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REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Best Practices for the Water Sector Workforce (RFP 5186)

Due Date: Proposals must be received by **3:00 pm Mountain Time on
November 22, 2022**

WRF Project Contact: Lyndsey Bloxom, lbloxom@waterrf.org

Project Sponsors

This project is funded by The Water Research Foundation (WRF) as part of WRF's Research Priority Program.

Project Objectives

- Identify and provide guidance for best practices in:
 - Completing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) assessments (e.g., employee demographic data, employee DE&I understanding and perspectives, current practices, etc.)
 - Increasing the awareness of water sector career opportunities across diverse local communities
 - Adding and implementing DE&I objectives in workforce development (e.g., recruiting, hiring, evaluations, employee resource groups, retention, promotion, trainings, etc.)
 - Establishing and maintaining an equitable and inclusive work environment
 - Establishing methods and metrics for reviewing effectiveness of DE&I implementation
- Identify partnerships (e.g., public agencies, private companies, community organizations, universities, disabled persons or non-governmental organizations, etc.) that have been or could be successful in advancing the implementation of DE&I objectives
- Identify relevant case studies from across or beyond the water sector and the key factors that have led to successful implementation of DE&I objectives

Budget

Applicants may request up to \$125,000 in WRF funds for this project.

Background and Project Rationale

All water sector organizations would benefit from increased efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). Utilities and organizations need guidance on how to complete DE&I assessments and integrate DE&I considerations into recruiting, hiring practices, career progression at all levels of the organization, community outreach, and training. Desired outcomes of this research include:

- A clear definition and understanding of what defines DE&I objectives and the aspects that should be considered when establishing DE&I objectives
- An understanding of, and guidance on, best practices for DE&I workforce programs
- Metrics/methods (key performance indicators) for reviewing the quality and success of efforts

- Case studies and tools for DE&I objectives implementation
- A diverse and inclusive water workforce, comprised of staff and leadership with a sense of belonging and investment in advancing DE&I objectives

Research Approach

This RFP is intentionally flexible in the research approach to encourage creativity and originality from proposers. Proposers should describe how they will conduct the research to meet the objectives listed above, specifically providing clarity in the approach/methods to be used in assessing and determining best practices. Potential research strategies may include, but are not limited to, a literature review, DE&I program case studies, focus groups and/or workshops, and surveys.

Expected Deliverables

The deliverables for this project are flexible, and creativity and originality from proposers are encouraged. Example deliverables could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Guidance document
- Templates for DE&I practice implementation (e.g., job postings, employee surveys, job descriptions, etc.)
- Literature review
- Research report
- Peer-reviewed journal article
- Webcast, conference presentation, etc.
- Fact sheet, case study, infographic, video, etc.
- Web tool (consider plan for maintenance)
- Workshop (consider plan to document workshop)

Communication Plan

Please review WRF's *Project Deliverable Guidelines* for information on preparing a communication plan. The guidelines are available at <https://www.waterrf.org/project-report-guidelines>. Conference presentations, webcasts, peer review publication submissions, and other forms of project information dissemination are typically encouraged.

Project Duration

The anticipated period of performance for this project is up to 18 months from the contract start date. Proposers should provide a proposed high-level schedule that fits within this timeframe.

Desired Qualifications

A successful proposal will demonstrate the proposer's experience with DE&I activities.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate proposals:

- Understanding the Problem and Responsiveness to RFP (maximum 20 points)
- Technical and Scientific Merit (maximum 30 points)
- Qualifications, Capabilities, and Management (maximum 15 points)
- Communication Plan, Deliverables, and Applicability (maximum 20 points)
- Budget and Schedule (maximum 15 points)

Proposal Preparation Instructions

Proposals submitted in response to this RFP must be prepared in accordance with the WRF document *Guidelines for Research Priority Program Proposals*. The current version of these guidelines is available at <https://www.waterrf.org/proposal-guidelines>, along with *Instructions for Budget Preparation*. The guidelines contain instructions for the technical aspects, financial statements, indirect costs, and administrative requirements that the applicant must follow when preparing a proposal.

