

Sharing DEIJA Stories from Across the Network

Stories submitted for October 2024 Management Board Meeting

Here's how jurisdictions and agencies are:

Creating the structures, policies, and processes that support efforts to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility, including supportive training and professional development where needed.

- **Maryland**
 - Hired first Environmental Justice Officer (EJO) to ensure programs, policies have positive impacts in communities disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices.
- **Pennsylvania:**
 - DEP created Workforce Culture Groups (part of an initiative they call DiverseEP) to create “safe space” communities within their workforce, affinity groups for staff.
 - DEP conducts Monthly Town Halls as part of DiverseEP. Monthly Town Halls bring together a recurring group of 200-400 DEP employees eager to hear about diverse experiences.
 - DCNR launched Mosaic to transform workforce demographics, workplace culture, and community engagement, while enhancing accessibility and inclusivity in its programs and spaces.
- **New York State**
 - Approved and adopted “disadvantaged community” criteria via its Climate Justice Working Group.
 - Created a disproportionate burden analysis worksheet for prioritizing reductions of greenhouse gas emission and co-pollutants in disadvantaged communities.
 - Refreshed its permitting processes for considering impacts and existing burdens on the area's most vulnerable communities.
 - Looped in the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights to advise on programs agency-wide on activities that promote inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility in outreach, education, and program delivery.
- **EPA**
 - CBPO created a project to incentivize training for all regional employees.
 - CBPO have taken administration and planning efforts to organize CBPO efforts to better incorporate DEIJ in everyday work.
 - CBPO hired a DEIJ, philanthropy and nonprofit expert to assist CBP in integrating DEIJ throughout their work.
- **USGS**
 - Created a dashboard web application program that helped workgroups and partners identify opportunities to implement DEIJ considerations into their work.
 - Tested social equity considerations in stream restoration. Initial research showed state scale could be too large; next steps might include a more local scale study. Also plan to research flood risk to marginalized communities.

Applying equitable recruitment, hiring, and selection principles for staff and volunteers

- **Maryland**

- Collaboration between University of Maryland Baltimore County, EPA and USGS to expose university students to traditional work and the work through a DEIJA lens which should increase pipeline to hiring. Messaging shared with University career center, and speed networking event(s) held to showcase work to students.

Including the communities that are most impacted by our work in advancing the work and in decision-making for more equitable, inclusive, and just outcomes.

- **Maryland**

- “Envision the Choptank” is a collaborative effort that includes nonprofits, government agencies, scientists, and community groups to identify solutions; includes local ambassadors in a cohort who both weigh in on official decisions and also gain capacity-building skills that support the Bay.

- **New York State**

- Created a [resource page](#) for hosting articles, podcast and blogs that center the voices of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Latino/a, and Latinx, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other identities (LGBTQ+) and their experiences in the outdoors and in nature.
- Created websites with recommended reading for awareness months:
 - [Black History Month](#) – February
 - [Women’s History Month](#) – March
 - [Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month](#) – May
 - [Pride Month Celebration](#) – June
 - [Hispanic Heritage Month](#) – September 15th – October 15th
 - [Native American Heritage Month](#) – November

- **Pennsylvania**

- DCNR took action in environmental justice communities by assisting marginalized communities with tree plantings, tree inventories and conflict resolutions; providing technical assistance regarding grant funding and providing specialized training on tree care.
- DCNR’s Bureau of Recreation and Conservation (BRC) hired a funding equity specialist who will strengthen connections and opportunities for underserved and under-resourced communities. Mapping tool created to view underserved communities.

- **EPA**

- CBPO is funding an EPA position to serve as the partnership's Diversity Workgroup Coordinator.
- CBPO and the EPA National Center for Environmental Economics are collaborating on a project to analyze the environmental justice-related

implications of restoring the Chesapeake Bay.

Creating more accessible communications that can reach broader audiences across the watershed.

- **Pennsylvania**
 - DEP - Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) assisted the Office of Administration, DEP, other agencies, and federal agencies on identifying vendors who provide language services for PA Dutch. OEJ also shared best practices of using Microsoft Teams functions on having multiple interpreters, including American Sign Language (ASL) for virtual presentations. DEP is in the midst of updating its Language Access Plan.
- **New York State**
 - Created a Destination Map that displays destinations across NYS with wheelchair accessible outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **USGS**
 - Completed preliminary analysis which suggests a relationship between predicted in-stream nutrient loads and social vulnerability factors and are exploring a journal article to share this work more broadly with the scientific community.
 - Supported a tool created to identify signals of change in healthy watersheds. Challenge is that each state defines healthy in different ways.

