

BWSR Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan

**2023-2025**

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# Letter from BWSR Executive Leadership

Staff and partners,

Working together to build an organizational culture that values inclusivity and diversity is key to our work at the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). We believe BWSR should be a place where everyone feels welcome and has access to equitable opportunities, whether they are internal employees or external partners.

This belief served as a catalyst for the development of our agency’s first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Plan. Starting in 2021, we accelerated our efforts to improve DEI policies and practices by contracting with Strategy & Effectiveness (S&E) to conduct an agency-wide assessment using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The goal of this assessment was to understand BWSR’s baseline intercultural competence capacities. The findings of the IDI assessment served as a jumping off point to pursue an agency Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan (DEI Plan).

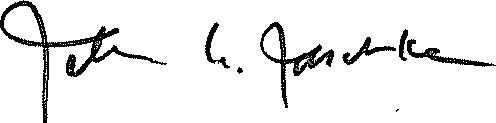
In early 2022, an RFP process selected S&E as the consultant responsible for assisting BWSR in writing its DEI Plan. An internal BWSR workgroup with representatives from our organization’s three divisions formed to work collaboratively with S&E to guide the assessment and development of BWSR’s DEI strategic planning process. Workgroup members participated in all aspects of the planning process, including collecting feedback from staff and internal partners to inform the plan, gathering baseline information to understand BWSR’s DEI needs, analyzing this information to integrate findings into the plan, organizing the plan, and reviewing and editing the plan.

The plan serves several purposes. First, it guides our agency in implementing DEI strategies and values on an organization-wide level. This includes learning, development, ongoing training and other approaches to further integrate DEI into BWSR’s work. The plan also outlines steps for launching a DEI Work Group at BWSR to oversee and implement DEI strategies in the long-term.

Our DEI work will require intentional, thoughtful actions by our staff and partners to be successful. This plan acts as a living document that assists BWSR in achieving its DEI goals. I look forward to engaging in this meaningful work with you as we strive to make BWSR a more diverse and inclusive environment for employment and partnerships.

Sincerely,

John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director



# Introduction

## About BWSR

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources’ (BWSR) mission is to improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.

BWSR was created in 1987, when the Legislature combined the Soil and Water Conservation Board with two other organizations with local government and natural resource ties: the Water Resources Board (established in 1955) and the Southern Minnesota Rivers Basin Council (established in 1971).

A staff of approximately 130 people working in nine locations across Minnesota carry out core agency functions including implementing the state's soil and water conservation policy, overseeing comprehensive local water management, and implementing the Wetland Conservation Act as it relates to the 41.7 million acres of private land in Minnesota.

BWSR policies, programs and initiatives are guided by a 20-member Board. Members can be citizens, state agency staff, or local government representatives that deliver BWSR programs. The Board is the state's administrative agency for 90 soil and water conservation districts, 46 watershed districts, 23 metropolitan watershed management organizations, and 80 county water managers. The Board sets a policy agenda designed to enhance conservation delivery through local government partners. Board members, including the board chair, are appointed by the governor to staggered four-year terms.

Because 78 percent of the state's land is held in private ownership, BWSR's focus on private lands is critical to attaining the state's goals for clean water, clean air, and abundant fish and wildlife. These working lands — Minnesota's farms, forests, and urban areas — contribute greatly to the production of environmental goods and benefits including cleaner air and water, fish and wildlife habitat, and preservation of open spaces.

Agency programs to assist landowners and local governments have resulted in less sediment and nutrients entering our lakes, rivers, and streams; enhanced habitat; and the drastic slowing of wetland losses. These outcomes have been realized despite intensification of agriculture, greater demands for forest products, and rapid urbanization in many parts of the state.

## State of Minnesota Diversity, Equity and Inclusion background

The state of Minnesota has been increasingly focused on DEI efforts over the past several decades.

In 1991, Governor Arne Carlson recognized the importance and responsibility of the state enterprise to have a workforce reflective of the diversity of Minnesota and through Executive Order 91-14, created an Affirmative Action Council to develop and implement a program for equal employment opportunity.

In 2003, Governor Tim Pawlenty required state agencies and employees to recognize the unique legal relationship and accord tribal governments the same respect accorded to other governments and required consideration of tribal interests when a state agency assumed administration of federal programs (Executive Order 03-05). Gov. Dayton also affirmed the government-to-government relationship between the State of Minnesota and Minnesota Tribal Nations, and in 2013 required all executive branch state agencies to recognize the unique relationship and all cabinet-level executive

branch agencies to consult with tribes and designate a trained staff person to serve as the principal point of contact for tribal nations (Executive Order 13-10).

Diversity and inclusion were core values of Gov. Dayton’s administration. Through Executive Order 14-14, Dayton increased affirmative action employment goals, required training programs and improved strategies to improve the recruitment, hiring, and promotion of people with disabilities. The Dayton administration also established the state’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, which continued that affirmative action and equal opportunity employment work (Executive Order 15-02) and in 2016 expanded agency membership to the Council (Executive Order 16-01).

