
CALENDAR YEAR 2023 EQUITY IMPACT PLAN

ANNUAL REPORT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Department Name: Department of Public Works and Environmental Services

Equity Lead(s): Courtney Willis-Banks

Date: 11/1/2023

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Review your department's Equity Impact Plan for CY 2023 at [Equity Impact Plans | Topics \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#). Using that plan, fill in each goal below and describe: what was done to make progress toward the goal

Goal 1: Through our diversity cross functional team, DPWES will implement departmental training, policies, and programs that further our diversity and equity goals in employee recruitment, retention, and development.

Goal 1 Progress:

DPWES continued working to advance One Fairfax in 2023 through our cross-functional Equity and Diversity teams in 2023 and with substantial support from our Human Resources and Organizational Development and Training Staff. A core accomplishment in 2023 was the completion of a department-wide diversity, equity, inclusion, and safety survey of DPWES employees, facilitated by the Survey Committee of the Diversity Team. The goal of the survey was to elicit information about potential barriers to diversifying the department and ensuring equity in both the delivery of DPWES services to the community as well as ensuring equitable treatment of employees. The survey included a total of 25 questions, including 2 open-ended questions, and was administered by our Diversity Team through a consultant to ensure anonymity while still providing critical demographic information about the respondents as well as to compare DPWES with national benchmarks. Overall, 72% of employees participated in the digital survey that was open for three weeks, and staff provided on-site support at all facilities to assist with completion of the survey.

The report of survey results from the consultant was shared unedited with all DPWES staff, and 11 in-person listening sessions led by the DPWES Director were completed at all facilities in October to discuss the results of the survey and elicit suggestions for actions to take based on survey results. The survey yielded a 97% favorability rating for the statement "it is important that DPWES services are delivered to the community in an equitable manner" and an 88% favorability rating for the statement "it is important for DPWES to reflect the demographics of the community we serve at all levels." These results were higher than anticipated by DPWES leadership, and led to an adjustment of planned training programs.

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The survey also identified multiple areas for improvement within DPWES, including ensuring disciplinary actions are consistently applied to all employees, creating a culture of psychological safety to ensure employees can share their perspectives without fear of retaliation, and a renewed focus on employee advancement. Survey results and feedback during listening sessions also identified the need for implicit/unconscious bias training for DPWES employees. Some planned and pre-existing activities address the needs identified by the survey, and departmental leadership continue to evaluate what actions will be taken informed by the survey results.

DPWES also continues to seek out opportunities to improve the employee experience for our female team members. The Recruitment and Selection Committee of our Diversity Team focused recruitment efforts specifically on women, the most underrepresented demographic group in DPWES relative to the population of Fairfax County. Through partnering with our internal, employee-led WOW (Women of Water) group and expanding that partnership DPWES-wide, we hope to create a mutual support network and identify effective ways to create a more safe, inclusive, and supportive work culture. The committee worked with the DPWES communications team to highlight women that work within DPWES and make their contributions more visible. DPWES has also increased its representation at career fairs and is working with schools to attract recent graduates in diverse communities to engineering and trades positions.

The department launched two new training programs in CY2023 that were developed to provide opportunities for trades employees. The LIFT, or Leadership in Frontline Teams program, provides employees in skilled trade positions such as senior maintenance worker, where we are aware we have a historic racial and gender imbalance, to prepare them to move into supervisory positions, which trend more white and male in nearly all trades divisions. The pilot cohort last year had 13 participants and 5 participants have been promoted at least one additional supervisory level since completing the program (2 black, 2 Hispanic, and 1 white employee).

The DPWES Solid Waste Management Program partnered with The English Empowerment Center (EEC) to provide a Destination Workforce course. The course provided DPWES Newington Facility staff with the opportunity to gain language and soft skills to aid in employee confidence, professional development, and effectiveness in communications. Sessions were offered September 2023-December 2023 with a 90% average attendance rate. During the course, employees increased knowledge of job-specific vocabulary, improved reading skills, gained confidence in reading aloud in English in front of peers, and increased conversational vocabulary and English. There were 14 DPWES employees who successfully completed the course.

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Goal 2: Evaluate the delivery of DPWES programs and projects to determine if our services are provided equitably to Fairfax County.

Goal 2 Progress:

Although the initial plan was to publish the results of the 2022 equity assessment of selected programs within DPWES, feedback from the DPWES Equity Team and leadership within the department prompted a change in plans. Staff expressed concerns that without sufficient foundational understanding of One Fairfax within DPWES, employees would not be well-equipped to discuss the results with interested members of the public once the equity assessment results were published. Additionally, some program managers expressed concerns about the methodology by which the 2022 assessments were conducted.

Thus, the Equity Team changed course in 2023 to develop an alternative method by which managers at the branch chief or complex manager level would participate in small group work sessions facilitated by a trained member of the Equity Team to complete their own equity assessment of a program under their leadership. Each of the approximately 50 identified managers would also identify and commit to completing a quantifiable action in fiscal year 2024 to enhance equity within their identified line of business. The new equity assessment framework was developed in 2023, and the work groups launch in January 2024. Actions identified during the 2022 equity assessment continued to be developed and implemented by Division Directors responsible for the assessed programs, so the earlier work remains informative.

DPWES reclassified a vacant position to create a new departmental equity coordinator position. However, completion of the hiring process is on hold pending publication of a new County job classification family.

Goal 3: Develop and implement community outreach and public participation processes that are inclusive and equitable for all County residents.

Goal 3 Progress:

DPWES continues to utilize the Inclusive Community Engagement framework developed in 2022, but made an intentional decision to hold on formalizing the framework until more staff had completed foundational equity training, allow staff to become more familiar with the Public Input platform as an alternative means of engagement, and to allow time for several pilot efforts to be completed.

To engage with the community and better understand their stormwater related issues and solutions, DPWES developed an Equitable Stormwater Management Engagement Framework with assistance from StanTec Consulting. Completed in March 2023, the document established a roadmap to achieve the following objectives:

- Equitable evaluation of flooding concerns without favoring one population over another
- Consideration of the Vulnerability Index and other factors
- Understand community issues and priorities

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- Build trust with the community so residents feel comfortable contacting the County when issues arise
- Comprehend community values and priorities as they relate to stormwater and flooding

A planning team comprised of department representatives and the County's consultant met biweekly to develop the stormwater framework. Participation from the County's Department of Neighborhood and Community Services was integral to the planning team. The Framework is a living document that the County will update as it gathers lessons learned from its collective community of practice. With this goal in mind, DPWES evaluated the effectiveness of the initial version of the framework by piloting the approach in the Culmore neighborhood, one of the County's Opportunity Neighborhoods. Although feedback from the community during the pilot implementation indicated that DPWES services other than stormwater were more of a concern, DPWES was able to expand the engagement focus to multiple business areas within the department and will apply the framework to other areas in the County.

Of additional note, three DPWES staff members participated in the Government Alliance on Racial Equity's Racial Equity Learning Cohort in 2023 and one employee participated in the Transformative Infrastructure Justice Fellowship sponsored by the Communities First Infrastructure Alliance in partnership with Policy Link and the Government Alliance on Racial Equity.