial Equity and Belonging (OREB) and Transit, Cable Car Division are collaborating with staff across the agency to design a series of decorative Cable Cars with racial equity exhibits. The inaugural cars launch with staff connection and networking rides. On April 15, staff participated in the launch of inaugural Middle Eastern Heritage Month Cable Car.

This month's exhibit highlights four educational topics including:

- Identity & Geography
- Architecture & History
- Culture, Music & Dance
- Food & Hospitality.

In a speech given by Bijan Ahmadzadeh, Principle Civil Engineer at the SFMTA, he reflected on the process to develop a racial equity exhibit about Middle Eastern communities:

"We talked about the various backgrounds and diversity of the Middle East and how best we can represent the culture, history and diversity so that when people ride the Cable Car, they would have a better understanding and appreciation of the Middle East, and see the beauty of the region and culture versus the harsh images that are portrayed in the news and media. I envision that these exhibits and decorations that are portrayed during the month will provide an opportunity for the general public to see another side of the Middle East and hopefully tear down some of the current stereotypical walls, thereby bridging any racial/cultural divide or misunderstanding."



Following, Supervisor Ahsha Safai of District 11, shared reflections on Middle Eastern identity and celebrated MTA's efforts:

"San Francisco has a rich tapestry of folks...and people from around the world come to ride Cable Car. When we do projects like this, we expose various people to different cultures and allow for people to learn and to see themselves. It might seem small, but it breaks down barriers, and that's why it's important that we do these things."

Additional comments included:

"Events like this really bring out the best of staff and show how much they care for each other and San Francisco."

Joel Ramos, Transportation Planner

"This whole thing is good because it opens up people's eyes and gives people the opportunity to learn something they didn't know before."



Special thanks to the staff volunteer team—Bijan Ahmadzadeh, Zahra Afrookhteh, Shayda Haghgoo, Soroush Roback and Hassan Nowroozi—for leading decorative efforts in support of Transit, Cable Car and the OREB team. Gratitude to Audrey Armour and Hector Godinez for operating the inaugural ride.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE: MIDDLE EASTERN HERITAGE MONTH READING LIST

Check out this reading list put together by the San Francisco Public Library in commemoration of Middle Eastern Heritage Month.

[Click Here to Access Reading List](#)

The purpose of this publication is to provide information about ongoing equity work at the SFMTA, including upcoming events, trainings and suggested educational resources.

The Equity Newsletter is published by the Office of Racial Equity & Belonging: equity@sfmta.com