



Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council

2022-23 Annual Report

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Introduction

The Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council, also known as HEDI, is an internal Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) council that provides analysis, insights, and recommendations to DHS on internal and external policies, programs, and projects related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and affirmative action. HEDI is made up of members from each division and office at DHS. HEDI was created in 2021 and spent 2021-22 creating a set of [recommendations](#) for the DHS Secretary. Those recommendations were considered in 2022 and 2023 and several were implemented or are in the planning process. The 2022-23 report summarizes each recommendation and its status.

Members

Tonya C. Evans, Chair (DMS)

Langeston C. Hughes, Co-Chair (DCTS)

Elizabeth Branney-Gant (DES)

Sheri Carter (OPIB)

Darwin Dick (Tribal Affairs)

Troy Jackson (DQA)

Phung Nguyen (OIG)

Edwin Nyakoe-Nyasani (DPH)

Michelle Schroeder (DMS)

Cory Smith (DCTS)

Andrea Turtenwald (OCMH)

Laura Varriale (OLC)

Charges

The HEDI has five charges as outlined in the [bylaws](#):

Charge 1: Oversee implementation of DHS' [equity and inclusion plan](#), including:

- The review of comprehensive workforce analysis to establish goals, strategy, and techniques to build an infrastructure and culture at DHS committed to equity and inclusion.
- Analysis and improvement of DHS leadership diversity.

Charge 2: Meet requirements of affirmative action under Wis. Stat. § 230.06(1)(j) to advise the DHS Secretary and Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) concerning programs designed to ensure equal opportunity to all employees, applicants for employment and clients of the agency.

Charge 3: Request and vote to select (and revise as needed) up to three recommended budget proposals from non-council members for submission to the Office of the Secretary (OS) for consideration in the DHS budget.

Charge 4: Request and vote to select (and revise as needed) up to three items related to diversity, equity, and inclusion per year for the HEDI to analyze or review in order to provide formal and direct recommendations or materials to DHS.

Charge 5: Support education and training on diversity, equity, and inclusion by:

- Identifying trainings for DHS executive management and all staff related to racial and health equity.
- Recommending trainings and resources for external partners, such as health care providers, pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion in alignment with OS goals.

Recommendations and Status

HEDI spent 2021 and 2022 developing a set of recommendations as directed by charges 1, 3, 4, and 5 of the bylaws. Charge 2 was put on hold until a new equity and inclusion plan is complete in 2023 and 2024. In July 2022, HEDI submitted [a report](#) with 6 groups of recommendations for the DHS Secretary to consider.

Preliminary feasibility meetings took place in the fall of 2022. Recommendations were evaluated on the basis of legal, operational, budgetary, capacity and alignment considerations. Many of the recommendations were incorporated into related efforts across the department. The following sections contain the recommendations and the status of each recommendation.

Metrics Recommendations (Charge 1)

HEDI recommended DHS begin collecting metrics that measure staff retention, representation of marginalized communities, bias within the talent mobility system, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) integration in performance. HEDI also recommended sentiment and culture be measured via the stay and grow survey. Specific recommendations are outlined in the [2021-22 annual report](#).

Stay and Grow Survey

The stay and grow survey was quickly modified to add three HEDI-inspired questions in time for the 2022 survey cycle.

Below are the questions asked and the top-line results with overall result for the DHS employees responding and then results broken down by the race/ethnicity self-identified by DHS employees completing the survey. Individual questions can be filtered further by division/office, facility, employee type, and gender.

