

Consent Item 4:

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Program and Equal Employment Opportunity for Fiscal Year 2024

Purpose:

To provide an annual update on our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Program along with the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Report for Fiscal Year 2024.

Background:

OWASA is committed to collectively advancing DEIB across the organization. The DEIB program is a conscious and intentional effort to ensure that all Team Members feel respected, valued, appreciated, and connected.

DEIB Guiding Principles

- The following commitments guide our actions:
 - We provide equal access to opportunities and ensure that all are treated fairly.
 - We provide a work environment where everyone's thoughts, ideas, and perspectives matter.
 - We welcome, accept, appreciate, and value everyone as a member of the team so they feel connected to OWASA.
- OWASA's DEIB program aligns with and supports [our vision, mission, and values](#).
- Investment in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace will enhance our engagement with the community, consultants, and stakeholders.
- To achieve our goals, we are open, honest, and transparent in our communications and invite and accept the open, honest, and transparent communication of others.
- We are committed to continuously improving in DEIB and assessing our progress and opportunities for growth.
- We seek to understand the difference between the intent of our words and actions and are empathetic of the resulting impact.
- We evaluate our policies, procedures, and practices to identify and eliminate barriers to achieving our DEIB program goals and objectives.
- We are committed to supporting the personal growth and development of all Team Members. We commit to providing the tools, resources, training, and education required to empower everyone to respect each other in the work environment and community.
- We engage and collaborate with our Team Members to develop DEIB program goals and objectives. We invite and meaningfully consider diverse viewpoints with a conscious effort to elevate the voices of those most impacted and/or least heard.

September 14, 2024

DEIB Program Update

DEIB PLAN AND INITIATIVES

We hired our first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Specialist in August 2023. The position is now vacant due to the person accepting a higher-level position at another government entity. We are currently recruiting and expect someone on board by October/November 2024.

When hired, the former DEI Specialist initially conducted a “Listening Tour” throughout the organization reaching out to staff with varied levels of tenure, roles, responsibilities, and departmental assignment. Time was dedicated to understanding the organization’s culture and workforce. This helped shape the next steps in our DEIB journey and the development of our new [DEIB Plan](#).

Once the plan became a draft, open employee sessions were held to receive feedback and allow for an inclusive process. Additionally, this plan incorporates insights from best practices and strategies utilized by other industries to promote DEIB. The objective is to use our guiding principles and the plan to integrate DEIB philosophies throughout OWASA, spanning from policy to practice.

The DEIB Specialist spent time participating in activities with One Orange, a county wide racial equity plan as well as the Government Alliance for Racial Equity (GARE). To benchmark programs, research was conducted with other municipalities on subjects such as holidays, probationary, and harassment policies.

EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

- Our Welcome Team assists with successful onboarding
- The Employee Human Resources Team meets monthly for open dialogue and opportunities to connect
- Employee and Senior Safety Committees work on continuous improvement
- The Water Wagon Deployment Team conducts outreach to the community.
- For each recruitment, two individuals are assigned to review and screen applications.
- Hiring panels are used to conduct interviews.



The Welcome Team and new employees they support!

All of these provide a supportive and welcoming workplace culture that encourages collaborative decision making.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND DEVELOPMENT

We are excited to have priorities within the Strategic Plan which emphasize how important staff are to the success of the organization, and how their employment experience matters. We are proud of our progress and look forward to continuing to focus on the goals:

- Increase the number of applicants for entry-level and/or high turnover positions. Positions identified are Utility Technician I/II, Treatment Plant Operator, and Utilities Engineer.
- Achieve and maintain competitive compensation.
- Ensure staff are prepared, informed, and engaged to lead OWASA into the future.

Recruitment

In 2023, OWASA created an Apprenticeship Program to provide knowledge, skills, and abilities to individuals interested in starting a career in the water and wastewater industry. This one-year program provides on-the-job training and support with the opportunity to attend courses and go through testing to become a certified operator. It is our hope that participants can become regular OWASA employees when positions become available or be positioned to pursue positions in the industry. Since early 2023 we have hired five Operator Apprentices for the Wastewater and Water Treatment Plants. The first three Apprentices gained the necessary skills, earned their required certifications, and were hired as full-time Treatment Plant Operators within OWASA.



Under our new program, our first three apprentices became regular full time OWASA employees

Internships

We also developed an Internship Program in our Engineering Department designed to support students in their education and to inform them about careers in the water and wastewater industry. The goal is to employ an intern each year and we are excited that our first Engineering Intern started in March 2024.

