Neponset River Watershed Association

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Strategic Plan 2024-2026

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Statement

The Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) embraces diversity in all its forms and works to foster an environment where every voice is valued. Through our watershed stewardship work, we seek to dismantle barriers, promote equity, and cultivate a culture of respect, acceptance, and belonging both within our organization and across our watershed communities.

We aspire to be an organization whose Board, staff, members, donors and volunteers reflect the rich diversity of people within the Watershed. Only by incorporating people of all lived experiences, abilities, and resources, will we be able to build a healthy, accessible, and resilient River and Watershed, thus truly fulfilling NepRWA's mission.

Background on DEIB at NepRWA

Since its founding in 1967, the mission of the Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) has been to protect and restore the natural resources of the Neponset River, its tributaries, and surrounding watershed lands for the benefit of present and future generations. Our staff and Board of Directors work hard to ensure that the benefits of a healthy River and Watershed are shared equally by all neighborhoods across the Watershed and all people who live in, work in, or visit the Neponset River Watershed.

Pollution, environmental burdens, and environmental amenities are not equally distributed across the Neponset Watershed nor in our society as a whole. Racism and inequity are deeply rooted historical issues with consequences that span many generations. In many cases, the injustices we see today have been created by government policies, actions, or inactions with explicitly or implicitly racist or discriminatory intent. At times these choices have been justified on the basis of environmental protection or conservation.

NepRWA has long been conscious of these challenges, and has worked to make sure all areas of the Neponset Watershed are healthy and accessible. Some of these past efforts included opposing the Southwest Corridor Project in the late 1960's, a project which would have devastated both the River and many neighborhoods of color in the City of Boston. In the 1970's NepRWA proposed a bond bill to build recreational trails and parks along the Lower Neponset in Dorchester, Mattapan, Hyde Park and Milton. More recently, these efforts include helping to organize the Hyde Park Neponset River Cleanup, securing designation of the Lower Neponset River Superfund Site, investigating sources of bacterial pollution in state-mapped environmental justice communities, and investing in the creation and growth of our Greenways program with a focus on historically overlooked neighborhoods.

However, the events of 2020, including George Floyd's murder and the inequitable health and social outcomes revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, helped us recognize that NepRWA needs to be more intentional about addressing questions of social and environmental justice, environmental equity, and systemic racism in our work.

NepRWA engaged the Justice Belongs Institute as a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) consultant in 2022 to help us conduct a baseline assessment of our existing DEIB efforts, provide a series of trainings for both the Board and Staff, recommend next steps and priorities we should consider, and provide feedback and guidance on a DEIB Strategy and Action Plan to be developed by Board and Staff.

Through this process, NepRWA has been on a journey over the past few years to ensure our mission fully serves everyone within the Watershed. We have made it a priority to engage more deeply with members of historically excluded communities that have been under-represented in our work and leadership, and to ensure that these communities are fully reflected in our organization and our priorities.

This DEIB Strategic Plan summarizes the results of this initial effort and sets high level goals and objectives for how we intend to better recognize systemic issues, implement equitable and inclusive policies, and foster continued open dialogue both internally and externally to enrich our collective efforts. The companion DEIB Action Plan provides additional detail to help guide and track implementation of the efforts. We expect these priorities to be fully incorporated into our overall organizational strategic plan during its next update in 2025.

For definitions of key terms used in this document please refer to Appendix A. For baseline information on the population and demographics of our Watershed service area, please refer to Appendix B.

Goal 1: Ensure that the NepRWA Board and Staff better reflect the demographics of the cities and towns within the Watershed.

Objective 1.1
Recruit and retain staff members that better reflect the demographics of the communities within the watershed.

Strategies

1.1.1 Establish staff diversity goals that align with the demographics of the watershed community.

1.1.2 Compile hiring best practices recommended by DEIB consultant into a hiring standard operating procedure (SOP). These best practices will include creating an inclusive hiring and retention guide that will address the hiring pipeline, review of job descriptions, the interview process, and retention.

1.1.3 Establish a formal orientation process for new staff that includes basic DEIB topics.

1.1.4 Dedicate funding to ongoing DEIB training for all staff including: inclusive hiring / management practices, culturally relevant communication, accessible design best practices, and other topics.

Objective 1.2
Recruit and retain Board members that better reflect the demographics of the communities within the watershed.

Strategies

1.2.1 Establish goals to diversify Board membership to include those in historically excluded groups.

1.2.2 Utilize the Advisory Council (AC) and community advisory groups to strengthen relationships with individuals who may be candidates for service on the Board or other leadership roles.

1.2.3 Conduct training for Board members on DEIB issues and best practices.

1.2.4 Evaluate Board expectations to eliminate any unnecessary barriers to leadership participation.

1.2.5 Establish and maintain an “Onboarding and Engagement Task Force” to ensure that all new Board and Advisory Council members are successfully integrated into the group and to supervise ongoing efforts to support full engagement by diverse candidates.

