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How to Establish and Operate a Diversity Program

AWWA's Diversity and Member Involvement Committee defines diversity as "a mosaic of people who bring a variety of backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values, and beliefs as assets to groups and organizations in which they interact."

The US Department of the Interior has said, "America's diversity has given it its unique strength, resilience, and richness."

Diversity has become a business imperative that is capturing the attention of leaders throughout our industry and the world. Embracing diversity is becoming more and more important as the world shrinks and the demographics of the workforce and our customers change.

As with many technical professions, the drinking water community does not reflect the general population. We face many new challenges in our work and will need the best and the brightest individuals, regardless of their diversity, to most effectively serve our customers. We need to encourage all interested individuals to enter the drinking water profession; and we need to encourage the new entrants to the profession, as well as those already established in the drinking water field, to join AWWA. Our Association will be stronger through differences in its members. It is critical that we position our Association to welcome and integrate these individuals into AWWA. How to accomplish this is the challenge.

Your AWWA section can take a leadership role by having a strong diversity program. This how-to guide is to help you establish and operate a successful program.

History of AWWA's Diversity Initiatives

In 1988, AWWA established the Minority Affairs Committee. In 1990, the Board of Directors adopted

an Affirmative Action Policy; and in 1991, the board formed the AWWA Minorities/Women's Affairs Committee. The mission of the committee was to assist in creating an inclusive environment in all segments of AWWA that would support increased diversity in the Association's activities. In 1996, the committee was combined with the Women and Minorities in the Water Industry Committee, under the Management Division of the Technical & Educational Council, and given its new name, the Diversity Committee. The new committee was an administrative committee reporting to the AWWA Executive Committee. In January 2001, the committee became a standing committee of the Board of Directors and was given another new name, the Diversity and Member Involvement Committee. At that same meeting, a policy on diversity and nondiscrimination was adopted.

AWWA's Statement of Policy on Diversity and Nondiscrimination (Adopted by the AWWA Board of Directors on Jan. 21, 2001)

"The American Water Works Association (AWWA) is committed to proactively promoting volunteer and employment opportunities that will encourage diversity of staff, membership, and leadership in all AWWA operating units and strongly recommends adoption of policies reflective of that commitment by all water profession organizations."

In addition, AWWA promotes volunteer and employment opportunities with commitment to nondiscrimination to encourage involvement and advancement of all qualified individuals in all AWWA operating units; and, AWWA strongly recommends adoption of policies reflective of that commitment by all water profession organizations. Such policies should make it clear that discrimination of any sort is not acceptable and should not be tolerated.

Establish a Section Diversity Committee

The first step is to establish a diversity committee, if your section doesn't have one. Be sure your committee includes members from all your section's geographic areas and types of organizations, as well as members reflecting the diversity of your section. Remember, the more people involved in this program, the more likely it is to be successful.

In establishing a diversity committee, many sections have started by having the section chair appoint an ad hoc committee. In this process, interested individuals can be contacted and their interest surveyed. The section chair and the new committee chair can then ask other members to join the committee. After recruitment of committee members, establishment of goals and objectives, and the section's determination that it is valuable to have a diversity committee, the board can then vote to establish a permanent committee.

Call AWWA Section Services for a list of sections that have diversity committees. You can call any section's diversity committee chair for information and advice to help you get started.

Establish the Committee's Goals and Objectives

Your section board may or may not provide the diversity committee with guidelines and suggested goals and objectives. The goals and objectives of the AWWA Diversity and Member Involvement Committee can be used as a start. You can also contact committee members for ideas.

Your committee's guidelines will set a general scope for your efforts and should be included in your section's strategic plan. Your committee's recommendations to the section's leaders will be a valuable source of leadership.

To increase participation by diverse groups, the committee should develop a set of structured, achievable goals and objectives. This would encourage a diverse mix of committee members.

One goal might be to conduct a session on diversity as part of your section's annual conference. Speakers from other professions with success in promoting diversity would be one possibility.

Another goal could be to help various utilities recruit diverse individuals. The committee could work with utility human resource departments to develop materials for recruiting diverse individuals, which highlight the waterworks profession as a challenging and rewarding field with excellent growth opportunities. Identifying potential sources of new diverse employees, promoting co-op and internship programs, participating in job fairs and school-to-work programs, and establishing mentoring programs are examples of activities that your committee could undertake to promote and implement diversification of the workforce.

You may find that you share some goals with other section committees involved with membership, e.g., young professionals, youth education, or student affairs. Working jointly with other committees on common goals spreads the workload and promotes teamwork.

Long-term goals should be broken down into yearly subgoals. Goals and objectives should be quantifiable so the committee can evaluate the success of its program. A resource for developing the committee's goals and objectives is the AWWA How-to Guide for Sections: Committee Management. It is available online or from AWWA Section Services, (303) 347-6202.

Implement Action Plans

Next, your committee is ready to develop and implement action plans. You should not try to do everything at once. If your committee is large enough, establish a sub-committee to develop your mission statement, objectives, and action plans. As you grow, you may want to establish other subcommittees to be responsible for specific tasks. Once you have your mission, objectives, and action plans, you will be able to develop a budget to fund your program. Concentrate on one or two plans to get rolling.