Community Reputation

During this reporting period, we embarked on several new strategies to increase our exposure and enhance our status as a favorable employer in the community we serve. Below are two new partnerships:

- Partnered with Hope Renovations Career Catalyst internship program to provide six weeks of on-the-job training. The program works with organizations to offer opportunities to underemployed women and gender-expansive folks and is designed to provide skills to help participants confidently enter their trades.
- Participated in the Summer Career Academy to offer employment opportunities to Chapel Hill and Cedar Ridge High School students. This five-week program provides noncollege bound students an opportunity to learn about the advantages of working in a trade and to gain marketable skills.



Paul Williams (pictured third from right) worked with OWASA's Sewer Maintenance Crew this summer.

Paul will be a senior at Cedar Ridge High School and was a 2024 Summer Career Academy participant.

Recruitment Tactics

We cast a wide net when recruiting for open positions by utilizing a variety of recruitment sources such as professional organizations, educational institutions, peer email and mailings, online job boards and search engines. We strive to build relationships and promote OWASA as a great place to work.

Here is a list of recruitment efforts that were new this reporting period:

- Attended Minority Participation Program and Public Contracting sponsored by the North Carolina Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Coordinator's Network put on by the UNC School of Government.
- Participated in the Veteran's in Water Workforce held by the US Environmental Protection Agency.
- Attended Central Carolina Women in Business Career Focus event.
- Attended a Veteran Career Fair at Fort Liberty.
- Used the Touch-A Truck event to seek out those interested in careers with heavy machinery.
- Attended local schools Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics events.
- Participated in a Triangle DEI Alliance event learning about how to support Re-entry and Re-engagement in the Workforce for those leaving incarceration.
- Analyzed applicant responses on how they are finding our job advertisements.
- Reclassified two (2) Utilities Engineer positions to Project Manager which significantly increased the number of qualified applicants.

- Strengthened our social media presence regarding employment opportunities.

Retention

We truly value all members of the OWASA team. An important part of the retention of our staff is maintaining a competitive compensation and benefits package. During FY 2024, we continued to consider and implement findings from the 2023 Pay and Classification Study.

Employee Benefits

Several new benefits or changes to existing benefits were suggested by employees and our consultant. The following changes were implemented:

- Increased the 457-employer contribution from 3.5% to 5%
- Increased the annual safety shoe reimbursement from \$150 to \$200
- Updated On-Call pay
 - Increased from 8 hours to 12 hours of pay for a week of serving on-call duty.
 - Added 4 hours of pay for employees that are recalled but are not specifically on-call at the time.
- NEW: Added Recovery Leave
 - Recovery leave is paid leave intended to provide employees rest time when recalled within eight hours of their next regular shift.
- NEW: Accept accumulated sick leave earned from prior employment at other local governments or state agencies
- NEW: Added annual Commercial Driver's License incentive
- NEW: Added \$100 reimbursement for eye protection equipment
- Increased annual Vision Care Reimbursement from \$405 per fiscal year to \$550
- Increased annual limit for Dental Coverage from \$1,000 to \$1,500
- Updated employee life insurance coverage to \$100,000 for all employees (was previously twice your annual salary with a maximum of \$100,000)
- Updated the maximum amount available for long-term disability coverage from \$3,500 to \$5,000

Employee Referral Program

During the period, we received 18 referrals through our Employee Referral program with four hired as OWASA Team Members.

Development

Diversity training increases awareness, appreciation and understanding for co-workers. All staff members are required to attend at least one DEIB training annually. During the period, these sessions were conducted in-house by the DEIB Specialist. We also contracted with VISIONS, Inc., the consultant that conducted our initial Organizational Assessments, to train new-hires and individuals promoted to supervisory roles. VISIONS also conducts annual DEIB training to newly appointed members of the Board of Directors.

Training and skill enhancement programs (see below) help staff support each other, improve communication/collaboration, create a more inclusive workplace, enhance cultural competencies and encourage open dialogue.

OWASA leaders attend Quarterly Leadership meetings in which outside experts conduct training sessions on various topics to enhance and grow our knowledge and skills. These sessions have been well received and appreciated by the leadership team.

