



The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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To Whom It May Concern

Subject: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Assessment

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) is currently inviting proposals for a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Assessment of the Association, headquartered in Washington, DC.

BACKGROUND

The Association is a 501c (6) not-for-profit organization. Founded in 1902, the Association represents North America's fish and wildlife agencies to advance sound, science-based management and conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest. You can access our web site at www.fishwildlife.org.

The Association currently has a staff of 25 headquartered in Washington, DC with offices in Texas (two staff), West Virginia (three staff) and Arizona (one staff).

The Association has created an internal values team focused on increasing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion among the staff. This group has implemented several initiatives to date and created a DEI framework to guide the Association's DEI efforts (attached).

It should be noted that the focus of this assessment is on the Association and its staff. At the same time, as a trade association representing our 50-state fish & wildlife agency members, the Association's efforts are always linked to, and related to, those of our member agencies. Therefore, the Association's success in implementing DEI internally has a direct bearing on our ability to serve and support our members' needs as well.

SERVICES REQUESTED

The following are suggested deliverables for this project. Applicants should feel welcome to make edits or suggestions to this list.

- Work with the Association's Values Team and Leadership Team to develop DEI metrics for the Association.

-Work with the Association's Values Team and Leadership Team to gather data based upon metrics.

-Review and evaluate appropriateness and possible impact of steps and training implemented to date.

-Review the Association's current DEI framework and evaluate its appropriateness based on stated objectives.

-Measure baseline attitudes of AFWA staff regarding current and future DEI efforts. Provide a means to update and analyze changes over time.

-Based on data gathered and a review of the current DEI framework, make recommendations for future actions to further the Association's DEI objectives.

INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED IN PROPOSALS

-Please explain how you will fulfill the services requested including the process (e.g., in-person interviews, online surveys).

-The following specific topics, not intended to be all inclusive, are of specific interest to the Association and your submission will be strengthened by addressing how they will be addressed:

- Recruiting and hiring practices: employer bias, equal opportunity, and equity
- Talent pipeline: internship program, junior staff, partnering with educational institutions
- Mentorship and sponsorship programs and retaining employees of diverse backgrounds
- Measuring inclusivity at the workplace: monitoring and evaluation of cultural and racial diversity: combating bias at the workplace Sex and gender at the workplace: equality and combating bias
- Physical and mental disabilities: equality and combating bias
- Diversity of age and generational gaps: cohesion and combating bias
- Unconscious bias, stereotypes, microaggressions, and code-switching at the workplace
- Intercultural competence

All submission should include references and a short statement about your qualifications to perform this work for the Association. The names and qualifications of key personnel who will work with the Association should also be included.

BUDGET

The maximum budget for this assessment is \$15,000.

TIMELINE FOR SELECTION PROCESS

- July 30, 2022 – All proposals submitted to Association
- August 15, 2022 – Final Vendor Selected

INFORMATION ENCLOSED:

For your information, enclosed is a copy of the following information to assist you in your proposal:

- AFWA DEI Framework
- Summary of DEI Work at AFWA to date

Please contact John Lord with any questions about your submission. As noted above, all proposals must be received by 5:00 p.m. on July 30, 2022. We are requesting electronic proposals only which can be emailed to John at jlord@fishwildlife.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

John Lord
Chief Operating Officer

AFWA's DEI Framework

April 2022

This document is a framework for AFWA's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) journey. It will evolve over time. It should be flexible and fluid as we learn, make mistakes, and decide to change course. We will review the framework once a year and survey staff to keep it current and up to date.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT: The Association recognizes that participation in our work by people with diverse views, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences is necessary to fulfill our mission. The Association is committed to fostering an inclusive organization and work environment where all people can thrive.

WHY: Embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion work allows for more diverse perspectives that can improve innovation and problem-solving, provides a more welcoming environment, and increases productivity, and can improve retention. AFWA's DEI work is intended to help us achieve our Mission, create a more welcoming and inclusive culture, and better support our members in their efforts around relevancy and creating a more diverse workforce.

How is the Framework integral to AFWA's Staff Values? AFWA's Staff Values are Community, Collaboration, Responsiveness, Respect, and Excellence. There is a strong connection between DEI work and our Staff Values because our Values are the foundation of AFWA's culture and serve to create a welcoming and inclusive workplace where all belong.