Shifting grantmaking and contracting practices to avoid placing the burden of complex processes on already overburdened and under-resourced communities while shifting more funding resources into under-resourced communities.

- **Maryland**
 - Chesapeake Bay Trust Maryland Department of the Environment joined forces to create a Community-Based Organization-Capacity Building Initiative to bridge the resource gap between mainstream, established organizations and community-based organizations.
 - Greenspace Equity Grantmaking is a funding program created that enhances the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities.
- **Pennsylvania**
 - DCNR hired a funding equity specialist who will work to strengthen connections and opportunities for underserved and under-resourced communities. Developed a mapping tool to identify underserved communities and in recent years has strengthened outreach to these communities.
 - DEP is focused on funding projects in EJ communities. For the past several years, DEP's Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management has provided preference toward funding watershed restoration and water quality improvement projects that are located in and/or positively impact EJ communities.

Next Steps for the Management Board: Reporting on DEIJ Implementation Plan Progress

- Share up to 5 internal or external facing activities that your agency or organization has accomplished or have successfully implemented in the last two years related to DEIJ efforts
- For each, answer these questions in bullets (15 words or less):
 - What was the outcome? (headline)
 - What did you do? (project description)
 - Key challenges?
 - Next steps?
- **Return your slides to:**
Williams.James@epa.gov and
melissa@colmena-consulting.com



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DUE AUGUST 30, SEPT 30, or OCT 30.

SLIDE TEMPLATE PROVIDED

Hired the agency's first Environmental Justice Officer

In January, DNR hired Mariah Davis as the agency's first Environmental Justice Officer (EJO). The EJO works in the Office of the Secretary and ensures that DNR's programs, policies, funding and projects have positive impacts in communities who have been disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices. DNR's EJO also works closely in collaboration with senior EJ leadership at other agencies. Since being hired, the EJO has worked with staff to adopt an agency Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Access [statement](#). Upcoming work for the EJO includes:

- Establishing Metrics and Defining Environmental Justice for the Agency
- Adopting and Implementing an Environmental Justice Policy
- Implementing an Internal DEI Action Plan
- Assessing Equity and Barriers in Grantmaking Increasing
- Identify Policy Gaps and Opportunities for Long Term Funding/Investments
- Establishing a Community Liaison Program
- Increasing Resources and Technical Support to EJ Communities working in Agriculture

Challenges: Limited staff capacity.

Initiated the Greenspace Equity Program

The Greenspace Equity Program is a new program with a goal to enhance the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities. This program provides grant funding to land trusts, nongovernmental organizations, and local governments to acquire and develop public green spaces by implementing projects to preserve, create, and enhance community greenspace, which includes community gardens, parks, community gather open space arena woodlands, green networks, parks, trails, and urban farms.

Applications are due November 1, 2024 at 3PM. Please help us promote this great opportunity. More information can be found [here](#).

Challenges: Since this is the first year of the program, it will take time to promote it and get the information to EJ communities. This is also a reimbursement program. Outreach and collaboration with EJ communities to ensure they are included in these projects and set up for success will be critical.

Community Based Organization Capacity Building Initiatives (CBO-CBI) Partnership with Chesapeake Bay Trust and Maryland Department of the Environment

The Community-Based Organization - Capacity Building Initiative (CBO-CBI) was designed to bridge the resource gap between mainstream established organizations and community-based organizations and partners and build the capacity of community based organizations. Historically under-engaged community-based organizations, representing populations who receive inadequate or inequitable services and/or who experience quality-of-life disparities, will be engaged as potential applicants to watershed resilience and restoration focused grant programs. These organizations will be provided necessary technical assistance to facilitate robust application submissions and training to build their knowledge and capacity to initiate and lead future resilient restoration efforts. The role of the Connector Group will be to conduct prioritized outreach to eligible organizations to receive technical assistance in applying to these grant programs. Additionally, Connector Groups will serve as a liaison between community based organizations and technical assistance providers. Through this partnership, as of July 2024, connectors have effectively collaborated with 50 community-based organizations and technical assistance providers have submitted 22 grant applications.

Challenges: Continued outreach needs and sustainable fund source(s)

Envision the Choptank and Local Ambassadors Program

Envision the Choptank is a collaborative effort, formed in 2015, that brings together nonprofits, government agencies, scientists, and community groups to identify solutions that support healthy and productive oyster reefs, restore fishable, swimmable waters to the Choptank River. This partnership pairs local knowledge and values with the latest science and technology to target work in places where it will be most effective and long-lasting for water quality, wildlife habitat, and community well-being. Through this work, there is a strong emphasis to address community needs in underserved and overburdened communities.

