

2023

OWRD DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION
AND STRATEGIC PLAN WORKPLAN

OREGON



WATER RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT

STATE OF OREGON

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About the Agency

Our Mission

The Department's mission is to serve the public by practicing and promoting responsible water management through two key goals:

- To directly address Oregon's water supply needs
- To restore and protect streamflow's and watersheds to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon's ecosystems, economy, and quality of life

OWRD Core Values

Integrity – We are accountable for all that we do. We act with honesty and promote transparency.

Service – We are dedicated to providing outstanding service and treating everyone equitably in our management and stewardship of state resources.

Technical Excellence – We base our resource decisions on law, science, and expertise.

Teamwork – We are united in our mission, relying on one another and working together with the communities we serve.

Forward-Looking – We seek innovative and practical solutions to the water challenges of today and tomorrow.

Introduction

In January of 2023, Governor Kotek delivered a set of expectations to agencies. One of these expectations directs the Oregon Water Resource Department (“OWRD” or “Department”) to develop an agency specific DEI Plan, as well as a Strategic Plan. While initially, the direction was to have a DEI Plan complete by June 1, later guidance allowed agencies to develop a workplan for the DEI Plan by June 1, outlining how the agency will approach developing its DEI Plan. As a result of this, OWRD changed course and decided to develop a workplan for the June 1 deadline to allow for more engagement and a higher quality product.

Agencies have also been authorized to include the DEI Plan in their Strategic Plan, which is set for completion by June 2024. OWRD believes that one integrated plan will better advance DEI work; however, the agency will need to do additional work to solidify the scope and approach of the Strategic Plan work once additional guidance from the Department of Administrative Services (“DAS”) is released for Strategic Plans. Thus, modifications to this workplan may be necessary as OWRD implements agency Strategic Planning and DEI integration. OWRD has prepared this workplan to fulfill Governor Kotek’s expectations for a DEI Workplan by June 1 and has included its initial plans for developing the Strategic Plan in recognition of this integration.

Workplan Adaptability to Meet the Needs of Oregonians

OWRD acknowledges that this workplan may need to change to meet the best interests of Oregonians and OWRD staff. The Department will engage with the Governor's office and DAS prior to making significant changes to the workplan. Various factors may contribute to adjustments in the workplan, including, but not limited to:

- Recommendations from consultants who have yet to be hired for Strategic Plan and DEI work.
- Modifications needed as a result of further planning for Strategic Planning and integration of the DEI Plan into that process.
- The time needed to engage with staff or external partners in a manner that prevents harm to populations that we strive to better serve.
- Impacts to staff and budget resources, which are highly dependent on actions yet to be taken by the Oregon Legislature during the 2023 session.
- Actions needed for alignment with the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (due in early 2024) and the Information Technology Strategic Plan (due in late 2023).
- Incorporating the vision of the new director to be hired in late 2023.

DEI & Strategic Plan Integration

OWRD aims to integrate diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice ("DEIJ") principles throughout its programs and agency culture. The agency believes that it is not the responsibility of a few people in the agency, or of the DEI Team, but rather that it is the collective duty of the agency to create a culture that is welcoming to all, values different backgrounds and experiences, fosters a sense of belonging, and serves all Oregonians. As such, the agency objective is to integrate its DEIJ work across operations and programs, as well as provide additional support, expertise, and focus from dedicated DEIJ staff, consultants (dependent on 2023 budget), and the agency DEI Team.

To accomplish this integration, it is important for DEIJ work to be incorporated into the agency's Strategic Plan. As of the writing of this plan, the DAS approved list of Strategic Plan consultants and associated guidance for Strategic Plans has yet to be released; OWRD will further refine the Strategic Plan workplan upon receiving this. However, the Strategic Plan itself is scheduled to be complete by June 1, 2024. Therefore, OWRD is proposing timelines for development of the integrated Strategic Plan and DEIJ Plan that are consistent with a June 1, 2024, due date. This timeline provides the agency with a specific timeframe to be accountable for developing an integrated Strategic Plan/DEI Plan, while also providing sufficient time and opportunity for staff and stakeholder engagement and adaptability in plan development.