Examples of Effective Action Plans

- *Conduct a Diversity Affairs Forum.* An example is the Ohio Section's forum. A forum can be conducted at the section's annual conference during the technical program, as an open discussion with a moderator, to initiate a free flow of information. The moderator could be a member from the section that has experience in a specific topic—and is from a diverse

background. Through such a forum, diverse groups will have an opportunity to openly discuss ideas for section involvement. Also, the barriers to greater participation by diverse individuals could be discussed. The moderator could record comments and send a summary of the forum to those who attended. Subsequent forums could be used to evaluate and further develop your program. You can call the Diversity Committee Chair of the Ohio Section for more information.

- *Publicize your programs.* Providing articles or a monthly column in the section newsletter is a means of maintaining interest and disseminating information.
- *Develop a Web page.* A Web page about your committee and its activities could be added to your section's Web site as another means of disseminating information. Make sure it is maintained and updated regularly.
- *Set up a Diversity Committee booth.* Your section secretary/treasurer received a tabletop display from Section Services to be used at various meetings, workshops, and the annual conference. You can display information about your committee's various activities, as well as recruit new committee members.
- *Encourage utility Human Resources personnel to join your committee.* Their knowledge of job and advancement opportunities and recruiting needs can help your committee structure one or more useful programs that will promote the waterworks profession to new and diverse individuals.
- *Celebrate your success.* If you are made aware of the successful participation of an individual or group representing diversity in the drinking water community, consider giving an award or publishing a newspaper article, so that a positive attitude will result.

Ideas for enhancing awareness include:

- *Technical program speakers.* Develop a roster of diverse individuals who could participate in technical programs, introduce speakers, or give an invocation or opening pledge of allegiance.
- *Section newsletter or other publications.* Create a column or series to focus on section members' contributions to the drinking water community and to the section. Make a

conscious effort to include contributions of diverse individuals.

- *Section committee appointments.* Include diverse groups in section committees to take advantage of their skills, education, and experience.
- *Section awards.* Establish section awards for organizations or individuals to recognize the contributions of individuals and groups that signify diversity. The awards could be named after someone of diverse background who is an outstanding role model.
- *Section activity.* Sponsor a function to get the attention of your diverse membership, such as a diversity reception, a 5-mile hike, or a golf tournament.
- *Encourage participation of diverse individuals and groups in section activities.* As more diverse individuals participate in section activities, more diverse groups will join the section and become active, encouraged by the participation of others.

Some suggestions on how to make new members feel comfortable and become active are:

- *Introduce new members.* At section meetings, take the time to introduce guests or new members, or have them introduce themselves. Encourage current members to make them welcome.
- *Contact new members.* Work with your membership committee to identify new members. Contact new members by telephone, letter, or e-mail, and let them know about your committee. Invite them to attend upcoming events or meetings, and, perhaps invite them to join your committee.
- *Develop a scholarship program* that encourages continuing education made available to water industry personnel, with an emphasis on "front line" employees (e.g., meter readers, lab technicians, maintenance workers, customer service representatives), and individuals of diversity. One example is the DARCE fund program from the Ohio Section.
- *Identify new members' interests.* Working with your membership committee, provide a "willingness to serve" form to new members'. This form should list your section committees and ask for new member indication of desire to serve. Be sure to follow up to encourage participation.
- *Mentor or buddy program.* Assign a current member to each new member. The current

member should introduce the new member to others, provide the new member with information on the section, and help get the new member involved in section activities.

- *Program and workshop development.* Develop a program that covers the range of activities needed to effectively run a water system. These activities should not be limited to the traditional, highly technical areas, but should include programs in customer service, meter reading, finance, water conservation, and management. Develop workshops that attract a diverse audience. Leadership development, managing change, building an effective team, and diversity awareness are topics that could be used to generate money to finance other activities.
- *Social activities.* Try alternative social events, such as tennis, picnics, skiing, road rallies, beach parties, whale watches, and sports events to encourage a diverse attendance and networking among members.

Measuring Your Success

It is important that your committee decide up front how you will measure your success. A measure should be set for each of your goals and objectives. For example, if one of your committee's goals is to hold a workshop on diversity issues, a possible measure of success could be the number of participants in the workshop.

A more long-term goal may be to encourage minority involvement in your section. Statistics related to the diversity of your section's membership are available from AWWA. The number of members representing diverse groups, such as young professionals, women, and non-whites, can be compared annually to determine if the percentages are increasing, possibly as a result of your committee's efforts. Clear evidence of diverse members rising in the leadership of the Association will strengthen the program's success.

Resources

AWWA's Diversity and Member Involvement Committee has prepared a notebook for sections that includes examples of successful section diversity initiatives. Each section should have a copy of this guide. If your section does not have a copy of this notebook, please call Section Services at (303) 347-6202. In addition, the committee has a Web site that

includes information on the Association's goals and activities www.awwa.org/sections/committee. Numerous companies have mature diversity programs that you may want to review for ideas. The following are organizations to contact:

The American Bar Association
<http://abanet.org/buslaw/diversity/home.html>
Microsoft Corporation
www.microsoft.com/diversity

As your section's diversity committee becomes more active, you should partner with other section committees, such as membership, young professionals, student activities, and public education, to expand your success. Perhaps one day we will look around at our organization's diverse and active membership and wonder why there was a need for a diversity committee. Then we will know that we succeeded.