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## **BWSR Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan**

**2026-2031**

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# 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.

## BWSR's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)

BWSR is committed to DEIA and is working internally to improve DEIA 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.

Starting in 2021, BWSR administered and implemented the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The IDI was offered and implemented again in 2025. Individual intercultural development continues to be supported by providing opportunities for staff to learn through individual debriefs with the DEI

Coordinator and through group-facilitated discussions. In 2025, BWSR implemented the Intercultural Competence Development (ICD) Program to support staff development, in which 1-2 sessions relating to intercultural competence are offered monthly. Feedback after each ICD session is collected and integrated into future offerings.

BWSR have also partnered with other state agencies in DEIA efforts, such as BWSR staff attending the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) IDEA program sessions. Lastly, BWSR has partnered with the State of Minnesota's Office of Inclusion to align the BWSR DEI Plan goals to the Office of Inclusion's Long-Range Plan goals. Office of Inclusion staff have also presented to the DEI Team on the Long-Range Plan. BWSR has also contributed to the Office of Inclusion's newsletter.

DEIA 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 DEIA.

## BWSR DEI Plan

BWSR's DEI plan aligns with the State of Minnesota's vision for inclusion and equity for state agencies (One Minnesota) and the Office of Inclusion's Long-Range Plan (per Executive Order 21-13). Goals, objectives, and strategies reflect the state's six goals: human resources policies and practices, training and leadership development, policy reviews and equity assessments, procurement and grant-making policies and practices, equitable community engagement, and transparent accountability.

## Definitions

The definitions used in this Plan have been adopted from the definitions used by the 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.
- Inclusion is the intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of organizational work, including decision making processes.
- Accessibility means everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience has access to the same tools and content.
- 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.

In 2021, the concept of cultural values in conservation was introduced as a key concept to understanding the relationship between perceptions and human interactions with the natural environment, and its impact on BWSR's conservation efforts in Minnesota. 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.

# BWSR DEI Plan: Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Outcomes

## Goal 1: Impactful Learning & Professional Development

Strengthen learning and development to build internal DEI capacity

### Objective 1.1 Increase knowledge of implicit bias and equity, inclusion, and accessibility concepts

#### Key Strategies

- Offer implicit bias training to staff, managers, executive leaders, and Board members
- Offer training on equity, inclusion, and accessibility concepts to staff, managers, executive leaders, and Board members
- Evaluate effectiveness of implicit bias, equity, inclusion, and accessibility training

#### Outcomes

- Implicit bias training is offered to staff, managers, executive leaders, and Board members every two years
- Equity, inclusion, and accessibility training is offered to staff, managers, executive leaders, and Board members every year
- Evaluations of trainings show an increase in pre/post-training knowledge
- Staff report having adequate access to training and support in future engagement surveys

### Objective 1.2 Strengthen staff ability to use the Equity Analysis Tool

#### Key Strategies

- Identify key programs where the Equity Analysis Tool will be used
- Provide Equity Analysis Tool training to SMT and relevant staff
- Work with relevant program managers to integrate the Equity Analysis Tool into processes

#### Outcomes

- SMT and relevant sections understand the benefits of using the Equity Analysis Tool consistently
- SMT and relevant sections apply Equity Analysis Tool to select programs

### Objective 1.3 Support intercultural competence development among BWSR Staff

#### Key Strategies

- Continue to offer Intercultural Competence Development (ICD) Program events and activities
- Supervisors and managers are required to re-take the IDI and staff are provided with the option to re-take the IDI every two years
- New staff are required to take the IDI
- Evaluate ICD event effectiveness

#### Outcomes

- 90% ICD credit completion rates yearly
- Plan and budget for IDI agency implementation every two years

- Evaluation results in response to ICD Program events and activities
- Agency IDI results show movement from the Minimization Orientation toward the Acceptance Orientation

Objective 1.4 Foster dialogue and resource sharing around diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility (DEIA), and intercultural competence

Key Strategies

- Develop a DEIA/Intercultural Competence Learning Hub on BERT
- Create processes for staff to share resources relating to culture, equity, and inclusion

Outcomes

- DEIA/Intercultural Competence Learning Hub is populated with relevant informational materials
- Staff know where to find DEIA/Intercultural Competence related materials on BERT
- Staff engagement metrics are developed
- Staff feedback processes on usefulness are developed

## Goal 2: Transparent Accountability

Strengthen transparent accountability across BWSR, leading to open communication and continuous improvement.

Objective 2.1 Develop an agency-wide equity impact statement

Key Strategies

- Draft, refine, and adopt an equity impact statement with staff and leadership input

Outcomes

- Completion of equity impact statement
- Staff awareness and understanding (adoption in meetings, presentations, etc.)