Quarterly Leadership Topics

- Coaching for Leaders
- Leading an Effective Team
- Workplace Laws
- Leading during an Emergency

Professional Development Benefit

We are a learning organization which encourages and supports professional development. There are important benefits to the organization and employees when individuals pursue professional growth within their profession. OWASA offers a bonus pay program that rewards employees who successfully obtain a job-relevant professional certification above what is required for their position. In this reporting period, 15 employees earned the bonus.

Skill-Based Pay Program

Certain positions within OWASA are eligible for the Skill-Based Pay program. This program provides opportunities and rewards for those who develop and demonstrate the productive application of new skills, providing benefits to both the individual employee and the organization. Six employees this reporting period took advantage of the Skill-Based Pay program and received a promotion. Additionally, eight other individuals earned promotions through traditional recruiting efforts.

Mentoring Program

A successful, sustainable mentoring program adds value for everyone involved including the organization. It is an investment in culture and relationships. While we have had a successful program for some time, additional work was started by our DEIB Specialist and is underway to strengthen, expand and promote the program. Successful mentoring programs:

- Build diverse partnerships and encourage collaboration.
- By pairing staff, it can help people feel heard, included and comfortable.
- Mentors model empathy and encourage active listening.
- Mentorship programs help employees feel valued and supported, which can lead to higher retention rates.
- Employees feel more satisfied in their jobs, which can lead to higher engagement.
- Prepare staff for future positions assisting with succession planning.

A LOOK AHEAD INTO FY 2025

- We are recruiting and expect to hire our new DEI Specialist by October/November 2024.
- We continue to work on Strategic Plan Initiatives. Examples include evaluating recruitment efforts and community partnerships, exploring apprenticeship opportunities for additional positions, completing a request for proposals to solicit consultant assistance to develop a Workforce Development Plan, etc.
- All staff members as well as the Board will receive annual DEIB training before the end of the 2024 calendar year.
- Research joining the National Women in Construction organization.
- Complete items in DEIB plan. Examples include DEI Specialist serving as reviewer for applications and candidate selections, adding a DEIB pre-recruitment training meeting for hiring panels, include a meeting with DEIB Specialist during new employee onboarding, removing biased language from Administrative Guides and HR Policy, rebuilding/reframing DEIB groups, etc.

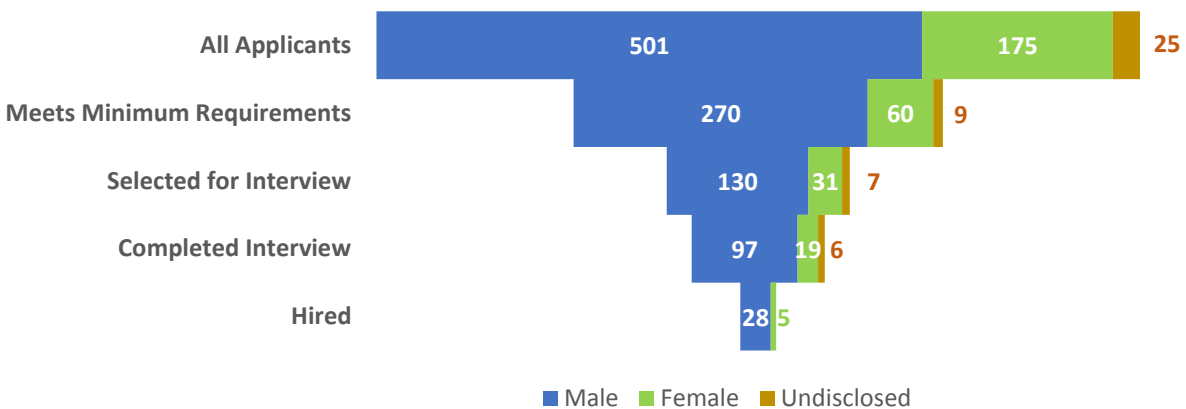


Human Resources and Distribution and Collection Department staff participated in the Touch-a-Truck event at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill on April 14, 2024, using the opportunity to recruit those interested in working with heavy equipment.