- Question 1: My personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation, color of skin, heritage, disability, or ability) are not a barrier to progression at DHS:
 - 73.2% of DHS employees responding agree or strongly agree, 26.8% disagree, strongly disagree, or neutral
 - 66.5% of employees responding who self-identify as African American/Black agree
 - 68.4% of employees responding who self-identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native agree
 - 71.3% of employees responding who self-identify as Asian agree
 - 75.8% of employees responding who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino agree
 - 60.5% of employees who did not self-identify race or ethnicity agree
 - 48.1% of employees who self-identified their race or ethnicity as other agree

- Less than 5 employees who self-identify as Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian responded agree or strongly agree so the results are suppressed.
 - 79.2% of employees who self-identify as white agree
- Question 2: People of all cultures and backgrounds are valued and respected at DHS:
 - 69.2% of DHS employees responding agree or strongly agree, 30.8% neutral or below
 - 59.1% of employees responding who self-identify as African American/Black agree or strongly agree
 - 68.4% of employees responding who self-identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native agree or strongly agree
 - 69.0% of employees responding who self-identify as Asian agree or strongly agree
 - 66.1% of employees responding who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino agree or strongly agree
 - 59.7% of employees who did not self-identify race or ethnicity agree or strongly agree
 - 44.4% of employees who self-identified their race or ethnicity as other agree or strongly agree
 - Less than 5 employees who self-identify as Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian responded agree or strongly agree so the results are suppressed.
 - 75.0% of employees who self-identify as white agree or strongly agree
- Question 3: I am comfortable discussing background, beliefs and cultural experience with my colleagues:
 - 60.1% of DHS employees responding agree or strongly agree, 39.9% neutral or below
 - 65.7% of employees responding who self-identify as African American/Black agree or strongly agree
 - 68.4% of employees responding who self-identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native agree or strongly agree
 - 72.4% of employees responding who self-identify as Asian agree or strongly agree
 - 56.5% of employees responding who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino agree or strongly agree
 - 48.2% of employees who did not self-identify race or ethnicity agree or strongly agree
 - 42.3% of employees who self-identified their race or ethnicity as other agree or strongly agree

- Less than 5 employees who self-identify as Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian responded agree or strongly agree so the results are suppressed.
- 63.4% of employees who self-identify as white agree or strongly agree

The stay and grow survey results will be analyzed more this summer to examine root causes.

Other Metrics

For the employee demographic data related to recruitment, hiring, retention, job mobility, and performance management practices, the **DHS Office of Policy Initiatives and Budget (OPIB) completed a comprehensive metrics and data review** of the metrics HEDI recommended collecting and the feasibility of using existing DHS and Department of Administration (DOA) human resources data. They identified barriers in meeting these requests with currently available data and provided recommendations for overcoming those obstacles or for collecting alternative data.

Some data is not available at all, such as data on sexual orientation. Further, for data that is collected, not all employees choose to enter their demographic data into STAR.

Given the data that is reported, DHS could provide many of the metrics identified by HEDI at a single time point; however, once an employee leaves DHS and joins another state agency, DHS no longer has access to their information. As a result, DHS is unable to accurately measure change over time or able to identify the demographics of individuals who leave DHS for another state agency. DOA does retain this data, and DHS could pursue options for gaining access to the data including asking DOA if they would work with DHS to access the historical human resources data. This step would require OS approval.

The data feasibility study also informed the metrics being collected for the 2024-26 equity and inclusion plan development.

Job Posting Recommendations (Charge 1)

Job postings are often one of the first interactions potential applicants have with a prospective employer. HEDI made several [recommendations](#) meant to make job postings more accessible, such as having a more powerful DEI statement in each posting, a word limit and not being overly specific in requirements.

In the State of Wisconsin, human resources functions are centralized at DOA. DOA created a workforce modernization workgroup to create a strategic plan to address the future workforce amid workforce challenges, such as rapidly changing technology and an aging workforce. As part of their work, they are examining current systems including the way the State of Wisconsin recruits employees. **The HEDI job posting recommendations were presented to DOA's workforce modernization workgroup,**

and the DHS Deputy Secretary and Human Resources Director continue to advocate with DOA on this issue.

Mentorship Program Recommendation (Charge 1)

HEDI [recommended](#) establishing a mentorship program that would empower and elevate marginalized staff within DHS, providing them with resources, tools and networks required to build their careers and cultivate informed and diverse minded future leaders.

