



Title: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Update

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Purpose:

At the October 12, 2023 Operations and Programs Committee (OPC) meeting, staff will provide an update on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative. To inform next steps, staff seek feedback from the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD or District) Board of Managers on (1) finalizing the DEI Findings & Framework reviewed at the July 27 Policy and Planning Committee (PPC) meeting for acceptance in early November 2023 and (2) a proposed workplan to advance near-term actions.

Background:

MCWD's approach to water resource planning is built on its 2014 Balanced Urban Ecology policy that recognizes the environmental, social, and economic value created when built and natural systems work in harmony. As MCWD shapes the landscape through the construction of capital projects that improve water quality and reduce flooding, it intentionally considers all components of the natural and human environments.

Just as MCWD integrates land use and water factors into its planning and decision making, to deliver on its vision and bring value to all, MCWD must understand the composition of its communities and meaningfully include a diverse set of perspectives to inform its work. The District recognizes that disparities exist in areas including health, income, mobility, and choice, and it is important to understand how MCWD's projects and policies might amplify or reduce these disparities within the watershed. Therefore, MCWD seeks to improve its understanding to inform how the District plans, implements, and evaluates its work to provide greater value to the communities it serves.

Process

The Board of Managers has established DEI planning and policy development as an organizational priority, including funds in the 2023 and 2024 budgets to support this work. MCWD staff initiated a discovery process to build organizational understanding on DEI topics relevant to MCWD and provide a thoughtful framing for Board consideration. At the [July 27, 2023](#) PPC meeting, staff reviewed the discovery process and vetted a draft DEI Findings & Framework document (DEI Framework) that is intended to capture the staff-led workgroup's findings and recommendations.

Since the July 27 PPC meeting, staff met with Manager Hejmadi, who was unable to attend the PPC meeting, to gather his input on the proposed DEI Framework and next steps. In addition, staff reviewed and vetted the draft DEI Framework and workplan outline with the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) at its [September 20, 2023](#) meeting. Both the Board of Managers and CAC expressed support for the draft DEI Framework, including the framing of the initiative purpose in context of the District's BUE approach and the proposed areas of focus and potential actions. Below are some of the key takeaways from discussions with the Board of Managers and CAC, which staff will review in more detail at the October 12 OPC meeting:

- The Board supports a plan and process that is custom-tailored to MCWD (i.e. not "cookie cutter").
- The Board favors a focused scope of work for consultant support, allowing staff to advance near-term actions while leveraging the expertise of a consultant to identify blind spots and support discrete tasks (e.g. updating Human Resources policies and procedures).

- The CAC reinforced the importance of building a planning equity lens, and of understanding how city partners plan for equity, so it can be effectively integrated into project planning, policy development, and engagement efforts.
- Both the Board and CAC reinforced the importance of taking a data-driven approach and utilizing the right metrics to track progress.
- The Board reflected that MCWD’s culture provides a strong foundation for supporting inclusion and belonging, and Manager Hejmadi provided useful insights on how MCWD could utilize a socialization model to support successful integration of new members into the organization.
- Manager Hejmadi provided a neuroscience perspective on how the brain creates biases and the importance of creating a safe environment to promote vulnerable conversations.

DEI Draft Workplan (Near-term Actions):

Based on the Board of Managers’ input, staff developed a draft DEI workplan to outline near-term actions that can be advanced by staff in 2024 with discrete task support from a consultant (see Attachment 1). The intent is to ensure MCWD is actionable in the near-term, while also integrating DEI into the planning process for the MCWD’s 2027 Watershed Management Plan (WMP), including stakeholder engagement and development of goals and metrics. MCWD staff propose the following as priority areas for near-term work:

Operations

- *Internally Led by MCWD Staff:*
 - Promote training and education of staff, Board, and CAC using existing trainings and resources from MCWD’s DEI Resource Hub.
 - Develop an onboarding process to support inclusion and belonging.
- *Supported by DEI Consultant:*
 - Update human resources policies and practices.
 - Review and identify potential gaps in MCWD’s DEI Framework.

Projects & Policies

- *Internally Led by MCWD Staff:*
 - Develop and integrate an Equity Lens and respective GIS layers into MCWD’s planning workflow, including capital projects and policy planning.

Outreach & Engagement

- *Internally Led by MCWD Staff:*
 - Develop an Engagement Framework with DEI best practices and tools for MCWD’s internal and external engagement.

October 12, 2023 OPC Meeting:

The OPC meeting will be structured as follows:

- DEI Process and Insights - Staff will provide a summary of the discovery work completed to-date, including reporting out on key takeaways from Board of Managers and CAC discussions. Staff will seek additional reflections from the Board of Managers.
- Draft Workplan and Next Steps – Staff will review the proposed workplan and seek Board of Managers’ feedback to identify areas for greater clarity, potential gaps, and other comments to support the finalization of the DEI Findings and Framework document and Draft Workplan.

Supporting Documents:

- Attachment 1: Draft Workplan (Near-term Actions)

Attachment 1: Draft Workplan for Near-term DEI Actions

OPERATIONS	
<i>Create a culture of inclusion and belonging, by providing training and policies that support equitable recruitment, hiring, retention, promotion, and procurement practices.</i>	
Areas of Work	Draft Workplan (Near-term Actions)
Equitable Staff Recruitment, Retention, and Promotion Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Consultant: Review DEI Framework and update human resources policies and practices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review and identify potential gaps in MCWD’s DEI Framework. ○ Review human resources practices and policies for potential biases in employment practices. ○ Update practices and policies to reflect best practices to identify, attract, invest in, and retain a diverse workforce.
Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Staff: Promote training and education of staff Board, and CAC on general DEI concepts, bias, and cultural competencies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utilize Harvard Assessment and supporting trainings and talks from MCWD’s DEI Resource Hub.
Culture of Inclusion, Belonging and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Staff: Evaluate and update employee onboarding process to enhance belonging. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a socialization model for the onboarding process to define roles, expectations, and responsibilities for new MCWD members. ○ Consider an onboarding mentorship or buddy program.

PROJECTS & POLICIES	
<i>Use data to understand community composition and the potential impact of MCWD’s work, to advance project and policy solutions that advance MCWD’s mission while addressing disparities and promoting equity.</i>	
Areas of Work	Draft Workplan (Near-term Actions)
Equity Lens for MCWD Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Staff: Develop and integrate an Equity lens into MCWD’s planning, that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Uses demographic data, and new data sets, to understand community composition. ○ Integrates that information into planning and decision making, including capital projects and policy planning (e.g. climate).

OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT	
<i>Promote organizational transparency and create inclusive opportunities to engage in MCWD’s planning and decision-making processes.</i>	
Areas of Work	Draft Workplan (Near-term Actions)
Inclusive and Equitable Outreach and Engagement Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Staff: Develop an MCWD engagement framework, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop tailored engagement strategies based on community composition data. ○ Integrate best practices for engaging historically underrepresented communities. ○ Develop a standardized engagement and facilitation toolkit for both internal and external communication needs. ○ Develop and implement a “Language Access Action Plan” to provide a systematic approach to translation and interpretation needs.