



# **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annual Report**

## **AGENCY: Department of Environmental Quality**

### **YEAR: 2025**

#### **Plan Goal 1: Access & Success**

*Recruit and retain a diverse workforce by increasing access to diverse populations for recruiting.*

##### Objective 1

*Continue to improve hiring processes and increase access to potential applicants from diverse populations.*

- DEQ utilizes Handshake, a college and university recruitment platform that connects with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), directly engages with local community colleges, posts opportunities in the V3 Transition Connection Newsletter, shares openings with the Department of Defense Career Skills Program partners and the Virginia Department of Veteran Services to reach the veteran community, and distributes opportunities to the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services and the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

##### Objective 2

*Continue to retain and promote a diverse workforce.*

- DEQ hosted two Fellows from Commonwealth of Virginia Engineering and Science Policy Fellowship (COVES) Program in summer 2025.
- DEQ hired 14 interns to participate in DEQ's 2025 paid summer internship program where students work alongside dedicated environmental professionals to build valuable skills and set themselves on a path to a successful career in the environmental field. Participants in the 2025 cohort had various cultural and racial backgrounds. Three of the interns have returned for another summer internship position, one of the interns has been rehired as a full-time classified employee and another has been rehired as a wage employee.
- Through the development of the Agency Workforce Development Plan and the Employment Opportunities Plan, DEQ conducted a thorough analysis of organizational entry, internal mobility, employee separation, and disability employment data. The plans also featured a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (S.W.O.T.) analysis, which highlighted the DE&I plan as a key strength for its role in fostering the recruitment and retention of a skilled and diverse workforce. The analysis identified a need for enhanced training for managers on effectively recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities. DEQ continues to expand access to diverse talent by using targeted recruitment strategies and engaging with career fairs or conferences focused on veterans and individuals with disabilities.
- DEQ continues to strengthen its employee retention efforts by offering development opportunities such as career path mapping, training, job partnering, and job sharing.

- DEQ recognizes employees through service awards and a comprehensive employee recognition program that fosters inclusivity as employees see that their unique efforts to uphold the agency's values are celebrated. The program strengthens the connection to the agency's mission and helps employees feel appreciated and part of a unified team working towards a common goal.
- DEQ developed its own confidential exit questionnaire for classified employees that left the agency either voluntarily, through interagency transfer or due to retirement. The survey was developed for exiting employees to share their experience, comments and concerns confidentially with Human Resources.

## **Plan Goal 2: Welcoming & Respectful Culture**

*Create and sustain a culture that welcomes and embraces diverse opinions, independent thinking, and respectful interactions to deliver optimal results for the organization and its customers.*

### Objective 1

*Persist in creating and maintaining a climate that is supportive and respectful and that values and integrates differing perspectives and experiences.*

- At the end of 2024, an anonymous survey was administered to all staff by C. Parker Consulting to establish a baseline of DEQ employees' views on DE&I topics, identify DE&I achievements and barriers, and collect data on the agency's current diversity characteristics. In September 2025, the DE&I Committee disseminated the survey analysis to all agency staff. Key demographic insights were highlighted, and eight core themes were identified. These themes, along with corresponding actionable commitments, guide the agency's ongoing efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion across all operations.
- The DE&I Committee is actively partnering with agency leadership to cultivate an inclusive culture across the organization. The OneDEQ approach continues to be implemented to help promote cross-collaboration between programs and across regions to enrich the employee climate, foster diversity of thought, create a network for staff, support development opportunities for employees, and promote innovative solutions and workload balancing to best serve internal and external customers.
- Starting October 2024, the DE&I Committee began hosting a monthly Lunch and Learn series. The sessions recognize, value and honor diversity and promote inclusion. Nine Lunch and Learn sessions were held in 2025. Topics covered: The Civil Rights Act, Black History Month: Post-Civil War American History, Women's History Month: Maggie Lena Walker, Celebrating Neurodiversity, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, DE&I in the Workplace: Driving Generational Highways, Diversity Awareness and Inclusion in the Workplace: Disabilities and Internal Belief Systems, Honoring Our Veterans, and Mental Health Awareness.
- New Employees are assigned a DEQ Guide before their first day with the agency. DEQ Guides are responsible for working with the hiring manager to prepare for the start of the new employee, welcoming the new employee into the workplace culture, and instilling a sense of connection between the new employee and their colleagues and the organizational goals and values of DEQ.

## Objective 2

*Continue to provide an environment where conflicts, concerns, and complaints are aired and addressed expeditiously.*

- The Human Resources Generalist team encouraged and assisted employees who experienced workplace conflict by providing coaching and counseling for how to resolve differences and develop solutions with their managers and co-workers.
- The Internal Training Team provided annual training on communication-styles to help employees and managers better understand their communication preferences and tendencies and learn how to adjust their approach to others. This training helped staff recognize and appreciate diversity in thought and style and helped promote respect and inclusion.