Currently, OWRD does not intend to develop a DEIJ Plan that is separate and distinct from the Strategic Plan. As such, the agency seeks to identify components within the Strategic Plan that fulfill the agency's DEIJ objectives. Due to this nexus, OWRD has included some considerations pertaining to the Strategic Plan. As the Department engages in DEIJ and Strategic Plan work OWRD may, however, determine that separate plans are necessary and will proceed according to this determination.

Strategic Plan Considerations

OWRD's current strategic plan covers the period from 2019-2024. During the development of the last strategic plan, the process included developing core values as well as strategies and objectives.

The Department anticipates that the Strategic Plan update will not rewrite the entire plan, but rather, focus on improvements and strengthen the document. Key areas for consideration in the Strategic Plan update process include:

- Reporting out on progress on implementation of the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan.
- Identifying actions in key DEI areas: community engagement, communications, data, decision making and budgets, and diversifying workforce and internal culture as discussed in more detail in the next section.
- Address other gaps in existing Strategic Plan:
 - Consider information from IWRS engagement actions to respect the time taken and contributions of the public and others engaged in that effort.
 - Integration of work from 2021 and 2023 legislative sessions.
- Ensure connectivity between the IWRS and Strategic Plan.
- Ensure Strategic Plan addresses foundational work needed to support staff in accomplishing our mission:
 - Capitalize on information obtained in the employee engagement survey (pending information from DAS), and the Department's DEI organizational assessment (if the resources are available to fund).
- Identification of the agency's priorities:
 - Add more specific tasks and timelines where possible, at minimum to fulfill requirements of DEI Plan, and, if determined to be appropriate, to fulfill workplan needs to implement the IWRS.
 - Integration with IT Strategic Plan priorities.
- Provisions for the plan to be adaptive for continuous improvement.

Key DEI Strategies and Focus Areas of the Strategic Plan

The Governor's office published the 2021 State of Oregon DEI Action Plan as a reference document for DEI plan development. The Action Plan identified 10 key strategies for advancing DEI work across State of Oregon agencies. As part of the guidance to agencies for development of the DEI Plan, DAS has identified five areas of focus that must be addressed in the final plan: inclusive communications, community engagement, data, and diversifying the workforce and workplace inclusion. OWRD, through its engagement with the DEI Team and other staff, has affirmed that much of the agency's DEI work falls within these categories. Preliminary areas of focus are identified below. Additional areas of focus may be identified during development of the OWRD Strategic Plan and Statewide Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

Identified action items below within each focus area are intended to provide examples of areas under consideration by the agency and are subject to change during the planning process.

Community Engagement:

Community engagement is foundational for advancing DEI, environmental, and racial justice work. Potential items include:

- Identifying actions and resources to incorporate community engagement more consistently and proactively in agency work, and advance best practices and requirements of the updated Environmental Justice Laws from 2022
- Staff training to conduct meaningful engagement and identify approaches based on the International Association for Public Participation (“IAP2”) spectrum of public participation that is appropriate for each project.
- Increasing understanding across all program areas of the importance of community engagement and the need to better address water needs of environmental justice communities and people.

Inclusive Communications:

- Identify agency information to be translated into target languages.
- Identify accessibility gaps and expand opportunities to participate and engage by ensuring e-reader compatibility, captions, transitioning from written to spoken word, and other accessibility tools.

Data:

- Identify data gaps in water management, community engagement, and accessibility.
- Facilitate understanding of the impacts of agency decision-making on environmental justice communities.
- Identifying tools and resources to assess community’s needs, cultural preferences, and barriers to engagement.
- Make agency data more accessible to all Oregonians.

Decision making and budgets:

- Facilitate greater and more diverse engagement in agency decision-making (rules, budget, legislation, plans, etc.).
- Assess impacts of potential decisions on environmental justice communities.
- Develop programs that address the needs of environmental justice communities.

Diversifying workforce and internal culture:

Ensuring that our workforce reflects the diversity of Oregon communities is essential to our ability to provide services to all Oregonians. To be successful, we must also create an environment that is welcoming and values different life experiences and perspectives. A wider range of perspectives fosters creativity and innovation and enables the agency to better serve its diverse stakeholders. We must work

to not only increase diversity of our workforce through recruitment, but also foster a culture where all staff can thrive. Examples include:

- Conduct outreach to students and young adults to generate greater interest and understanding of water issues and water as a career.
- Implement strategies identified in our Affirmative Action Plan to advance recruitment, selection, and retention that supports a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment.
- Creating a cultural shift, including providing training and other opportunities for staff to better understand DEI best practices and their role in creating a more inclusive environment.