Governor Tim Walz recognized that disparities based on race, geography, and economic status impact Minnesotans’ ability to be successful and on his second day in office established the One Minnesota Council (Executive Order 16-01) — an interagency partnership charged with ensuring everyone in Minnesota has opportunity to thrive. Through Executive Order 19-24, Gov. Walz expanded the number of agencies required to develop policies and consult with Minnesota Tribal Nations and directed specific agency staff to complete the states’ Tribal State Relations Training. In 2021, government-to-government relationships with Tribal Governments became law (Minnesota Statutes 10.65), which defines specific consultation responsibilities and training requirements for state agencies and agency staff, including BWSR.

Following the approval of Executive Order 16-01, state agencies increased efforts to advance equity. An enterprise Chief Inclusion Officer was appointed, and an enterprise Office of Inclusion established, housed within Minnesota Management & Budget (MMB). Cabinet-level agencies began to develop equity change plans. For fiscal year 2018, the Office of Grants Management revised grant management policies (Policy Numbers 08-02, 08-03, and 08-04) with diversity and inclusion standards in grant-making. An enterprise Office of Accessibility was established within MNIT.

The pace of recent efforts may have been impacted because of the pandemic, however, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, the resulting civil unrest in Minneapolis, and those that occurred across the country (and in other nations) brought to the forefront the importance of addressing racial bias and inequities, creating a shared vision, and identifying targeted efforts to improve internal capacity for DEI work.

## BWSR’s Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

BWSR is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and is working internally to improve DEI policies and practices across the organization. In 2019, BWSR implemented a comprehensive Affirmative Action Plan that includes policies and procedures against sexual harassment and provides for reasonable accommodations, outlines a job category analysis, and identifies areas for further monitoring, among other items. The agency established various partnerships that strive to increase the diversity of its candidate pools, given the lack of diverse staffing representation across BWSR regions. BWSR has engaged in DEI activities to support staff development through introductory trainings and the administration of the Intercultural Developmental Inventory. DEI training is also offered at BWSR Academy. These efforts are making important contributions to hiring practices, inclusion and the promotion of a baseline understanding of DEI. However, to effectively infuse DEI values and practices into our work, ongoing efforts must be intentional and strategic.

## DEI Strategic Planning and Development Process

BWSR engaged in a second RFP in 2022 to secure an external consultant to develop the organization’s DEI Plan, ultimately engaging S&E to expand IDI work from 2021. The goal of this DEI strategic planning process was to identify strategies to build both staffing and organizational capacity to work effectively across cultures.

## Plan Development

BWSR’s DEI plan development process builds on the agency-wide assessment findings using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) conducted in Spring 2021 and learnings from the situational analysis. BWSR’s DEI plan aligns with the State of Minnesota’s vision for inclusion and equity for state agencies (One Minnesota). Priority areas and actions reflect the state’s four goals: designing for equity, intercultural competence, disaggregating data and leadership development.

IDI assessment findings, the organization’s development stage along the intercultural development continuum, and the situational assessment results provide the foundation for the development of BWSR’s DEI plan. This in-depth and participatory process at all organization levels aligns strategic priorities and actions with the organizational readiness level. Planned updates to BWSR’s overarching Strategic Plan will provide opportunities to further align the business strategy of the organization with the DEI Plan.

# BWSR DEI Plan

## Definitions

The DEI definitions used in this DEI Plan have been adopted from the definitions used by the State of Minnesota’s Office of Inclusion.

* **Diversity** is all the ways that people are different and the same at the individual and group levels. Diversity is expressed in many dimensions, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, culture, national origin, religious beliefs, identity, age, invisible or visible disability status, political perspective, and other dimensions.
* **Equity** is ensuring everyone has what they need to be successful. It requires commitment to strategic priorities, resources, respect, and consideration, as well as ongoing action and assessment of progress toward achieving goals.
* **Accessibility** means everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience has access to the same tools and content.
* **Inclusion** is the intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of organizational work, including decision making processes.
* **Diverse Populations** include racial and ethnic communities, including American Indians, LGBTQI communities, disability status, veterans, geographic diversity within and across Minnesota, including Greater Minnesota, urban/metro.

An understanding of the relationship between perceptions and human interactions with the natural environment and exploration of their impact on the effectiveness of BWSR’s conservation efforts in Minnesota is needed. The concept of cultural values in conservation was introduced as a key concept to understanding this relationship, and how distinct cultural groups value nature differently. These underpinning cultural values impact BWSR’s DEI strategy and plan implementation, along with the effectiveness of conservation and climate change efforts. The following common understanding of cultural values in conservation was adopted:

**Cultural Values in Conservation** refers to the ways in which the norms and values of different cultural groups shape their relationship to the natural resources (air, water, soil, minerals, plants and animals) and their approaches to the protection, conservation and management of natural resources. Understanding and integrating cultural values in conservation practices contributes to the promotion of equity (including reinforcing cultural practices) and sustainability. A lack of understanding of this relationship hinders the effectiveness of conservation efforts and can have negative consequences on the norms, values and behaviors of different cultural groups.