Proposals that include the production of web- or software-based tools, such as websites, Excel spreadsheets, Access databases, etc., must follow the criteria outlined for web tools presented in the *Web Tool Criteria and Feasibility Study for The Water Research Foundation Project Deliverables* at <https://www.waterrf.org/project-report-guidelines#deliverables>.

Eligibility to Submit Proposals

Proposals will be accepted from domestic or international entities, including educational institutions, research organizations, governmental agencies, and consultants or other for-profit entities.

WRF's Board of Directors has established a Timeliness Policy that addresses researcher adherence to the project schedule. The policy can be reviewed at <https://www.waterrf.org/policies>. Researchers who are late on any ongoing WRF-sponsored studies without approved no-cost extensions are not eligible to be named participants in any proposals. Direct any questions about eligibility to the WRF project contact listed at the top of this RFP.

Administrative, Cost, and Audit Standards

WRF's research program standards for administrative, cost, and audit compliance are based upon, and comply with, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Grants Guidance (UGG), 2 CFR Part 200 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, and 48 CFR 31.2 Contracts with Commercial Organizations. These standards are referenced in WRF's *Guidelines for Research Priority Program Proposals*, and include specific guidelines outlining the requirements for indirect cost negotiation agreements, financial statements, and the Statement of Direct Labor, Fringe Benefits, and General Overhead. Inclusion of indirect costs must be substantiated by a negotiated agreement or appropriate Statement of Direct Labor, Fringe Benefits, and General Overhead. Well in advance of preparing the proposal, your research and financial staff should review the detailed instructions included in WRF's *Guidelines for Research Priority Program Proposals* and consult the *Instructions for Budget Preparation*, both available at <https://www.waterrf.org/proposal-guidelines>.

Budget and Funding Information

The maximum funding available from WRF for this project is \$125,000. The applicant must contribute additional resources equivalent to at least 33 percent of the project award. For example, if an applicant requests \$100,000 from WRF, an additional \$33,000 or more must be contributed by the applicant. Acceptable forms of applicant contribution include cost-share, applicant in-kind, or third-party in-kind that comply with 2 CFR Part 200.306 cost sharing or matching. The applicant may elect to contribute more than 33 percent to the project, but the maximum WRF funding available remains fixed at \$125,000. **Proposals that do not meet the minimum 33 percent of the project award will not be accepted.** Consult the *Instructions for Budget Preparation* available at <https://www.waterrf.org/proposal-guidelines> for more information and definitions of terms.

Period of Performance

It is WRF's policy to negotiate a reasonable schedule for each research project. Once this schedule is established, WRF and its sub-recipients have a contractual obligation to adhere to the agreed-upon schedule. Under WRF's No-Cost Extension Policy, a project schedule cannot be extended more than nine months beyond the original contracted schedule, regardless of the number of extensions granted. The policy can be reviewed at <https://www.waterrf.org/policies>.

Utility and Organization Participation

WRF encourages participation from water utilities and other organizations in WRF research. Participation can occur in a variety of ways, including direct participation, in-kind contributions, or in-kind services. To facilitate their participation, WRF has provided contact information, on the last page of this RFP, of utilities and other organizations that have indicated an interest in this research. Proposers are responsible for negotiating utility and organization participation in their particular proposals. The listed utilities and organizations are under no obligation to participate, and the proposer is not obligated to include them in their particular proposal.

Application Procedure and Deadline

Proposals are accepted exclusively online in PDF format, and they must be fully submitted before 3:00 pm Mountain Time on November 22, 2022.

The online proposal system allows submission of your documents until the date and time stated in this RFP. To avoid the risk of the system closing before you press the submit button, do not wait until the last minute to complete your submission. Submit your proposal at: <https://forms.waterrf.org/222555832480861> .

Questions to clarify the intent of this RFP and WRF's administrative, cost, and financial requirements may be addressed to the WRF project contact, Lyndsey Bloxom at (571) 384-2106 or lbloxom@waterrf.org. Questions related to proposal submittal through the online system may be addressed to Caroline Bruck at (303) 347-6118 or cbruck@waterrf.org.

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The following utilities have indicated an interest in possible participation in this research. This information is updated within 24 business hours after a utility or an interested organization submits a volunteer form, and this RFP will be re-posted with the new information. **(Depending upon your settings, you may need to click refresh on your browser to load the latest file.)**

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