Workplan

Key Considerations from DEI Team

To inform development of this workplan, the Department held a workshop, offered individual meetings, and hosted presentations with the agency's DEI Team. Feedback provided by the DEI Team from these events emphasized three main priorities for consideration as we develop and implement our DEI Plan:

(1) Prioritize internal culture change and workforce diversity recognizing the importance of creating a more diverse and inclusive internal culture, as well as diversifying the workforce to ensure the agency's success in the future.

(2) Allow enough time for a third-party organizational assessment, which will form the basis of the DEI strategies and priorities in the Strategic Plan. This is a key priority of the DEI team.

(3) Provide adequate time for stakeholders, staff, and sovereigns to engage, respecting their capacity and availability. Where possible, the agency will seek to build upon existing work and information to be respectful of internal and external parties' time and resources.

Staffing Structure – Roles and Responsibilities

Strategic Plan Coordinator: A Strategic Plan coordinator will conduct day-to-day work and preparations for Strategic Plan activities. This individual will develop materials, coordinate with consultants, coordinate with the Strategic Plan Committee, DEI Team, IWRS team, IT Strategic Plan teams, Tribes, stakeholders, and leadership to move the work forward in time for completion of the Strategic Plan. It is not known at this time whether the Strategic Plan coordinator will be a stand-alone position or part of other job duties, due to the pending 2023-2025 budget.

Strategic Plan Committee: The agency will formulate a Strategic Plan Committee made up of two staff members from each division (total of 10) and five managers. To ensure a focus on DEI, the Strategic Plan committee will include at least two members from the DEI Team. To ensure coordination with other actions and given the focus on actions to fulfill the DEI Plan components, the Strategic Plan Committee will also include at least one staff member focused on the IT Strategic Plan work, communications, human resources, and public engagement.

- 2 staff and 1 manager from Field Services Division
- 2 staff and 1 manager from Technical Services Division
- 2 staff and 1 manager from Water Rights Services Division

- 2 staff and 1 manager from Administrative Services Division
 - At least one from IT working on the IT Strategic Plan
 - At least one from HR working on an inclusive workforce
- 2 staff and 1 manager from Director's Office
 - At least 1 focusing on inclusive communications
 - At least 1 focusing on public and community engagement
 - At least 1 focusing on the IWRS
- If obtained in the 2023 session, 1-2 staff engaged in DEI work.

Strategic Plan Advisory Group: Will include two staff members from the DEI Team, as well as members of leadership and staff designated to develop the plan.

To ensure integration, the staff coordinator will conduct regular check-ins with the following individuals and groups:

- DEI Team: The DEI Team will contribute ideas for the ensuring that the OWRD Strategic Plan integrates and advances DEI work.
- Environmental Justice Public Advocate (if different from positions on the Strategic Plan Committee)
- Tribal Liaison
- IWRS Coordinator and/or IWRS Agency Group
- IT Strategic Plan Group
- Water Resources Commission

Key Partners for Strategic and DEI Plan Development

Internal Partners / Participants

- Water Resources Commission
- Agency Staff
- Agency Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team
- Agency Leadership Team
- Agency Management Group

External Partners / Participants

- DAS and Governor's Office (guidance and direction on plans)
- Environmental Justice Council, Racial Justice Council – Environmental Equity Committee, Cultural Resources Working Group of Legislative Commission on Indian Services, and Natural Resources Task Force of Legislative Commission on Indian Services
- Tribes
- Cities/counties
- Water Users
- Consultants

- Community based organizations- environmental justice advocates, conservation groups, and other public interest organizations
- Members of the public
- Other natural resources agencies via the Integrated Water Resources agency team or Water Core team

Anticipated Methods of Engagement

In order to facilitate greater engagement in the development of the Strategic Plan, including the DEI portion, OWRD plans to employ a variety of methodologies. The Department is currently involved in a comprehensive engagement process to develop the IWRS and aims to leverage this effort as a basis for the Strategic Plan. Additionally, OWRD intends to conduct an internal survey to identify perceived gaps in the existing plan, potential areas for improvement, and priority actions. Furthermore, the Department plans to hold focus groups with its staff to better understand necessary employee initiatives, as well as conduct meetings/surveys with external partners and participants. Finally, the Department will work collaboratively with the Commission to determine their desired level of engagement. A more refined engagement plan will be developed.