Community: True community can only be achieved by ensuring everyone is included and respected.

Collaboration: A component of collaboration was the following Associated Behavior. "Function as a team to provide the highest quality products and meet our mission and vision." To function as a team, staff need to feel valued, respected, heard, and included.

Respect: Being willing and open to have challenging but respectful conversations; valuing and appreciating diverse opinions; and cultivating an environment that is open to and values diverse opinions, backgrounds, and perspectives are part of Respect and integral to our DEI work.

Excellence: Increasing diversity will support and enhance our ability to do exceptional work.

How is the Framework integral to AFWA's Strategic Plan and Organizational Values? A framework to enhance DEI will support AFWA's vision of "providing conservation leadership for a sustainable, publicly supported future for fish and wildlife." This framework will provide tangible evidence of the Association's commitment to its Organizational Values: community, inclusiveness, respect, integrity, collaboration, and excellence. DEI work connects to all six goals of the current [strategic plan](#). The strategic objectives that will be particularly served by AFWA's focus on DEI include 1.6, 2.2, 2.5-2.7, 3.1, 3.3, 3.5, 3.8, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 6.1, and 6.3.

DEI GOAL and OBJECTIVES:

Goal: Foster a welcoming and inclusive work environment where staff can thrive.

Objectives:

- A. Provide opportunities to increase awareness, understanding, experiences, and skill in addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- B. Develop meaningful relationships with individuals and groups that have been marginalized and/or underserved to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

C. Create organizational policies, practices, and procedures that are informed by DEI considerations.

STRATEGIES/ACTIONS TABLE

Objective(s) Addressed	Strategy/Tactics/Actions	Timeframe	Metric	Actions Taken
A, C	Conduct a DEI assessment (audit) to better inform our understanding of where AFWA is and actions it can implement to achieve our DEI Goals	January 2022- July 2022	DEI assessment (audit) conducted, and recommendations reviewed and discussed to update Framework, hiring practices and procedures, etc.	
A	Conduct bystander training to provide staff with the tools to recognize, intervene (when appropriate and safe), and show empathy as needed to victims of inappropriate behavior.	January 2022- May 2022	Conducted Bystander Training. Consider a pre- and post-training evaluation.	March 1 and March 31 st training with Fran Sepler;
A, C	Encourage all staff to have at least one DEI item included in their performance work plan to begin to integrate DEI in our daily work.	January 2022 – March 2022	Each staff performance plan either has a DEI component or considers applicable aspects of their work through the lens of DEI.	Added a performance element about values/AFWA culture
A	Have a DEI-focused staff meeting quarterly to generate input and discuss specific DEI topics and actions. Consider having someone come in as a speaker on occasion.	February, April, July, October	Conducted scheduled discussions and provided a report out of outcomes or results.	
B	Investigate opportunities for an annual Fellowship	February 2022	Opportunities determined and assessed to move to the next step.	Ongoing, Deb, Kelly, Ron meet to discuss on April 7th
B	Create summer internship for 2022.	June 2022		
A, C	Develop group agreements and common language (e.g., definitions) for staff DEI discussions (consider the need for a facilitator).	March 2022		

A, B, C	Work with leadership to consider developing a policy to provide staff with one paid day off per year to participate in a group or individual volunteer opportunity that advances DEI.	May 2022	AFWA pays for staff time (e.g., one day a year) to cover the employee work time of approved volunteering opportunity. All hours are tracked.	
C	Investigate what actions we can take to ensure our work is accessible to those with disabilities.	August 2022	Need is determined.	
A, C	Conduct anonymous staff surveys to help update/adapt framework (e.g., measure progress on actions and objectives, identify areas for improvement, generate new ideas)	October 2022 (annually here on out)	Survey results	

Background/Context on Some Proposed Actions:

What is a DEI assessment (audit)? An assessment by a third-party of DEI at all levels of the organization. This includes policies, procedures, practices, programs, and culture. A DEI audit would also include interviews or focus groups with all staff members. It would identify areas of improvement and make recommendations on how to move forward, as well as identify the things that are working well.