Goal 2: Foster a collaborative, community-based approach to enhance partnerships with all stakeholders.

Objective 2.1
Establish and strengthen partnerships with new and existing community leaders and community based organizations (CBO) in historically excluded communities within the Watershed.

Strategies

2.1.1 Create a full-time Community Engagement Specialist role to promote engagement with community-based organizations and leaders of historically excluded constituencies.

2.1.2 Increase involvement in environmental justice (EJ) communities by identifying key leaders and organizations to understand their perspectives and priorities and to actively seek collaborative opportunities.

2.1.3 Ensure NepRWA Board and staff engage in personal relationship building with priority CBOs.

2.1.4 Collaborate with community-based partners to create and secure funding for initiatives addressing environmental concerns specific to these partners' communities.

2.1.5 Form community advisory groups to provide feedback on key programs and recruit participants from diverse backgrounds.

2.1.6 Establish event evaluation procedures to track and estimate participation by EJ communities and priority populations as prioritized by the DEIB Council.

Goal 3: Ensure all aspects of NepRWA's outreach, education programs, and events are broadly accessible and culturally responsive.

Objective 3.1
Strengthen NepRWA's social media presence to effectively engage with more diverse audiences.

Strategies

3.1.1 Develop a comprehensive social media strategy that includes messaging for diverse audiences.

3.1.2 Implement the use of analytics to measure the impact of social media and digital marketing efforts and support data-driven decisions.

3.1.3 Create culturally relevant content in a variety of formats that resonates with our target audiences.

Objective 3.2
Review website and printed materials to ensure inclusivity, cultural relevance, and accessibility for all.

Strategies

3.2.1 Develop a standardized set of representative languages to be used.

3.2.2 Update website to provide visibility of DEIB efforts within the organization, including, but not limited to, NepRWA's DEIB statement, land acknowledgement, and indigenous history pages.

3.2.3 Review and revise website and print materials for cultural awareness, representation of various constituencies, and accessibility.

Objective 3.3
Review school outreach and curriculum to ensure inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, and accessibility for all.

Strategies

3.3.1 Conduct a thorough review of existing educational materials and programs to identify ways to incorporate diverse perspectives, voices, and experiences into the curriculum and program offerings.

3.3.2 Evaluate current practices for seeking feedback from students, teachers, and community members to inform curriculum development, and update as needed.

Goal 4: Ensure successful implementation and refinement of the DEIB Strategic Plan through monitoring and ongoing evaluation.

Objective 4.1
Monitor the implementation of NepRWA's DEIB Strategic Plan.

Strategies

4.1.1 Task the Board with oversight of implementation of the DEIB Strategic Plan, via its integration into the NepRWA Strategic Plan.

4.1.2 Develop process to monitor implementation of the DEIB Strategic Plan.

4.1.3 Ensure funding is available to implement the DEIB Strategic Plan via the annual budget development process and targeted fundraising efforts.

Objective 4.2

Evaluate the progress of NepRWA's DEIB Strategic Plan to recognize successes, identify challenges and areas for improvement, and make necessary adjustments to further strengthen the plan's effectiveness.

Strategies

4.2.1 Develop processes, prioritizing the collection of NepRWA community feedback data, to evaluate progress toward achieving the goals of the DEIB Strategic Plan.

4.2.2 Leverage data and feedback obtained during the evaluation process to make informed adjustments and enhancements to the DEIB strategic plan.

Appendix A: Definitions

Diversity - Diversity refers to the presence of differences within our organization. These differences can include, but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves diverse perspectives, work experiences, life experiences, and viewpoints that enrich our organization and contribute to our mission of sustainable watershed management and community engagement.

Equity - Equity involves ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Equity requires an ongoing commitment to address historical and systemic inequities within our organization and the communities in the Watershed, ensuring that everyone has the support and resources they need to succeed and contribute fully to our mission.

Inclusion - Inclusion is the intentional creation of environments in which any individual or group is and feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. An inclusive organization actively invites the contribution and participation of all people. In the context of our watershed organization, this means fostering a culture where diverse voices and perspectives are heard and considered in decision-making processes, project planning, and community outreach efforts.

Belonging - Belonging is the sense of being accepted and valued as an integral member of the organization. It is the feeling that individuals can bring their authentic selves to their work, volunteer activities, and Board or advisory roles without fear of discrimination or marginalization. For our watershed organization, creating a sense of belonging means that everyone, regardless of their lived experience or identity, feels that they are an important part of our team and our mission to protect, restore, and enjoy the Watershed for current and future generations.