Preliminary Timelines



Visualized Simplified Workplan



Building a foundation June - July 2023

- Provide DEI Trainings to begin developing foundational knowledge of DEI among staff and management.
- Assess ability to fund a 3rd party DEI organizational assessment; if able to fund, contract with consultant to conduct the assessment. The assessment should identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
 - Selecting consultant:
 - OWRD is currently reviewing responses from its On-Call, DEI Consultant services RFP.
 - Strategic Plan consultants: Identification of a consultant is on hold until DAS provides list of approved vendors.
- Refine and further develop workplan; begin engagement plan development:

- Methods to consider includes 1:1s, focus groups, short surveys, subgroups, topic specific small groups, virtual and in-person meetings, and interviews.
- Leverage existing work and engagement where possible.
- Define objectives for the Strategic Plan and DEI portion of the strategic plan that aligns with the organization's mission and values.
- Consider the plans intended function and methods of accountability.
- Compile and review feedback gathered from the DEI Team, interviews, IWRS engagement reports, and other sources to begin informing the plan.
- Find opportunities to build trust, buy-in, and create a unified understanding of the purpose and intended use of the plan.
- Establish effective communication channels for updates on progress.

Engagement: August - October 2023

- Initiate contact with community partners to gauge interest and capacity.
- Finalize internal and external engagement plan.
- Begin implementing engagement plan.

Feedback Synthesis: October - December 2023

- Create reports and recommendations based on the collected information. Consider disaggregated information so that it represents the diverse viewpoints.
- Identifying any gaps or biases in information, addressing them as needed. This could include conducting further research or seeking out additional input from underrepresented groups.
- Create a tracking method so that contributors know how their input was addressed in the final plan.

Priority & Action Development: January - February 2024

- Establish priority goals, objectives, and actions in alignment with DAS guidance and OWRD's mission and values.
- Develop metrics for measuring success:
 - Ensure that priority action items are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) and consider impact on marginalized and underrepresented communities.
 - The actions should lead with racial equity in mind.
 - Include ways to track progress and hold individuals and teams accountable.
- Allocate adequate resources, including financial, human, and technological resources, to support the implementation of the action items.
- Assess opportunities to engage internal and external partners in this process.

Drafting: February - March 2024

- Develop draft of Strategic Plan, with integrated DEIJ strategies and priorities.

Review & Integration: March - April 2024

- Present the draft plan to internal partners for feedback.
- Integrate feedback into draft.

Final Edit: May 2024

- Prepare for final publication.

Publication: June 2024

- Submit the final plan by June 1.

Planning Debrief: June - August 2024

- Solicit feedback from staff and external partners to assess the plan creation process and engagement.
- Inform staff and external partner how their feedback was used.

Barriers & Challenges Impacting Plan Development and Implementation

Limited resources and 2023 Legislative Session: There are limited staff, budget, and time to devote to the planning process, which can be a barrier to the development of a comprehensive and effective plan. A significant factor that remains uncertain is the outcome of the 2023 legislative session and its potential impact on the agency's workload, capacity, and resources. For example, the Governor's Recommended Budget includes two positions focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as water equity and environmental and racial justice. If funded, these positions will provide significant capacity and expertise for the agency to be successful in this work. Conversely, a reduction in the agency's budget may pose challenges to meaningfully executing this work.

Potential Changes in Leadership: Appointment of a new director is likely to occur in mid-to-late 2023. Directors are integral in shaping Strategic Plans and setting agency priorities.

Time constraints: Having adequate time is important for relationship building, buy-in, and engagement; however, it may be challenging to balance this need with the need to develop the plan within a certain timeline and in alignment with other timelines.

Communication: Effective communication is essential for successful engagement and plan development; however, challenges such as unclear communication and a lack of transparency can hinder engagement efforts and lead to misunderstandings, harm, or distrust.