EEO REPORT FOR FY 2024

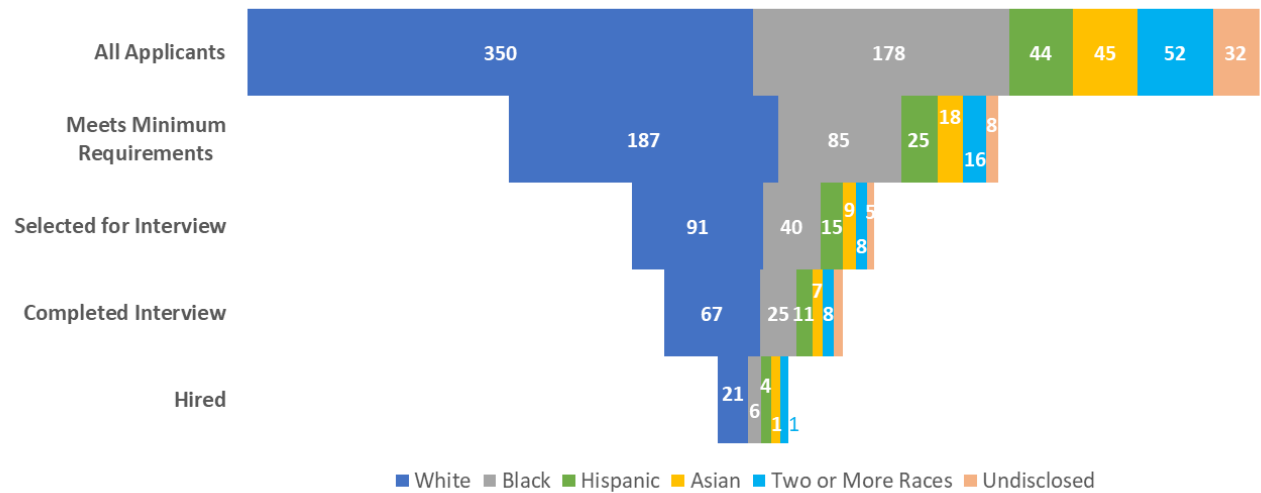
OWASA is committed to seeking qualified minority applicants for all job categories and to make efforts to increase minority representation throughout the organization. Our practice is to use diverse interviewing panels when filling positions. We strive for a fair and equitable hiring experience and plan to continue working to strengthen our processes. We also monitor demographic representation at each step in the recruitment process to track our efforts in promoting workforce diversity. A year ago, we identified a challenge in attracting female applicants for our Treatment Plant Operator positions. We are excited that we filled one vacancy with a female at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and just recently hired a female as a Water Treatment Plant Operator (not reflected in the information below). Below is information on the gender and racial diversity of recruitments, there were 33 positions filled this reporting period.

Gender Distribution in the Recruitment Process



	Male	Female	Undisclosed
Applicants	71%	25%	4%
Meets Minimum Requirements	80%	18%	2%
Selected for Interview	77%	19%	4%
Completed Interview	79%	16%	5%
Hired	85%	15%	0%

