

Diversity & Inclusion Working Group

March 26, 2024

Attendees: 35

Agenda:

Call to order; Welcome and Introductions; Review of Agenda

- Round robin introductions
- Announcement- Jen Newmark will be stepping down as Chair since she has left state service and now working for WMI; David Buggs has stepped up as Chair of this Working Group

Work Plan

- Updated charge at the AFWA Annual Meeting 2023
 - **New Charge Statement:** To inspire, guide and support the conservation community in embracing the richness of diverse cultures, individuals, experiences, and perspectives. This is reflected through proactive actions that enhance diversity in the workplace, create a welcoming culture, and increase our relevance to the broader conservation community by being inclusive and intentional in our actions.
- Possible name change- Discussion
 - There is a challenge with nomenclature with the activities that we do, due to the political climate
 - We need to have everyone a part of the conservation; we cannot stop doing the work
 - Need to make sure we are still doing the activities without the banter around nomenclature (adaptation)
 - Possible name change to 'Access and Engagement'- it describes what we do without causing issues around 'hot topic' words
 - [Discussion]
 - Comment: Even if we change the name, 'they' will find another way to attack the work that we do; they wouldn't be attacking it if it wasn't working
 - Looking at how we can still do the work, being more strategic about how we do it; systems thinking approach to show how it will benefit the entire agency
 - Need to show this is a business priority
 - We need to not let language to determine our work; we will still get the work done
 - The word 'Access' can be confusing to people in this fish and wildlife community, it may have be important make sure it's clear what we are about
 - Many states have passed or in the process of passing legislation that prohibits state funds to be used for DEI programs- reason for having to look at our nomenclature so people can still participate and get the work done within the parameters of some state legislation
 - Maybe use the phrase 'Opportunity and Engagement'
 - 'Need to operate from our wisdom and not our wounds'
 - Right now we are just maintaining (DEI efforts), and maintaining doesn't move the needle

- Staying above the fray: navigating through a changing landscape (D. Buggs presentation)
 - Rules of engagement: be respectful, stay present, be thoughtful, be open to new ways of seeing and executing, collaborate, consider strategic actions
 - Anti DEI Legislations has been proposed:
 - 80 have been introduced
 - 9 have final legislative approval
 - 9 have been signed
 - Need leadership support to continue doing the work, even if the nomenclature has changed
 - Anti DEI legislation has prevented funding programs
 - Right now there is a lot of uncertainty where things will be going; election year with possible changes in congress and presidency politics
 - Risk assessments are being done about if the DEI work can be done in certain states
 - Fear and concern around perceived work and potential consequences
 - Must weigh risk and privilege
- What is the biggest concern moving forward with your people engagement strategy
 - Collateral damage (people with high risk and low privilege)
 - Hard not to discourage doing the work
 - Finding an effective strategy
 - Sliding backwards
 - Loosing allies because they don't see the work being done
 - Change is incremental- so may not see the needle move immediately
 - If we don't move into the areas where our constituents are, we'll lose relevancy in our states
 - Starting the lose the energy to fight the fight in this political environment
 - If we're not doing this, we are not managing the resources in the public trust
 - We'll lose the ability to do thoughtful and innovative work if we lose the diversity of employees doing that work; loss of potential
 - Lose the variety of perspectives
 - If we ostracize entire groups from working with or for us, we've lost a great deal of talent
 - Nobody is getting evaluated on 'it's the right thing to do'; that is not sustainable
 - Need to tie the work into how leadership is being evaluated and how it affects the bottom line for the organization
- Need to focus on the whole agency
 - You need to pick your battles carefully, but make sure you have Senior accomplices (not allies) first
 - Assess and assist
 - Begin with the end in mind
 - Make emotions the thermometer, not the thermostat
 - Breaking some things is great, starts with you (sometimes the first thing that needs to break is you; change your mindset)
- Watch your language