Project management: The agency has a number of new projects from the legislature and the Governor, in addition to its own priority projects to advance its mission. Managing the variety of projects and workloads, as well as public engagement is an ongoing challenge.

Staff engagement: It can be difficult to create spaces where all feel welcome to contribute, learn, and grow. The plan may not adequately advance the key focus areas if staff members do not feel adequately supported to participate in the plan development process. Successful engagement takes time and planning, and occasionally the need to modify approaches based on feedback and assessing what is working and what is not.

Stakeholder engagement: If OWRD does not engage with a diverse range of stakeholders, including environmental justice communities, the plan may not reflect the needs and interests of all Oregonians the agency is seeking to serve. Additionally, external partners may not have the capacity to engage; therefore, we will need to seek ways to effectively utilize and be respectful of their time, including incorporating their contributions from other agency work.

Data and information gaps: OWRD may lack the data and information needed to develop evidence-based plans and create metrics to track progress over time. This can make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of strategic goals and adjust plans as needed.

Be mindful of best practices in change management: It is important for leaders to support change through clear communication, education, and collaboration with staff members. Creating a shared understanding of agency initiatives and involving staff in the planning process can help to build support for and sustain change. Agency should undertake work in a manner that reduces stress associated with change, and enhances resiliency to change, and is supportive of changes needed to understand and address DEI work. The agency will need to take actions to reduce fear of the unknown, unconscious biases, perceived threats, lack of understanding, and feelings of emotional resistance.

Appendix A

Definitions

Racial equity means closing the gaps so that race can no longer predict any person's success, which simultaneously improves outcomes for all. To achieve racial equity, we must transform our institutions and structures to create systems that provide the infrastructure for communities to thrive equally. This commitment requires a paradigm shift on our path to recovery through the intentional integration of racial equity in every decision.¹

Diversity means honoring and including people of different backgrounds, identities, and experiences collectively and as individuals. It emphasizes the need for sharing power and increasing representation of communities that are systemically underrepresented and under-resourced. These differences are strengths that maximize the state's competitive advantage through innovation, effectiveness, and adaptability.²

Equity acknowledges that not all people, or all communities, are starting from the same place due to historic and current systems of oppression. Equity is the effort to provide different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. Equity actionably empowers communities most impacted by systemic oppression and requires the redistribution of resources, power, and opportunity to those communities.³

Inclusion is a state of belonging when persons of different backgrounds, experiences, and identities are valued, integrated, and welcomed equitably as decision-makers, collaborators, and colleagues. Ultimately, inclusion is the environment that organizations create to allow these differences to thrive.⁴

Environmental burden means the environmental and health risks to communities caused by the combined historic, current and projected future effects of: (a) Exposure to conventional pollution and toxic hazards in the air or in or on water or land; (b) Adverse environmental conditions caused or made worse by other contamination or pollution; and (c) Changes in the environment resulting from climate change, such as water insecurity, drought, flooding, wildfire, smoke and other air pollution, extreme heat, loss of traditional cultural resources or foods, ocean acidification, sea-level rise and increases in infectious disease.⁵

Environmental justice means equal protection from environmental and health risks, fair treatment and meaningful involvement in decision making of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, immigration status, income or other identifies with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies that affect the environment in which people live, work, learn, and practice spirituality and culture.⁶

¹ 2022 State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan.
https://www.oregon.gov/das/Docs/DEI_Action_Plan_2021.pdf

² 2022 State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan

³ 2022 State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan

⁴ 2022 State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan

⁵ ORS 182.535(2)

⁶ ORS 182.535(3)

Environmental justice communities are communities of color, communities experiencing lower incomes, communities experiencing health inequities, tribal communities, rural communities, remote communities, coastal communities, communities with limited infrastructure and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth, and persons with disabilities.⁷

Meaningful Involvement means:

- a) Members of vulnerable populations have appropriate opportunities to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environment or health;
- b) Public involvement can influence a decision maker's decision;
- c) The concerns of all participants involved are considered in the decision-making process; and
- d) Decision makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of members of vulnerable populations.⁸

Racial justice means systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all people.⁹

Remote community means a community with low population density and high geographic remoteness.¹⁰

⁷ ORS 182.535(4)

⁸ ORS 182.535(7)

⁹ ORS 176.350(11)(b)

¹⁰ ORS 182.535(9)