Agency efforts to implement this recommendation are ongoing and have had to be mindful of potential legal challenges, as both the equal protection clauses of the United States and Wisconsin Constitutions and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act closely scrutinize actions that draw distinctions based on protected class status. Much of the ongoing work has been considered through the lens of affirmative action, but such government action must be limited in scope and time to those actions appropriate to overcome specific effects of past and present practices, policies, or other barriers to equal employment by that agency, and Wisconsin law requires that those efforts be supported by data showing substantial disparities in job groups, Wis. Stat. § 230.01(2).

Additionally, the legal landscape around affirmative action is an uncertain one, as the United States Supreme Court recently held, in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, Docket No. 20-1199, that race-based affirmative action programs in college admissions processes unconstitutionally violated the equal protection clause. It is still uncertain to what extent the Court's decision extends to employment generally, but the equal protection clause nonetheless applies to public-sector employers like the Department. DHS will continue to monitor any developments related to this case and any future cases as we work to implement this recommendation.

One of the paths being considered to meet the goals of the HEDI recommendation is through the existing leadership programs. **The Division of Enterprise Services (DES) is examining the programs and updating the selection process.** In addition, they hired a strategy manager to oversee and manage the programs. The new manager developed the *Dive into DHS* newsletter, a newsletter for participants in the DHS leadership programs. The newsletter provides research, insights, and inspiration for future and current leaders, and has a section that connects graduates to DHS leadership opportunities. Later, DES will look at developing a coaching component to the program.

In addition, **the Office of Health Equity (OHE) has been researching and exploring strategies for establishing employee resource groups in the agency** which would not only provide leadership and community building opportunities for participants, but also, provide group, and potentially individual, mentorship opportunities to participants among other benefits.

Both of these programs will better connect a diverse group of emerging leaders to other leaders within and outside of DHS.

Budget Recommendations (Charge 3)

HEDI was also charged with proposing three new initiatives for budget consideration. HEDI solicited and received over 180 responses to its 2022 DEI recommendations and budget requests survey. They then selected three suggestions from the surveys to recommend to the Secretary: ombudsperson, translation, and a community comms advisory group.

The ombudspersons proposal would have created positions to serve as advisors, counselors, and navigators for DHS staff facing adversity in the workplace related to DEI issues.

The translation proposal recommended translating all DHS webpages into multiple languages, edit forms to have more bilingual options, and create a process where all external facing DHS documents would be translated from English into the other most common languages in the state.

Finally, HEDI recommended developing an advisory group made up of representatives from community organizations to disseminate information to marginalized communities and advise DHS on the communication needs of those communities.

A form of all of the HEDI budget recommendations were approved by the Secretary, written by OPIB, and presented to the DOA State Budget Office for consideration. When Governor Evers released his budget proposal in February 2023, he included funding to translate the DHS website and forms into multiple languages, but the other two proposals were not included. However, when the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) considered the DHS budget, they did not provide funding for this item. On July 5, 2023, Governor Evers signed the 2023-25 budget bill into law.

DEI Request Recommendations (Charge 4)

HEDI was also charged with selecting three DEI requests to recommend to the Secretary. HEDI reviewed the 180 responses to the 2022 DEI recommendations and budget requests survey and grouped their recommendations into three areas: celebrating diversity, diverse representation to increase sense of belonging, and a communications plan: campaign towards inclusion.

Celebrating Diversity Recommendation

HEDI [recommended](#) providing more opportunities for employee-led DEI events in order to foster a culture of education and belonging. **OHE is continuing its Leading Learning Agency strategy with webinars and other learning opportunities.**

In addition, OHE hired a section manager for the Medically and Economically Underserved Communities Health Policy Section (MEUCHPS) whose role will add

capacity to health equity efforts with a focus on health disparities based on place, economic status and race/ethnicity and the Inclusion Diversity Equity and Access (IDEA) Program Specialist whose role will add capacity to equity efforts centered on our internal workforce/workplace and operational activities and is hiring other critical team members to increase its capacity to provide strategic and programmatic leadership, coordination, support, and promotion of initiatives that integrate equity throughout DHS.