At the core of this partnership is a Local Ambassador Program. More than six Local Ambassadors participate to help increase local engagement and information sharing. Envision the Choptank held its first cohort of community members in February 2024 with the LEAD the Coast program. Sessions included skill and capacity building topics for civic engagement and organizing outreach campaigns. Other topics included stormwater management, increasing access to information, and race, power, and privilege. Through this shared learning space, local governments and watershed organizations have worked in collaboration with environmental justice communities but better understand their needs, barriers, and challenges.

Challenges: Limited staff capacity and funding. Some goals (e.g. work engaging disenfranchised communities) are incredibly time-intensive and would benefit from increased staff/human resources. Successful fundraising is needed to continue to support work with local governments.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Reporting on DEIJ Implementation Plan Progress

Management Board

September 2024

Internal: Creation of NYS DEC Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights

- Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights helps advise programs agency wide on activities that promote inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility in DEC outreach, education, and program delivery.
- Four main objectives:
 - Ensure compliance with federal state civil rights requirements
 - Expand DEC's language access offerings both in written documents and public meetings
 - Ensure compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in DEC operations and meet internal accessibility goals
 - Oversee strategic planning and initiatives for workplace diversity inclusion and belonging



External: Approval and adoption of final disadvantaged community criteria by the Climate Justice Working Group

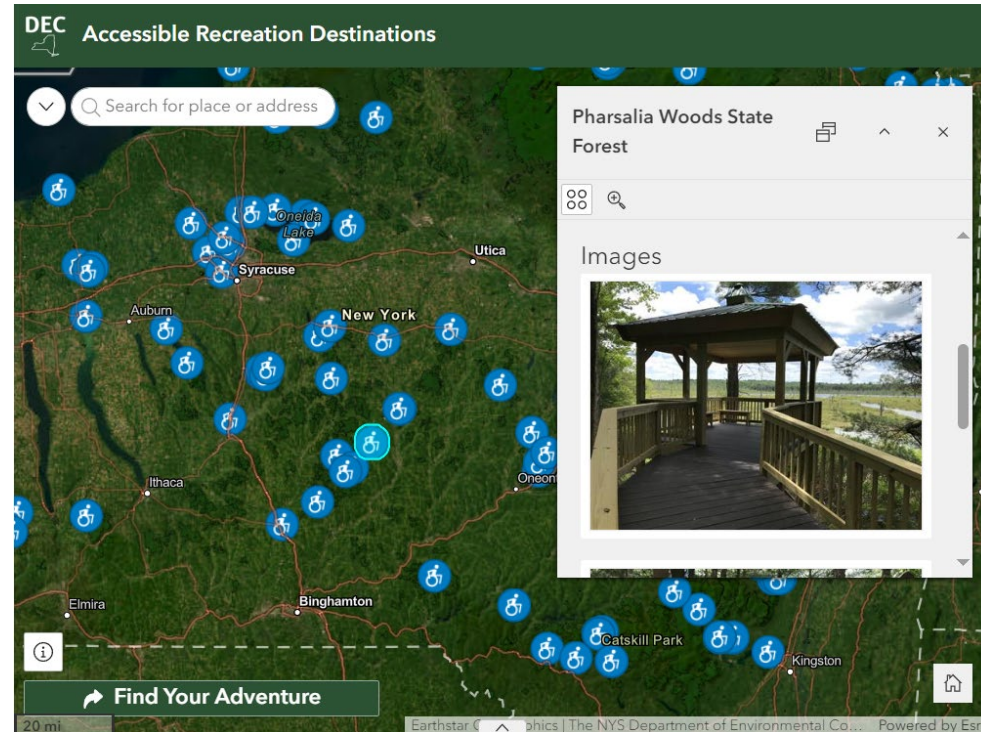
- Developed to ensure disadvantaged communities directly benefit from the State's historic transition to cleaner, greener sources of energy, reduced pollution and cleaner air, and economic opportunities. Metric categories included:
 - Health impacts & burdens
 - Housing, mobility and communications
 - Income
 - Race/ethnicity
 - land use & historic discrimination
 - Potential climate change risk
 - Potential pollution exposure
- Key challenges included the selection of indicators as 150 were considered and CJWG settled on 45 indicators.
- The Climate Act requires the CJWG to review the criteria annually.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

External: Accessible Recreation Destinations Mapper

- More than \$5 million in recent statewide accessibility projects completed to expand recreational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities
- Accessible Recreation Destination Map displays destinations across NYS with wheelchair accessible outdoor recreation opportunities