Racial Distribution in the Recruitment Process



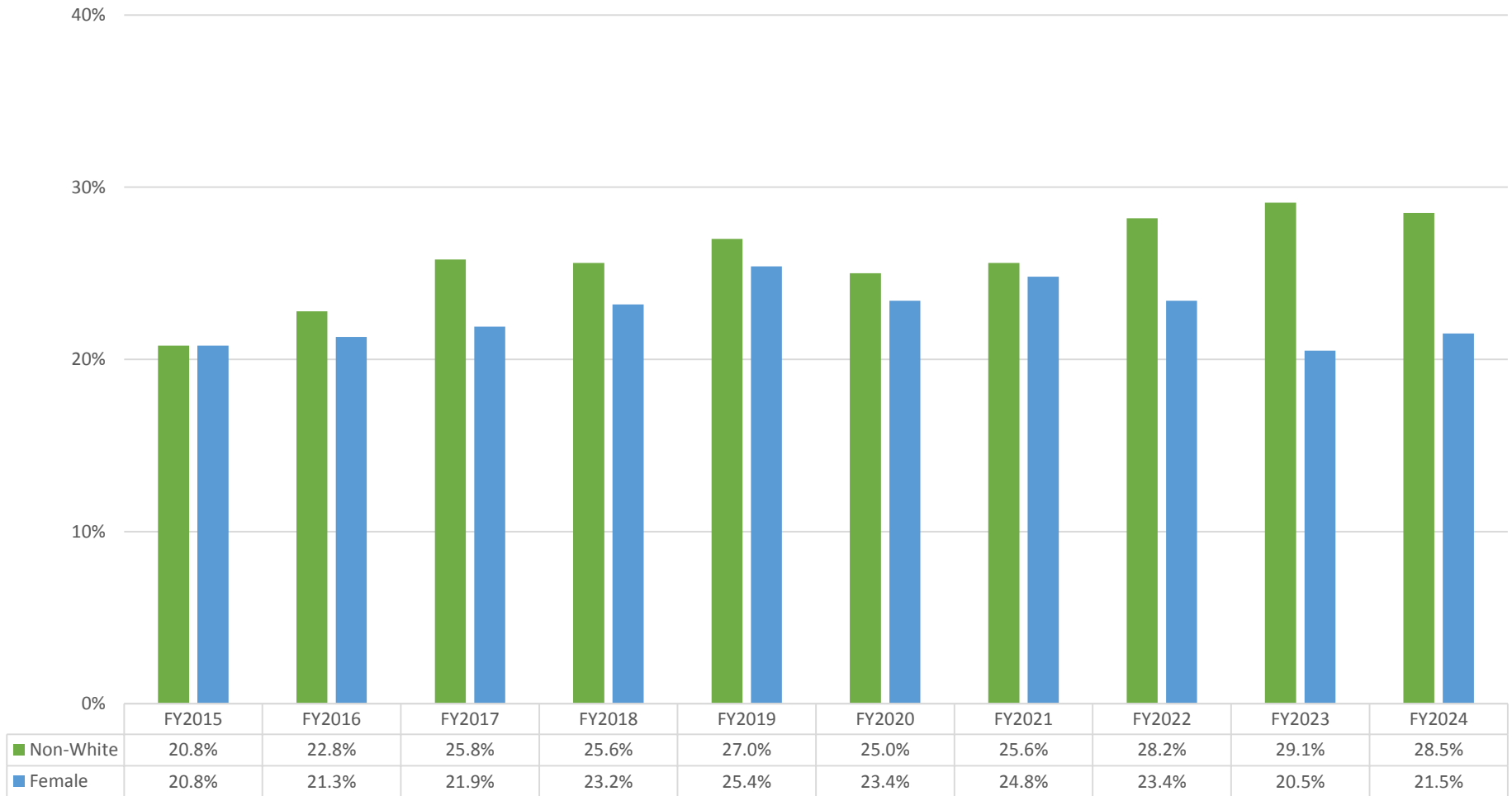
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Two or more	Undisclosed
Applicants	50%	25%	6%	6%	8%	5%
Meets Minimum Requirements	55%	25%	7%	6%	5%	2%
Selected for Interview	54%	24%	9%	5%	5%	3%
Completed Interview	55%	20%	9%	6%	7%	3%
Hired	64%	18%	12%	3%	3%	0%

Note: During this reporting period, there were six individuals offered a position that declined the offer or failed our post-offer process.

The employee race and gender representation on June 30, 2024, was 28.5% non-white and 21.5% females – see chart below.

Workforce Race and Gender Distribution By EEO Classification on June 30, 2024									
	Gender		Race						
Classification	Male	Female	Two or More Races	White	Black/ African American	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
Officials and Administrators	7	9	1	13	1	0	1	0	0
Professionals	21	2	2	17	3	1	0	0	0
Technicians	9	2	0	11	0	0	0	0	0
Protective Service Workers	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Paraprofessionals	4	4	0	4	4	0	0	0	0
Administrative Support	1	8	0	2	4	3	0	0	0
Skilled Craft Workers	38	2	3	29	4	4	0	0	0
Service Maintenance	20	1	0	15	5	0	1	0	0
Total (130)	102	28	6	93	21	8	2	0	0
Percentage	78.5%	21.5%	4.6%	71.5%	16.2%	6.2%	1.5%	0	0

OWASA Workforce Ten-Year History
Racial and Gender Distribution on June 30th
(FY 2015-FY 2024)



Observations

- For about the same number of recruitments, we received 49% more applications in FY 2024 compared to the prior year.
 - In FY 2024 we filled 33 positions with 701 applications
 - In FY 2023 we filled 34 positions with 469 applicants.
- Three recruitments were filled with former employees returning to OWASA.
- Thirty-six percent of those hired were non-white and fifteen percent were female.
- Workforce demographics are measured as of June 30 each year. As shown above, for FY 2024 our workforce was 28.5% non-white and 21.5% female. We have filled several positions since and as of this writing, our team is 31.8% non-white and 22.2% female.
- During this reporting period, we had 20 separations:
 - Three were retirements
 - Six were terminations
 - Eleven were resignations
 - Three relocated out of the area
 - Six accepted a higher-level position with another organization
 - Two sought other employment