## Values

Values underpinning diversity, equity and inclusion were identified early in the process by workgroup members through facilitated conversations. A review of BWSR’s current core values was conducted, and

staff, SMT and AAC Board members identified the top five values needed to be central to BWSR’s work. These values are:

* Collaboration
* Partnerships
* Respect (people, communities and organizations)
* Accountability
* Innovation

## Value Drivers

In addition to the organizational values outlined above, the value drivers necessary to support the development of DEI were identified through the survey. Staff, SMT and the AAC of the Board identified the following value drivers as important to DEI work at BWSR.

* Understanding cultural values in conservation
* Nature is diverse and so are people
* Committed leadership
* New ways of working together that result in greater impact

## Strategic Themes

Multiple data sources and levels of analysis informed the identification of strategic themes and priorities. The organizational survey identified implementation priorities for BWSR to begin its DEI work. Further information from the analysis of focus group findings contributed to the identification of strategic themes. The themes included:

* Shared understanding of vision-mission and stakeholders for DEI implementation
* Promoting a culture of engagement and inclusion
* Creating DEI structures to execute the DEI Plan
* Expanding programs and policies
* Working with existing and new partners to reach DEI focused conservation goals
* Providing learning and development opportunities to build internal staffing and leadership capacity
* Enhancing talent practices
* Communicating internally and externally about the DEI Plan
* Using data to inform efforts, foster transparency and accountability

These strategic themes reflect the aggregate internal and external stakeholder recommendations and inform the priority areas, goals and actions.

## Strategic Priority Areas for DEI Implementation at BWSR

Five priority areas were identified:

### Priority Area 1: Culture

### Priority Area 2: Implementation Support

### Priority Area 3: Learning and Development

### Priority Area 4: Partnerships

### Priority Area 5: Programs, Policies and Practices

# BWSR DEI Plan: Strategic Priorities, Goals and Actions

## Priority Area 1: Culture

Outcome: The culture at BWSR supports DEI values, promotes open communication, safety, continuous improvement and transparency.

1. Culture of Engagement:

Establish a culture at BWSR that supports a sense of belonging, an appreciation of differences and provides opportunities for idea exchange and dialogue about DEI in a safe environment.

1. Monitoring, continuous improvement and transparency:

Develop a culture of DEI accountability, transparency and continuous improvement at BWSR.

1. Communication:

Use a variety of communication tools to increase understanding internally and externally about the added value of DEI in conservation and its importance at BWSR.

## Priority Area 2: Implementation Support

Outcome: Dedicated positions, committees, and workgroups (DEI structures) work together to provide coordination, guidance, leadership and collaboration to execute the DEI plan.

1. Senior Management Team:

Provide strategic guidance, oversight, and support for DEI implementation.

1. DEI Work Group:

Provide leadership, monitor and evaluate DEI Plan implementation.

1. BWSR Board:

Review and adopt DEI policies, to support DEI Plan implementation at BWSR

## Priority Area 3: Learning and Development

Outcome: Sustained organizational growth, DEI integration and dedicated learning and development results in an environment committed to the exchange of ideas and continuous learning.

1. Intercultural Development:

Engage in agency-wide adoption of the intercultural development continuum as the framework for understanding differences and similarities and supporting intercultural growth at all levels of the organization.

1. Organizational Learning:

Encourage the exchange of ideas, promote learning, and use feedback to foster agency growth.

1. Development of Staff, Managers and Executive Leaders: Increase staff and leadership capacity by offering and promoting learning and development strategies across the organization.

## Priority Area 4: Partnerships

Outcome: New partnerships and support to existing partners expand BWSR’s work with diverse populations (Ex., LGU’s, landowners, local partners, NGO’s, Tribal governments, BIPOC communities, renters, non-traditional farmers, other underrepresented groups).

1. Local Government Partners: Support LGU partners in expanding their DEI efforts.
2. Interagency Collaborations:

Explore partnerships and collaborations with other state agencies and initiatives.

1. New partnerships:

Identify opportunities to establish new partnerships with diverse populations

1. Resources:

Commit to the allocation of resources to support outreach, engagement, education strategies, and innovative programming

## Priority Area 5: Programs, Policies and Practices

Outcome: BWSR’s programs, policies, and practices provide equitable resources and opportunities in consideration of state DEI policies.

1. Research:

Prioritize research and data collection to understand the strengths and needs of programs, staff, constituents, and the values that drive conservation across groups, and respond with tailored capacity building approaches.

1. Policies:

Engage in an assessment of programmatic policies and practices and their impact on DEI implementation.

1. Practices:

Embed DEI practices in appropriate programs, activities and hiring practices.