
Date: Sept. 24, 2021

To: Environmental Quality Commission

From: Richard Whitman, Director

Subject: Item F: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at DEQ (Informational)
Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 2021, EQC meeting

Purpose of this item DEQ last reported to the commission on diversity, equity and inclusion issues at the agency in January 2021. Since that time, the DEI Transition Team and others, including the BIPOC Staff Affinity Group, have worked hard to advance DEI at DEQ. DEQ is still at early stages of incorporating DEI into our workplace culture. This report provides the commission with both a snapshot of where the agency currently is, and a picture of where we plan to go over the next year.

Background One element of the change DEQ seeks is to increase the level of diversity in staff and management. The following information is excerpted from DEQ's most recent Affirmative Action Report, which was finalized early this year.

“The percentage of people of color at DEQ increased from 12.2% in 2018 to 16.1% in 2020. Part of this increase is due to the number of employees identified as two or more races and those declining to identify by race or ethnicity. Statewide, people of color represent 19% of the State of Oregon’s workforce and 24% of the workforce population.

During the 2019-2021 biennium, diversity at DEQ improved but DEQ has more work to do to strengthen and support diversity, equity and inclusion. Between February 2019 and August 2020, DEQ received 3,404 job applications. People of color made up 24.74% of the candidate pool and 22.22% of new hires. Candidates identifying as two or more races and Hispanic or Latino were underrepresented in new hires.

People of color and women are underrepresented in supervisory positions. Although people of color make up 16.1% of DEQ’s workforce, people of color only account for 9.6% of supervisors. Forty-five percent of DEQ’s workforce is women but women hold only 28.8% of the supervisory positions.”

In short, while DEQ has made some progress in recent years, people of color and women are both underrepresented at both the professional staff level, and in management. DEQ needs to improve all aspects of recruitment and retention. This must include using more inclusive job announcements, building new networks for sharing employment opportunities, developing robust internship programs, continuing to diversify our classifications, using diverse hiring panels, equitable and inclusive onboarding programs, changes to trial service and performance evaluations, and strong support for employee retention and career development. As communities across Oregon become more diverse, DEQ's workforce needs to change as well so that we fully understand and can relate to the effects of our environment and pollution on people's lives and livelihoods.

Finally, during the past year, several people of color have left the agency at least in part because of issues with agency culture. Establishing, nurturing and strengthening psychological safety and true community within the agency is a critical component of ensuring a culture of belonging where diverse perspectives are heard, valued and respected. DEQ has work to do to assure that new and existing BIPOC employees, women and people of all gender identities feel fully welcome and included as part of the DEQ community, so that all of DEQ can truly thrive as we carry out our mission to protect public health and the environment.

As we support increasing diversity at DEQ, a significant related aspect of change is developing a workplace culture that strongly values equity and inclusion. Tomorrow, you will hear about exciting work that DEQ staff have initiated to help the agency address environmental justice. This important effort is a great example of how we need to bring values around equity and inclusion to how we do our work within the agency, as well as how we work with the communities we want to help thrive.

**Foundational
work on DEI
in 2021**

While several important pieces have been put in place to support DEI at DEQ, this work is still very much at a formational stage. The work this year has been led primarily by the DEI Transition Group, a group of volunteers that has worked through a set of teams to advance this work. The group's teams include a transition team, a communications team, and a resources team.

DEI Council

A primary focus of the Transition Group has been to help DEQ form a new, permanent, body to lead DEI work at the agency. The inaugural DEI Council has been selected after an open process to solicit interest and participation. The Council is made up of 14 people from across all of DEQ representing a cross-section of multiple forms of diversity. The DEI Council is the body within DEQ that will identify priority actions and work areas, including training and education, recruiting, retention and career advancement, ways of

supporting community, and barriers to success. The Council will begin meeting in October 2021.

DEI Coordinator

We were successful in establishing and funding a new position for DEI Coordinator in the 2021 legislature. This person will report directly to the Director, and will support the DEI Council by facilitating Council meetings, identifying resources to implement Council priorities, and tracking progress for the Council's work plan. We are in the final stages of recruiting the DEI Coordinator, and hope to be able to announce who the individual is at or before the EQC meeting.

DEI Resources

To increase diversity and inclusion, and to incorporate equity more fully into how we grow our workforce, DEQ will need external expert assistance. Under the leadership of the DEI Transition Group, we have completed most aspects of a competitive procurement to contract with external organizations that will provide expertise in assessing the agency's current state, developing recommendations for sequencing and content of training, facilitation, and systems changes within the agency.

DEQ also will create a limited duration position to support the work of the DEI Coordinator and the Council, providing capacity to research best practices at other organizations, and to track and provide support for implement DEI Council priorities. DEQ will seek permanent funding for DEI support in upcoming legislative sessions.

Affinity Groups

DEQ's Leadership Team has approved five affinity groups that are meeting regularly and providing a forum for diverse communities at DEQ to find mutual support. These groups are:

- BIPOC Staff
- BIPOC Managers
- Allies for Racial Justice
- Veterans/Armed Services
- DEQ Pride (LGBTQ2S+)

Collectively, these groups begin to form the foundation for a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging at DEQ. However, the hardest work will be to incorporate DEI values and understanding into the everyday work and work culture of all DEQ employees throughout the organization. That work can, and needs to, begin in earnest now so that we can maintain momentum and show real progress in welcoming diversity and helping our employees and leaders of the future thrive.

**DEI in DEQ's
Strategic Plan**

DEQ paused its work on a new strategic plan in late 2020 in order to reset the effort to incorporate DEI values and expertise into the effort. We are now just about ready to resume that effort, and look forward to working with the commission to build a strategic plan that fully incorporates these elements (along with environmental justice).

**EQC
involvement**

DEQ is seeking feedback from the commission regarding the work being done to advance DEI at the agency. In addition, DEQ is seeking one or two volunteers from the EQC to participate in the agency's strategic plan development, including the aspects of the plan centered on DEI.

As we put metrics in place to track progress and outcomes around diversity, equity and inclusion at DEQ a part of that system will be regular reporting to all of the agency, including the EQC. In particular, I will work with the DEI Council to set new measures for employee retention and job satisfaction that help us understand where we are currently and how we are changing for DEQ's BIPOC employees as well as other types of diversity

DEQ will provide an update to the commission regarding progress in advancing DEI at least once every six months, or more frequently if warranted. The updates will include reporting on metrics around diversity in recruiting and retention of staff and managers.