## **Plan Goal 3: State Agency DE&I Infrastructure & Training**

*Maintain a plan and infrastructure that continues to provide individualized skills training and career development for state employees. Agencies report annually on DE&I goals and accomplishments.*

### Objective 1

*Continue to amplify opportunities to advance the goals outlined in this framework.*

- DEQ staff signed up for instructor led online training and in-person training offered as part of the agency's Employee Development Plan catalog of courses. In 2025, DEQ staff attended a total of 1,214 live learning events, including conferences. This included 13 DEQ scheduled and delivered in-person learning events; 25 internal webinars that included the DE&I survey results, and nine DE&I Lunch and Learns.
- Each month, the HR Newsletter includes DE&I celebrations from the DHRM calendar, Lunch and Learn dates, and other HR Program updates.

### Objective 2

*Continue to create structures and processes of accountability to increase organizational effectiveness with the Department of Human Resource Management.*

- The HR director met with the agency director to review the 2025 Employment Opportunities Plan, DE&I Annual Plan, and Workforce Development Plan to identify achievements as well as opportunities for improvement.
- DEQ conducts continuous review, assessment and update of internal HR policies and procedures, as needed, to identify opportunities for further organizational excellence.

### Objective 3

*Continue to provide training and educational workshops available to all employees.*

- The Talent Acquisition & Retention Coordinator maintains an accessible centralized, well-organized, and easy to follow, web-based center for tools and resources on SharePoint (DEQnet) that DEQ employees can use to foster a greater understanding of DE&I learning goals. The site includes recorded webinars, documents, links to outside resources, and online courses.
- DEQ uses evaluation tools to gather employee feedback to assess, evaluate and improve training offerings and Lunch and Learn sessions.



**DIVERSITY, OPPORTUNITY & INCLUSION  
STRATEGIC PLAN**

**June 2025**



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## DO&I COMMITTEE

The Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) leadership has continued its commitment to be Diverse, Fair and Inclusive by supporting the work of the agency's Diversity, Opportunity & Inclusion Committee (DO&I Committee). The DO&I Committee has developed a clear, multi-step strategic plan to assist all of us at DEQ to have a voice in the important work of protecting the environment. Members of DEQ's Leadership Team (LT) continue to act in an advisory role to review and provide guidance for recommended changes to agency policies, procedures, and structure.

The DO&I Committee takes a staff up approach, ensuring that all members of our DEQ family have an opportunity to influence and provide direction through internal feedback, committee membership, development of policies and practices, training and education, and the agency's DO&I Strategic Plan. The committee will aim to illustrate diversity from within by promoting membership that spans differences between people, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, tenure, geographical location, varying abilities, education, religion, and beliefs.

Committee members are committed to *Shaping DEQ's DO&I strategic direction; Developing DEQ's DO&I Strategic Plan; Identifying DO&I training needs and programmatic changes; and informing and educating through open, honest, and mindful dialogue.*

### Committee Members:

Wendy Baker, Talent Acquisition Manager, Human Resources Office

**Jerome Brooks (Co-Chair)**, Regional Director, Piedmont Regional Office

Lisa Hardy, Deputy HR Director for Talent Management, Human Resources Office

Stefanie Jones, Remediation Geologist, Northern Regional Office

Cortney Marquette, Brownfields and Voluntary Remediation Program Manager, Office of Remediation Programs

Craig Nicol, Regional Director, Tidewater Regional Office

Carla Pool, Enforcement Adjudication Coordinator, Enforcement Division

**Renee Sacra (Co-Chair)**, Human Resources Director and *DEQ's Chief Diversity Officer*

## STRATEGIC GOALS FOR 2025

In alignment with Governor Youngkin's Executive Order 10, DEQ has committed to focusing on the three strategic goals outlined below for the 2025 plan. The associated objectives and strategies are expected to be fluid. We anticipate an expansion of, and changes to, our objectives and strategies over time as we progress in our knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of DO&I in the workplace.

Additionally, DEQ contracted C. Parker Consulting to develop a survey to collect employee insights, perspectives, and experiences. The DO&I Committee worked with Dr. Parker to develop survey questions and a communication plan for the agency. The survey results have been analyzed, and recommendations are included in the goals listed below.

DEQ also plans to deploy pulse surveys in the future that will be used as a feedback mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment and retention and training strategies outlined below, and to assess progress in DO&I knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions.

### Goal 1. Access and Success

- Recruit and retain a qualified, diverse workforce by increasing access to diverse populations for recruiting.

### Goal 2. Welcoming and Respectful Culture

- Create and sustain an agency culture that affirms and respects diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout daily operations.

### Goal 3. DO&I Infrastructure & Training

- Engage the workforce in learning the concepts of DO&I, and the importance of these concepts to achieving our agency mission.

**Goal 1: Access and Success:** Recruit and retain a qualified, diverse workforce by increasing access to diverse populations for recruiting.

**Objective 1:** Continuous development and implementation of a comprehensive talent acquisition program that will build and maintain a highly qualified workforce which represents diversity in all aspects, to include race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical ability, religion, veteran status, and thought.

