



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Minutes DRAFT

12:30pm -2pm, Wednesday, March 12, 2025

AGENDA

Minutes keeper: Scott Gall

12:30 pm – Welcome, check in (all, led by Eleanor) – Warm up question: if you could master one skill overnight, what would it be?

12:50 pm –Review minutes from last meeting (led by Scott) *No one had any corrections.*

12:50 pm — Discuss Federal Executive Order DEI ramifications. Information sharing, what we know, how are partners affected? Also preparing for potential EO enforcement. This informs grants, public-facing language, long-range business plan (led by LB).

Federal Executive Orders (EO) that have been issued by the current presidential administration are still in legal flux as they have been challenged in courts. Additionally, there may or may not be additional EO's in the future. At this meeting the discussion purpose was to seek clarity on how to safely continue DEI work and District DEI actions, policies, practices and intensions. To be clear, the District intends to NOT change it's approach to DEI and will continue furthering the already stated goals. WMSWCD will retain and espouse our values, policies and practices in all regards.

One document was discussed, provided by Cascade Employer, "5 reasons organizations should not abandon DEI work". Those 5 being 1) Enhanced Financial Performance, 2) Improved Employee Engagement and Retention, 3) A Broader and More Skilled Talent Pool, 4) Increased Innovation and Problem-Solving and 5) Stronger Reputation and Brand Loyalty. The merits and applicability of these to WMSWCD and the current situation was briefly discussed.

For background, it was shared that at the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) – which WMSWCD is a participant – that many Districts around the country are choosing to err on the side of caution and remove terms called out in EO's. This is in the event the federal government is required to audit organizations receiving federal funds – that those terms have already been removed or altered. Some may be going as far remove diversity for any subjects –

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such as biodiversity. It was stated at this meeting that WMSWCD received federal funds directly (from NACD) or indirectly (through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board - OWEB).

Staff discussed the pros and cons of wordsmithing WMSWCD's website, documents and products for DEI related terms. A general feeling was that it was both too early to make any changes and that making in changes may have unintended consequences – including but not limited decreased transparency, reduction in trust in the District, alienating constituents/clientele, and others. One final point that was made was that the District is not breaking the law in any way with the DEI program and is most likely to only affect our federal funding – which currently only makes up 5% of the proposed 2025-2026 budget.

Staff will continue to track, research and follow the evolving EO process and impacts.

The Committee recommends that there would be no changes implemented at this time and await further developments as well as potential guidance from funding organizations such as OWEB, ODA, NRCS and NACD.

Further the committee recommends that the board discuss this, with urgency, this very topic and provide any decisions or recommendations to staff that they feel necessary.

Finally, the committee recommends that staff have further discussions with all team members – either at an all staff meeting, or a separate as-of-yet unscheduled meeting.

1:55 pm—Next steps, Lynn will work with the Board Chair and Board to consider the recommendation from the committee. Staff will further discuss this topic at a meeting to be determined by leadership. Co-chairs and committee members will be available to attend any board meeting in which the Board discusses this topic.

Next DEI Committee meeting scheduled 12:30-2pm, 6/11/25.

2:13 pm—Adjourn