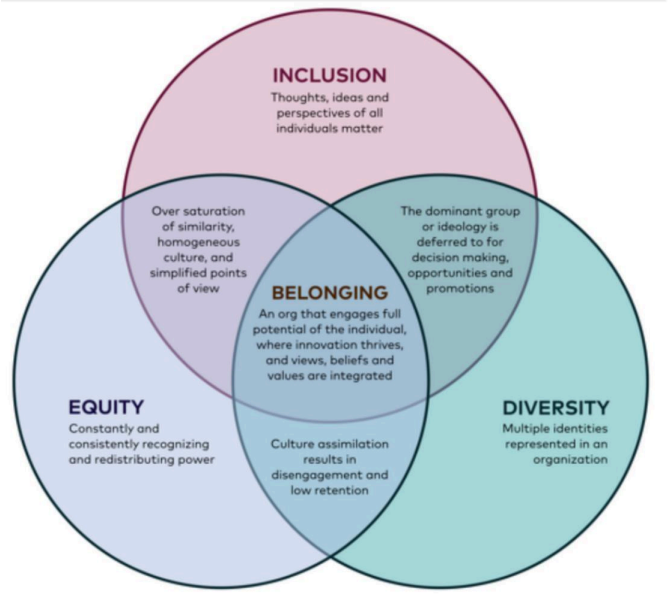

Image credit: Dr. Vivian Smith-Del Toro
https://globalexecutivebusinessconsultants.com

Appendix B: Baseline Watershed Demographics

The Neponset River Watershed includes portions of 14 cities and towns from the headwaters in Foxborough to the Estuary in Boston and Quincy. As of the 2020 Census the overall population of the Neponset River Watershed is approximately 330,000.

The EPA EJ Screening Tool provides demographic information for a user-selected area of interest that does not conform to municipal or other standard census boundaries, but the resulting figures are approximate because of the challenges of accurately selecting an irregular shape. The state also maintains their own version of an EJ map here.

Basic demographic data for the Watershed from EJ Screening Tool are summarized below and the raw reports are included for reference. This information provides only a crude summary of the diversity of perspectives and life experiences across our watershed as a whole, but it is intended to provide a concept of what it means to be "representative of the diversity of the Watershed."

For comparison purposes, these data are further divided by the approximate portion of the Watershed located in the cities of Boston and Quincy, and the portion of Watershed composed of the smaller or "suburban" towns. This disaggregation highlights the large portion of the overall Watershed population located in the two cities. It also highlights the fact that although the most diverse populations are found in the cities, there is a significant level of diversity within the "suburban" communities as well.

Disclaimer - High level summaries like this can reinforce inaccurate perceptions that each of us may carry, the various categories provided by the EJ Screening Tool are not linked, nor do they represent cross tabs. For example "people of color" and "low income" are next to one another in the table, but they are unrelated indicators and this table sheds no light on questions such as "how many people of color are also classified as low income".

Total Population	Whole Watershed	Watershed Quincy & Boston	Watershed Other
Overall population	306,635	139,853	157,587
Percent Watershed Population	100%	46%	51%
Percent Watershed Area	100%	13%	87%

Community Information	Whole Watershed	Watershed Quincy & Boston	Watershed Other
Low Income	19%	28%	12%
People of Color	45%	67%	24%
Less than high school educ	9%	14%	5%
Limited English Households	7%	11%	4%
Unemployment	6%	7%	5%
Persons with disabilities	12%	14%	10%
Male	48%	48%	48%
Female	52%	52%	52%
Average life expectancy	79	79	80
Per Capita Income	$49,404	$43,221	$57,325
Owner occupied households	62%	48%	73%

Breakdown by Race	Whole Watershed	Watershed Quincy & Boston	Watershed Other
White	55%	33%	76%
Black	21%	34%	7%
Asian	10%	14%	7%
Hispanic	10%	14%	5%
Two or More Races	4%	4%	3%
Other	1%	1%	1%

Breakdown by Age	Whole Watershed	Watershed Quincy & Boston	Watershed Other
Age 1-18	22%	20%	23%
Age 20-64	62%	64%	60%
Age 65+	16%	16%	17%

Health Indicators	Whole Watershed	Watershed Quincy & Boston	Watershed Other
Low Life Expectancy (state percentile)	47%	61%	33%
Heart Disease (state percentile)	45%	40%	45%
Asthma (state percentile)	55%	81%	23%
Cancer (state percentile)	43%	24%	66%

Limited English Speaking Breakdown	Whole Watershed	Watershed Quincy & Boston	Watershed Other
Other Indo European	40%	24%	71%
Asian pacific Islands	35%	44%	19%
Spanish	21%	27%	7%
Other Indo European	4%	5%	3%

Language Spoken at Home (not all are limited english)	Whole Watershed	Watershed Quincy & Boston	Watershed Other
English	72%	63%	79%
Total non english	28%	37%	21%
Spanish	7%	11%	3%
French, Haitian, Cajun	5%	8%	3%
Chinese	4%	6%	2%
Other Indo-European	5%	4%	6%
Vietnamese	2%	4%	1%
Other API	1%	1%	1%
Arabic	1%	1%	1%
Other	2%	1%	1%

Original Reports from the EJ Screen Tool on which these tables are based are available HERE