Diverse Representation to Increase Sense of Belonging Recommendation

HEDI [recommended](#) developing a program housed within OHE and staffed with full-time employees assigned to each division, office, and facility to provide DEI related mentorship, counseling, and leadership to employees.

While a comprehensive program would require extensive planning, budget authority, and positions, there is overlap between this recommendation and the mentorship recommendation. As described under mentorships, **DES is updating existing leadership programs and OHE continues to explore forming employee resource groups**. In addition, OHE is working with DES on improving onboarding of new staff.

Communications Plan: Campaign Towards Inclusion Recommendation

HEDI [recommended](#) collaborating with the communications office to develop a campaign around various topics to encourage a culture of inclusivity.

Several communications activities have been completed, or are in progress, which aim to make DHS materials more inclusive. To support rewriting DHS public website content in plain language, the OS communications team added a plain language guide and a guide for inclusive and accessible communication were added to the WorkWeb. OHE, in collaboration with the OS communications team, will be developing the DHS health equity style guide in the coming year.

In addition to adding these resources to the internal WorkWeb, there have also been changes to the external website to make it more inclusive. In 2022, DHS worked with an outside vendor to rewrite and use inclusive and gender-neutral language in webpage content. The vendor rewrote webpages that support our public benefit programs as well as our most popular webpages. This work establishes the foundation of easy-to-understand content that will be easier to translate into other languages, including Spanish. As part of the website upgrade project, DHS began to establish the technical infrastructure needed to translate the public website into Spanish. To get this effort over the finish line and implement a bilingual website, a dedicated project will need to be established.

Training Recommendations (Charge 5)

HEDI [recommended](#) eight trainings for DHS leadership, staff, and external partners to help foster an inclusive culture in the workplace.

While implementing this specific recommendation would require an extensive plan and budget, an implementation committee met in 2022 and 2023 and chose **two existing equity and inclusion employee trainings and two existing supervisor trainings to be featured in Cornerstone**. The trainings are not mandatory but are a curated training resource for employees. The trainings range from 25 to 54 minutes each. Once the trainings are highlighted, they will be promoted in the DHS newsletter, Dive into DHS newsletter, and division and other newsletters.

In addition, **BHR has updated its recruitment protocol** to ensure hiring managers have access to implicit bias training available from the Division of Personnel Management's interview panel best practices. BHR continues to work through options on how to ensure hiring managers and interview panel members have completed it prior to participating in interviews.

2024-26 Equity and Inclusion Plan

DHS is in the planning and development phase of establishing a new equity and inclusion plan for 2024-2026. A cross-agency team of interested staff, including subject matter experts, are participating in the plan development, collectively identifying and prioritizing goals, actions, and data/metrics to support them, as well as engaging with representative employee and partner groups to facilitate broad input and support shared ownership of agency strategies and outcomes. HEDI members may have the opportunity in their capacity as DHS staff to participate in the engagement strategies. This approach to utilize a diverse cross section of the agency will help ensure that the strategies included in the plan are in alignment with our agency opportunities and challenges. Strategies pursued will be informed by a broad array of agency inputs and supporting data. The 2024-2026 agency equity and inclusion plan will meet directives, as laid out in Executive Order #59, and serve as a point of alignment for our agency efforts related to recruitment, retention, and agency culture.

Looking Forward to 2023-2024

In 2023 and 2024, HEDI members will support the evaluation of the 2012-2023 Equity and Inclusion Plan. In addition, in 2023 and 2024, HEDI will also focus on how it can grow into its Charge 2. Finally, HEDI will continue to track the 2022 recommendations that are advanced by the Secretary.