Internal/External: NYS DEC Policy for Evaluating and Averting Disproportionate Impacts of Permitting Actions on Disadvantaged Communities

- New policy provides guidance in DEC's permitting processes for considering impacts and existing burdens on New York's most vulnerable communities.
- Created a **disproportionate burden analysis worksheet** for prioritizing reductions of greenhouse gas emission and co-pollutants in disadvantaged communities

Internal/External: Creation of Diversity Resources in the Outdoors, Science, & Environmental Justice Webpage

- NYS DEC created a [resource page](#) for hosting articles, podcast and blogs that **center the voices** of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Latino/a, and Latinx, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other identities (LGBTQ+) and their experiences in the outdoors and in nature.
- NYS DEC created websites with recommended reading for:
 - [Black History Month](#) – February
 - [Women's History Month](#) – March
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Pennsylvania's DEIJ Implementation Plan Actions/Activities

- DCNR launches Mosaic, DCNR's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) initiative. DEIB is a strategic priority for the agency and DCNR hired the Director of DEIB and launching the Mosaic initiative to transform workforce demographics, workplace culture, and community engagement, while enhancing accessibility and inclusivity in its programs and spaces.
- DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation (BRC) is highly focused on funding equity and recently hired a funding equity specialist who will work to strengthen connections and opportunities for underserved and under-resourced communities. BRC has developed a mapping tool to identify underserved communities and in recent years has strengthened outreach to these communities. This work continues.
- DCNR's Urban and Community Forestry program is actively working in environmental justice communities by assisting EJ communities with tree plantings, tree inventories and conflict resolutions; providing technical assistance regarding grant funding and providing specialized training on tree care.
- DEP Monthly Town Halls are part of DiverseEP, DEP's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative. Monthly Town Halls bring together a recurring group of 200-400 DEP employees eager to hear about diverse experiences. These experiences are shared by through presentations by our own colleagues about their lives or by outside experts on specific topics related to diversity. In the beginning, crowd size was low, but interest quickly increased as colleagues started presenting. DEP works to keep the momentum, as this is our most successful initiative for learning and to maintain enthusiasm.
- DEP Workforce Culture Groups, also an initiative brought forth through DiverseEP, create "safe space" communities in Regional Offices for idea generation and camaraderie. Workforce Culture Groups identified people with passion and organizational skills and handed them a structure to build from. Some groups have 30+ members, while others are only a few. Buy-in from leadership is an important step as DEP works to continue this cultural growth across all offices.
- DEP Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) assisted the Office of Administration, DEP, other agencies, and federal agencies on identifying vendors who provide language services for PA Dutch. OEJ also shared best practices of using Microsoft Teams functions on having multiple interpreters, including American Sign Language (ASL) for virtual presentations. DEP is in the midst of updating its Language Access Plan and the Policy shop has identified a temporary/interim language coordinator to coordinate.
- DEP continues to focus on funding projects in EJ communities. For the past several years, DEP's Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management has provided preference toward funding watershed restoration and water quality improvement projects that are located in and/or positively impact EJ communities.

DEIJ Success Stories and Accomplishments from EPA CBPO

- Example 1: Invested EPA CBPO money in underserved communities
 - Project Description: Working with jurisdictions and other partners, investing tens of millions of EPA CBPO BIL grant funds in underserved communities in the Bay Watershed towards meeting Justice 40 (SWG, INSR, MEB)
 - Key Challenges: Time. Significant time lapse from Congressional authorization to completion of projects in underserved communities
 - Next Steps: Continue to award remaining BIL grant funds
- Example 2: EPA CBPO is funding an EPA position to serve as the partnership's Diversity Workgroup Coordinator
 - Project description: Coordinator will support efforts to integrate DEIJ considerations into the partnership's watershed restoration and stewardships activities.
 - Challenges: Delays in federal hiring process
 - Next Steps: Complete final steps of hiring process (conduct interviews, make selection, onboard coordinator)
- Example 3: Leadership by Deputy Director (Martha Shimkin) in Region 3 DEIJ management council
 - Project description: Led creation of an incentive-based training plan for all interested Region 3 employees
 - Challenges: Going from creation to implementation
 - Next steps: Fully implementing the training plan
- Example 4: EPA CBPO and the EPA National Center for Environmental Economics are collaborating on a project to analyze the environmental justice-related implications of restoring the Chesapeake Bay
 - Project description: Series of focus groups and ensuing analyses to create a study of how costs and benefits are distributed in the Bay watershed, particularly for communities with environmental justice concerns.
 - Challenges: Speed of academic-style research
 - Next Steps: Recruiting and implementing focus groups
- Example 5: Hired a DEIJ Consultant
 - Project Description: EPA CBPO hired Melissa Sines as a DEIJ consultant to assist CBP in integrating DEIJ throughout their work.
 - Challenges: Increasing awareness of Melissa's expertise and how it can be beneficial to workgroups and teams
 - Next Steps: Integrating Melissa's work with CBP
- Example 6: Administration and planning efforts to organize CBPO efforts to better incorporate DEIJ in everyday work
 - Project Description:
 - Beginning in 2021, incorporating DEIJ language in all grant notice of funding or request for applications.
 - Drafted and currently implementing EPA CBPO's 2023 BIL Equity Strategy
 - 2022-2023 One-year, 4 session allyship training, run by EPA staff from Philadelphia and CBPO, inviting all CBPO – discussions, multi-media training, actions/active learning on the importance of inclusion & allyship