Objective 2.2 Establish metrics and a review process for DEI Plan progress

Key Strategies

- Develop metrics and a review process for mid-point and end-point assessments of the DEI Plan
- Gather staff feedback on DEI Plan implementation

Outcomes

- Completion of mid-point and final reviews
- Number of metrics tracked
- Number of feedback gathered

Objective 2.3 Communicate DEI progress regularly

Key Strategies

- Share progress and evaluation results updates via Highlights, newsletters, social media, and other forms of communication

- Share updates at SMT and Board meetings

#### Outcomes

- Progress reported through existing communication channels twice yearly
- Updates shared at SMT and Board meetings on a quarterly basis

### Objective 2.4 Apply diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in all levels of BWSR's work

#### Key Strategies

- Support staff and leaders in identifying structural barriers at BWSR
- Identify the key programs, activities, and decisions at BWSR that must consider and/or integrate diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility
- Embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility topics into meetings at all levels of the organization

#### Outcomes

- Staff can apply a lens of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility when reviewing existing or developing new programs and procedures.
- Structural barriers are documented and actions to address those barriers are taken

## Goal 3: Assist Partners in Local Efforts

Assist Local Government Unit (LGU) partners in local diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts.

### Objective 3.1 Deliver diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility training to partners

#### Key Strategies

- Provide equity and inclusion training at BWSR Academy
- Offer diversity, equity, and inclusion assistance for other BWSR training programs and initiatives as needed
- Evaluate partner training to determine effectiveness

#### Outcomes

- Equity and inclusion training provided at BWSR Academy every year
- Evaluation results indicate that training objectives were met, and participants were satisfied with the sessions

### Objective 3.2 Collaborate with LGUs in expanding equity and inclusion efforts

#### Key Strategies

- Work with LGU partners to identify interest and support needed to expand their equity and inclusion efforts
- Collaborate on equity and inclusion activities
- Identify funding opportunities to support equity and inclusion efforts by LGU partners

#### Outcomes

- BWSR understands the type of support LGUs need to expand equity and inclusion efforts at a local level
- BWSR can provide support to LGU partners

### Goal 4: Equitable Community Engagement & Partnerships

Advancing community engagement through an equitable and inclusive lens by leaning into new or existing partnerships.

#### Objective 4.1 Strengthen partnerships with agencies on diversity, equity, and inclusion work across the state enterprise

##### Key Strategies

- Participate in the Office of Inclusion's Long-Range Plan
- Leverage resources from other state agencies
- Collaborate with other state agencies

##### Outcomes

- Documented outcomes per the Long-Range Plan
- Participate in interagency initiatives once a year

#### Objective 4.2 Establish new partnerships with diverse populations

##### Key Strategies

- Pilot 1-2 programs that are well-suited to establishing new partnerships
- Apply successful models to other programs
- Develop a communications strategy for reaching a more diverse audience.

##### Outcomes

- 1-2 pilots launched within the span of the DEI Plan
- Positive feedback from participants about partnerships
- Pilot programs can be replicated with other agency programs
- Have broader audience with access to BWSR programs

### Goal 5: Policy Reviews & Equity Assessments

Ensure BWSR plans, programs, policies, and practices provide equitable resources and opportunities in consideration of state diversity, equity, and inclusion policies.

#### Objective 5.1 Gather quantitative and qualitative data on community needs

##### Key Strategies

- Survey LGUs and other partners to gather data on barriers for constituents
- Work with state demographer to gather data in relation to BWSR's programs
- Assess current programs for strengths, biases, impact, and opportunities

- Gather information from partners regarding existing DEI approaches

#### Outcomes

- Data gathered from state demographer
- BWSR staff understand how LGUs are integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility into their work, what the current barriers to are, and how demographics impact program delivery

### Objective 5.2 Evaluate and revise plans, programs and policies using an equity lens

#### Key Strategies

- Update DEI definitions and goals in the strategic plan
- Evaluate programs and policies using the Equity Analysis Tool
- Develop metrics for reviewing policies
- Provide standard equitable language for grants and other programs
- Update plans, programs, and policies for equitable participation and access

#### Outcomes

- BWSR regularly evaluates programs and policies to ensure equity
- New metrics adopted
- Grants and other programs are updated

### Objective 5.3 Improve digital accessibility of materials

#### Key Strategies

- Ensure web materials and other communications meet WCAG 2.1 requirements

#### Outcomes

- Accessibility improvements implemented
- Regular accessibility reviews of resources conducted

## Goal 6: Inclusive Human Resources (HR) Policies & Practices

Support HR policies and practices that proactively and consistently promote a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workplace.

### Objective 6.1 Implement policies outlined in the BWSR Affirmative Action Plan

#### Key Strategies

- Provide annual Affirmative Action training and updates to SMT

#### Outcomes

- All SMT members receive Affirmative Action training, as needed

### Objective 6.2 Diversify applicant pools

#### Key Strategies

- Review current recruitment practices with HR, managers, and supervisors

- Develop or refine recruitment strategies

#### Outcomes

- Managers report knowing how to implement recruitment practices that lead to more diverse applicant pools
- HR data shows that applicant pools for BWSR positions have increased in diversity

#### Objective 6.3 Train supervisors on inclusive hiring practices

##### Key Strategies

- Identify potential barriers to inclusive hiring practices
- Provide training to supervisors on inclusive hiring practices

#### Outcomes

- All supervisors are trained on inclusive hiring practices
- Hiring process improvements are made based on potential barriers identified