What are group agreements? Sometimes referred to as working agreements, these are guidelines that define how groups want to work together and what they want in a working environment. These might include things like agreeing to be present, actively listening, challenging others respectfully, trusting intent, acknowledging impact, maintaining confidentiality, and including grace and forgiveness. The possibilities are endless!

What is shared language? A common language for talking about and across differences/people developing understanding amongst themselves based on language (e.g., spoken, written) to help them communicate more effectively. An example might be defining what is meant when using the term diversity – does diversity refer only to race and gender, or does it also refer to gender identity, etc.?

Fellowship idea: The idea would be to provide college students and recent graduates from diverse backgrounds with more opportunities in the field of wildlife and natural resources conservation by creating a conservation internship program in the DC area in partnership with other NGOs.

DEI Overview May 20

Guiding Principles:

1. Catalog the DEI work we have done and that is ongoing (training, paid internships, hiring practices, policies and procedures, etc.)
2. Ground our actions in the Strategic Plan and the AFWA staff Values
3. Engage staff every other month at a staff meeting (next would be in July)
4. Advance the roadmap concept
5. Focus is on AFWA as an organization not the broader community.
6. Consider what becoming a learning organization means for AFWA and DEI. A learning organization being one that creates the safety for people to make mistakes or fail, that values growth and adaptation.
7. This is everyone's work.

What we have learned:

- To date we have had moved forward as some have said with random intentionality
- We are not all in the same place.
- We do not all agree on the pace of the journey.
- We do not yet know what our shared purpose or vision is.
- Not everyone is comfortable engaging in the staff meeting venue.
- We do not yet have the psychological safety we need to have these conversations completely openly.
- We have heard about the loss and/or fear of loss that staff are experiencing. Jen shared some insight about this at the May 20th Leadership Team meeting and can bring the Team up to speed on May 24th.

Some things from our discussions with Carolyn Finney:

- Consider "how we evolve/mature to honor our values and culture."
- What is our organizations vision? How do we focus?
- Being ok with not being perfect and showing vulnerability.
- How do we build the capacity to lean in?
- How do we create safety knowing that this will not always be comfortable?
- What are our intentions? How do we be intentional?
- Options for considering what we do moving forward – specific trainings, books, facilitated conversations, develop a vision, etc.
- How do we do this work when everyone is maxed out with work and (as we heard on the second conversation with Carolyn) tired?
- How do we build our capacity to be uncomfortable?
- The answer is less important than being able to have the conversation.

Questions posed to staff at the May 4th staff meeting:

- How do we grow and mature as an organization to live our values?

- How do we meet this knowing that we all have different backgrounds, experiences, and have a range of ideas on where AFWA should go and what we should do?
- How do we create the safety needed to sit in our discomfort and share openly?
- How do we become a learning organization on this issue to allow us to make mistakes, grow and adapt?
- How do we develop the capacity for these conversations? Do we need training, facilitated discussions, readings?
- What is our pace?

What came out at the May 4th staff meeting when staff were asked “What do you think our next steps are?” and “What do you need as an individual and we need as an organization to define our purpose and develop a roadmap?”

- How do we balance the different paces between how fast the Association is moving versus the pace of some of the initiatives we manage (e.g., Project Wild).
- What does soul-searching mean? Do we need to do some soul-searching as a staff?
- How does DEI show up in our performance plans? Could this be a tangible step forward?
- How do we make this real for each of us but also weave it together?
- Different opinions on whether we do or do not need facilitation to develop our purpose/vision and a roadmap
- Understand the loss associated with all of this.
- Would a diversity statement be useful?
- Could we use Teams and break out groups at our staff meeting discussions to provide spaces for these conversations?

Concepts from the Values Team discussion on 5/17 for consideration by Leadership Team:

- Do we need to work on psychological safety first?
- Could use a facilitator to guide conversations but this may take too long to organize.
- A roadmap would lay out the journey in manageable steps.
- How do we balance leaving time for the process and getting everyone involved with moving forward?
- Need to embrace diverse opinions on this.
- Values team could guide but all engage.
- Overall advancing DEI is a journey and will take time. How much time are we willing to invest? An hour at staff meeting isn't enough.
- One way forward:
 - Develop an anonymous short survey to glean what people think our purpose should be before the July staff meeting (what is your vision of AFWA in 10 years? What is your future desired condition for AFWA?)
 - Values Team comes up with a draft purpose based on this input.
 - Break into groups at the July staff meeting to get additional input on what values Team comes up with.
 - After we have our purpose, we set up small groups to work on developing the roadmap in between staff meeting where we get full engagement.