- Active effort to incorporate watershed communities and entities in the EPA EJ Road Show and access to technical assistance and information on EPA's Community Assistance Grants, availability of \$2B.
- Challenges: Translating administration and planning activities into benefit to DEIJ communities.
- Next steps: Continuing to implement these efforts

DEIJ Implementation Plan

Progress: USGS

Joint UMBC/EPA/USGS MOU

MD-DE-DC WSC/Northeast Region

- What was the outcome?
 - Increases exposure to the work done at USGS and develops a stronger recruitment pathway for students at MSIs
- What did you do?
 - Manage activities and collaboration between the three entities (i.e., Earth Month events, USGS lab tour, invited presentations, internships)
- Key challenges?
 - Awareness to entire University about MOU
 - Capacity to execute activities
- Next Steps?
 - Collaborating with UMBC Communication department and Career Center
 - Speed Networking Event

Stream Conservation Research

Sean Emmons/Taylor Woods/Kelly Maloney, Eastern Ecological Science Center
Tom Neeson, University of Oklahoma

- What was the outcome?
 - Tested social equity considerations in stream restoration initiatives results in tradeoffs depended on the scale spatial equity was tested: at the state scale minimal tradeoffs were observed but strong tradeoffs were observed when tested at the county scale
- What did you do?
 - Developed a spatial planning framework that assesses tradeoffs among three outcomes:
 - (1) social justice – implementing projects in marginalized and vulnerable communities
 - (2) spatial equity – implementing projects fairly among states/jurisdictions
 - (3) stream health – either restoring areas with degraded streams or conserving areas with healthy streams
- Key challenges?
 - Justice and equity have many complex dimensions, while focus is on two for this research, other dimensions are equally important and could be investigated in future work
- Next Steps?
 - Investigate if more local scale social and spatial data (i.e., townships/local jurisdictions) can be incorporated into spatial planning framework to improve targeting.
 - Develop assessment of flood risk to marginalized and vulnerable communities; a need expressed by the Climate Resiliency workgroup.

Water Quality in Vulnerable Communities

Leah Staub/Tristan Mohs/Andrew Sekellick, MD-DE-DC WSC

- What was the outcome?
 - Preliminary analysis suggests a relationship between predicted in-stream nutrient loads and social vulnerability factors
- What did you do?
 - Predictions from a water quality model were compared to social vulnerability factors to understand conditions in vulnerable communities.
- Key challenges?
 - Funding has so far only been provided by the MD-DE-DC water science center. More is needed to complete the project.
- Next Steps?
 - Complete analysis and write journal article.
 - Perform gage network analysis to identify the range of social conditions represented in the monitoring network

Environmental Justice and Equity Dashboard

USGS@CBP GIS Team

- What was the outcome?
 - Helped CBP workgroups and partners spatially identify opportunities to implement DEIJ considerations into their work.
- What did you do?
 - Developed a web application integrating demographic, socioeconomic, programmatic, environmental datasets to inform DEIJ efforts.
- Key challenges?
 - Engaging appropriate audiences, keeping data up to date.
- Next Steps?
 - Continue updating and potentially update to reflect the focus of the partnership beyond 2025

Chesapeake Bay Healthy Watershed Assessment Tool

USGS@CBP GIS Team/Healthy Watershed GIT

- What was the outcome?
 - Support CBP and partners in detecting signals of change in state-identified healthy watersheds, providing information useful to support strategies to protect and maintain watershed health.
- What did you do?
 - Develop a set of metrics characterizing multiple aspects of landscape condition, hydrology, geomorphology, habitat, biological condition, and water quality. DEIJ datasets were included as overlay layers to inform strategies.
- Key challenges?
 - Each state has their own definition of a healthy watershed
- Next Steps?
 - Sharing the tool with partners and updating datasets as appropriate