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**Title:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Framework Updates

**Prepared by:** Name: Kate Moran, James O'Brien, and Samantha Hoppe  
Phone: 952-641-4520  
[kmoran@minnehahacreek.org](mailto:kmoran@minnehahacreek.org)

**Purpose:**

At the December 18, 2025, Policy and Planning Committee (PPC) meeting, staff will provide an update on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Framework and the near-term actions guiding current work.

**Background:**

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) operates from the belief that natural systems underpin place and community, and that when built and natural systems are aligned, they create environmental, economic, and social value. This belief shaped MCWD's Balanced Urban Ecology (BUE) vision, which recognizes that resilient and thriving communities are built when planning integrates all components of the urban ecosystem.

As MCWD plans policies and capital projects to improve water quality and reduce flooding, the District's BUE approach recognizes the importance of considering all components of the natural and human environments. Understanding the people and communities within the watershed is therefore foundational to delivering transformative work. Knowing who is present in the watershed and how they live, work, and experience place helps MCWD design planning processes, engagement strategies, and project solutions that are responsive to local conditions and generate broader public benefit. Integrating diverse perspectives into MCWD's work strengthens the quality of its planning and decision-making, while an internal culture of inclusion and belonging ensures that the staff are supported to carry out the MCWD's mission.

To support these goals, in 2022, the Board directed staff to begin building organizational understanding and capacity around DEI. A cross-program staff workgroup conducted a discovery process, which informed the [DEI Framework](#), approved in 2023. That framework outlines near-term priorities to integrate DEI into MCWD's planning, outreach, and project development; internal people and process systems; and 2027 Watershed Management Plan (WMP) development.

**Summary:**

Guided by the DEI Framework, staff are advancing three areas of work: the Onboarding Plan, Equity Lens, and Inclusive Engagement Framework. Together, these initiatives support MCWD in aligning its internal culture with its mission, strengthening its understanding of people and place, and increasing the inclusiveness and effectiveness of its planning and project work.

Onboarding Plan

MCWD's [2024 Strategic Plan](#) identifies a near-term priority to strengthen organizational culture and support employees through a consistent, mission-aligned onboarding approach. Central to this effort is ensuring that new employees feel welcomed, supported, and connected to MCWD's culture and values from the outset. The DEI Framework reinforces the need for a socialization onboarding model that promotes belonging and clarity for new employees. Staff are currently finalizing an Onboarding Plan that provides a unified structure for welcoming and integrating new employees. The plan focuses on helping staff understand MCWD's mission, expectations, and organizational culture, while fostering early connections across programs. This work strengthens MCWD's ability to develop, retain, and support its people, which is an essential part of delivering high quality, mission-aligned outcomes.

### Equity Lens

MCWD has developed an Equity Lens that is a tool designed to help staff better understand who is affected by MCWD's work and how project and policy outcomes are experienced across communities. It supports more consistent, informed, and inclusive decision making by grounding project and policy development in community context, place-based data, and MCWD's BUE vision. This allows staff to develop an early analysis of potential benefits and burdens that may be experienced by communities as a result of a specific project or policy. Staff are preparing to begin a pilot phase in early 2026 to assess how the Equity Lens can (1) guide project scoping, design, engagement, and evaluation; (2) strengthen alignment between purpose, outcomes, and community context; and (3) deepen internal understanding of how MCWD's work interacts with people and place.

### Inclusive Engagement Framework

Building from the insights and data generated through the Equity Lens, staff are developing an Inclusive Engagement Framework to guide how MCWD engages communities across its project and policy work. This engagement framework will provide a repeatable approach for understanding who should be involved, identifying appropriate outreach channels, tailoring engagement activities to the needs and context of each effort, and evaluating the effectiveness of engagement. Overall, this will help ensure MCWD's engagement practices are proportional, transparent, and reflective of community conditions.

### December 18 PPC Meeting

At the PPC meeting, staff will provide an overview of the DEI Framework and then provide a high-level update of the three current areas of work: Onboarding Plan, Equity Lens, and Inclusive Engagement Framework.