- **Access:** permission, liberty, or ability to enter, approach, or pass to and from a place or to approach or communication with a person or thing.
Admittance.
- **Engagement:** is a function of the relationship between an organization and its employees, customers, or constituents. It's about improving your workplace and culture, so everyone feels more connected and dedicated to your organization's goals and values.
- **Broadening participation:** provides for the discovery and nurturing of talent wherever it may be found. (recruitment, marketing, customers, etc)
- **Organizational relevancy:** the pertinence, meaningfulness, and importance that an organization earns with employees, customers, and all stakeholders.
- **Cultural competences :** refers to the skills to relate and work effectively in culturally, recognized and respecting their unique backgrounds and how they contribute to the whole society.

'Empty stomachs have no ears'

- If you help people with what they need, they will start to listen to what you have to say
- Organize vs Agonize
 - It's a journey, not a destination
 - Passion and progress
 - Emotional intelligence; respond vs react
 - Windshield vs rear view mirror (look forward and not be stuck in the past/what has happened)
 - Plan for resistance
 - **Systems Thinking** brings everyone along
 - **Why systems thinking?** fundamental shift from seeing things in isolation to seeing how they are interconnected with the system; address causes and effects within the system to achieve the results that benefit everyone in the system; keeping the entire system in mind when we need to make a change.
- The Mission is Paramount
 - How do you tie it to the agency's mission (not today's headlines)
 - Critical questions to ask
 - The business of conservation (people buy benefits not features)
 - Don't leave anyone out of the design
 - What your leadership gets measured on
 - Which partners see broader engagement as important?
 - Value proposition
- Policy + Activity
 - Focus on policy changes that support all employees and end users
 - Look for champions in each department
 - Keep it simple (slow change is permanent)
 - Use positive language, not threats
- Measure what matters
 - Representation plus (employee engagement scores, funding, grants, external participation, etc)
 - Data tells the story, but not the whole story

- Feedback, broad collaboration, positive recognition, recommendations, etc
 - A few good stories
- Special Delivery
 - Garbage can lid vs Fine China (often times people are delivering a great message, but in a threatening way); deliver message in a fashion where people can consume it.
 - How you like me now (ask for feedback constantly)
 - Give it away (give others credit even if their role was small)
- We all win
 - Solicit positive stories of external engagement
 - Highlight efforts of internal and external retention
 - Apply for leadership awards (best place to work for, etc)
 - Celebrate everyone (make it a big deal)

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

What are some actions your organization can take to create more access and engagement?

Group 1:

- Funding
- Language access program
- Youth engagement (more strategic)
- Reach under represented communities
 - Can just specify communities
 - Under served
- Resources to identify opportunities to better serve communities
- Hiring pool targeting new permanent residents
 - Where we look to hire/advertise
 - How we word position descriptions and advertisements

Group 2:

- What services are provided and by which agency- share credit with partners
- Meet the community where they are
- Barriers assessment- policies
- University pipelines
- Accomplice versus ally – know your agency privileges
- Explore partner pathways-federal/state agencies don't have a much liberty as NGO's may have; lean into this and utilize each other's strengths.

Group 3:

- Offering programming in other languages
- Diversity of interns and increasing exposure
- Use of a multicultural advertising agency; translation of business
 - Use of diagrams and other visuals to get message out
- Guiding interpretation by clarifying intent
- Representative imagery
- Asking folks directly who to engage them
 - Parks

- What are their needs
 - Invitations
- Partnering with NGO's
- Improve leadership approachability
 - Multilevel leadership
 - Encourage out of box thinking
- Internal cultural competency training

Group 4:

- Start conversations to understand and be aware of attacks
- Engage (strategically) with partners
- Better articulate the value proposition
- Intentionally link networks
- Lean into language access
- Commit support and resources to staff doing this work
- Create space and time to bring internal staff along. Tie to strategic plan, mission, etc.

Group 5:

- Meaningful presence in ALL communities
- Non-agency partners
- Infusing policy with DEI
- Develop trust in diverse talents
- Adapt our hiring practices and position management to reflect actual Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA's)