**Strategies:**

- Build relationships with regional colleges, to include Historically Black Colleges and Universities, with environmental programs to strengthen the agency's talent pipeline.
- Develop a DEQ Veterans Resource Group to strengthen ties with our veteran community and develop partnerships to assist with recruitment.
- Host positions for service members participating in the Career Skills Program.
- Partner with Department for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services to hire qualified staff.
- Identify vacant positions historically filled through the competitive or wage hiring process to be filled via an Alternative Hiring Process (Code of Virginia 2.2-1213).

**Objective 2:** Continuous review, modification and improvement of the agency's volunteer, fellowship, and internship programs to cultivate future talent pipelines and create accessible pathways to careers within DEQ for historically underrepresented and diverse populations. Implement intentional outreach to high schools to increase awareness of environmental study programs.

**Strategies:**

- Implement intentional outreach to education systems and programs with underrepresented and diverse populations to increase awareness of environmental study programs.
- Host fellows from the Virginia Management Fellows Program and the Virginia Engineering and Science Policy Fellowship (COVES) Program.

**Objective 3:** Retain and promote a high performing workforce at every level which represents diversity in all aspects, to include: race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, varying abilities, religion, veteran status, and thought.

**Strategies:**

- Review survey results and employment data in conjunction with current workforce plans to identify areas to focus efforts.
- Evaluate the recruitment process to determine if there are barriers to success for diverse applicants.
- Share and make available the Employment Opportunities Plan, Workforce Plan, and DO&I Annual Plan with agency leadership and all staff through DEQnet.

**Goal 2. Welcoming and Respectful Culture:** Create and sustain an agency culture that affirms and respects diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout daily operations.

**Objective 1:** Establish a climate that is supportive, respectful and exudes a sense of belonging by incorporating Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion principles within DEQ. Promote DEQ cultural and social awareness by fostering employee engagement with employee morale boosting events and celebrations.

**Strategies:**

- Prepare an executive summary and engage agency leaders and key stakeholders in reviewing the DO&I Survey Analysis to identify strategies that promote a culture of support, respect, and belonging.
- Communicate the findings of the DO&I Survey Analysis to all staff through a webinar and follow-up DEQnet story.
- Evaluate the DO&I Committee membership, responsibilities, and alignment with other workforce and training committees to optimize the success of the DO&I Committee and align efforts with other stakeholder groups that have related goals and responsibilities.
- Enhance efforts to encourage staff participation in the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign, Employee Recognition Program, and Public Service Week to continue to foster team building with an emphasis on employee morale, recognition, and a cohesive work environment that fosters belonging and unity.

**Objective 2:** Ensure accountability at all levels. Continue to provide an environment where conflicts, concerns, and complaints are aired and addressed expeditiously.

**Strategies:**

- Increase awareness of avenues to report behavior contrary to DO&I principles and promote productive, structured methods of conflict resolution.

**Goal 3. DO&I Infrastructure and Training:** Engage the workforce in learning the concepts of DO&I, and the importance of these concepts to achieving our agency mission.

**Objective 1:** Identify and offer training opportunities for all employees that includes DO&I topics, including creating a common language of DO&I competency so that terms and concepts are uniformly understood (e.g. using pronouns, use of terms such as gender-fluid, micro-aggressions, implicit bias, etc.).

**Strategies:**

- Utilize Survey Analysis to identify training topics that address DO&I performance and knowledge gaps.
- Ensure training programs are available to all employees, including through multiple modes of facilitation (e.g. classroom, virtual, online self-paced, etc.).
- Host Windmills webinar series from the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services and Anthem webinars about DO&I topics for DEQ staff.

**Objective 2:** Provide resources and training for the Leadership Team, managers, and supervisors to address DO&I topics, particularly in difficult situations requiring solutions beyond their experience.

**Strategies:**

- Update training materials and job aids for hiring managers and interview panelists to educate them on legal hiring practices, interview guidelines, best practices before conducting interviews and the Alternative Hiring Process.

## Measuring and Evaluating Success

The Department of Environmental Quality is committed to measuring and evaluating its DO&I efforts and initiatives to ensure they are intentional and support the agency's mission, vision, and values. As we progress in our education and understanding of DO&I and the impact on our workforce, we will commit to reviewing and updating these measures to assess long-term effectiveness and success of our efforts and initiatives. The following are metrics that will be used to measure progress and evaluate effectiveness:

### Goal 1. Access and Success

- Review and track demographic data from Oracle HCM showing expanded composition of the applicant pools across the various stages of recruitment and hiring.
- Review and track the number of new hires that represent diversity and were hired as a result of DO&I initiatives.
- Review and analyze the agency's disaggregated employment data, providing a clear picture of the diversity landscape at the agency.

### Goal 2. Welcoming and Respectful Culture

- Track attendance, evaluate the participation rates, and solicit feedback for events to determine the level of interest and sustainability.
- Review and analyze survey results to gain fundamental knowledge regarding where staff think DO&I is within DEQ or what the "current" culture is.

### Goal 3. DO&I Infrastructure & Training

- Review and analyze survey results to determine training needs and effectiveness of tools, resources, and strategies.