- Or have a small group develop a theory of change once we decide on a future desired condition.
- A channel in Teams could also be helpful to advance portions of our conversations.

Potential future staff meeting topics/questions:

- What have we done related to DEI over that last year that has been successful?; 2) What more should we do in the future?
- Checking in with staff to see how this landed for them?
- How we can all create a safe space for these conversations.
- How does DEI show up in your performance work plan? What are your measures of success? Are there additional things you need from AFWA to achieve that success (ie. Additional training, etc.)?
- Based on your committee conversations at the North American and our staff discussions with Carolyn Finney, what do you see as your next steps in better integrating DEI into the work of your committees? What can AFWA do to support those next steps?
- We had some really good initial conversations with Carolyn Finney around racial justice in the workplace and conservation community. How should we continue the conversation and what can we do to ensure staff feel safe to share?

What we have already done.

Opportunity to have read and engage on a book last year

Updating hiring procedures to be more thoughtful and intentional about DEI

Developing a summer internship

Outlined what could be the way forward for a diversity Fellowship opportunity with other organizations to bring in a cohort of individuals

Sarah asked Committee chairs to consider DEI – Where do we go with this?, Jude shared how the BCC is being intentional about its DEI discussions

MATeam has workshops and courses

Two sessions with Carolyn Finney.

AFWA is working with Project WILD state coordinators to update the Project WILD Coordinator Handbook in order to strengthen and improve Project WILD's implementation through the lenses of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- A few years ago we added these questions to our annual report form that Project WILD coordinators submit every year:
 - “Are you doing anything to increase the diversity of Project WILD participants? Yes/No If so, how do you define ‘diversity,’ and what are you doing?”

- Approximately how many title I schools were reached through Project WILD workshops or other outreach?
- We have invited coordinators and/or created a venue for them to share expertise and practices that make Project WILD more inclusive. Here are some examples:
 - Webinar on meeting diverse learning needs with Project WILD
 - Webinar on Supporting Young Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
 - Webinar to discuss WILD & DEI, what coordinators are doing and how AFWA can support them
 - From this a team was formed to review our Coordinator Handbook and add content to highlight DEI practices and opportunities
 - Conference sessions on reaching underserved audiences and including people of all abilities in Project WILD
 - Coordinator program highlights: e.g., “Life of a Bird” connecting Montana students with Mexico students to learn about birds using Flying WILD
- We received an EPA grant through NAAEE that we will start working on this month. The grant provides for the following:
 - DEI training for all Project WILD coordinators
 - Seed grants and cohort training for outreach to improve and enhance DEI efforts related to Project WILD
 - Seed grants and cohort training for outreach to improve and enhance efforts to build connections with school districts and pre-service educators (which could include some lower-income school districts and HBCUs, for example)
- While we do not have great data on the students we are reaching, Project WILD represents an avenue of the Association to meet people of all walks of life via the education system. Growing Up WILD Home Connection cards are translated into Spanish, and GUW is used at many Head Start centers with English-Language Learners.

Survey Questions:

Maybe one open-ended but also shorter questions

What is the problem that we need to solve?

Is this a focus on racial diversity only? What about other diversity? = Maybe a question?

Do we need to focus on some aspect of diversity?

How does this support AFWA’s mission?

What types of diversity are we thinking about and talking about?

Why is it important?

Mission: We serve our members. Current and future generations, Future for fish and wildlife, publicly supported? You could build on those and talk about what is the role of AFWA staff – Maybe need skills, abilities to help states, relevancy

Marc’s suggestions –

The problem?

What are our opportunities for AFWA to improve its understanding of DEI issues,

How could our DEI work affect AFWA's ability to fulfil the mission—to advocate for the roles, responsibilities, and authorities of our member agencies to manage fish and wildlife as public trust resources for current and future generations?

Trying to wrap our heads around what we are grappling with and where peoples heads are? So start broad – describe something ask a few general questions?

To fulfill our mission -

How you rate this statement? – maybe a future question.

What areas can we make progress on what can we move forward?

What are we trying to do?