EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

BLUEPRINT

Table of Contents

ONTARIO CLEAN WATER AGENCY
AGENCE ONTARIENNE DES EAUX

Introduction

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are not solely ethical principles but strategic assets, fostering innovation, resilience and wellness in today's dynamic landscape.

By embracing EDI, an organization can attract and retain top talent, increase employee engagement and improve connection and alignment with the clients and communities it serves.

The Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) is a leader in the water industry and recognizes that the Agency's success is built on having an equitable, diverse and inclusive workforce that brings different experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives together. We remain committed to advancing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and recognize change requires consistent, persistent and intentional action to drive true transformation. In other words, progressing EDI is a journey and not a destination.

As such, EDI is not only identified as a foundational element of OCWA's strategic plan, but we have developed an EDI Blueprint to serve as our compass on our transformation journey, connecting the people, programs and priorities to our vision of a culture where every employee feels safe, valued, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

Progress and Current State

OCWA implemented its inaugural multi-year Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Anti-Racism plan between 2019-2022. The strategy laid the groundwork for advancing EDI at OCWA by defining our mission and vision, setting key priorities and actions.

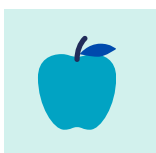**Notable outcomes from the 2019-2022 strategy included:**

KPIs

Setting EDI key performance indicators and reporting tools like the EDI Snapshot

EDI Council

Establishing OCWA's first Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Council

Training

Training for senior leaders and managers (e.g. Unconscious Bias, Cultural Competence)

Information Sharing

Sharing EDI & Anti-Racism resources weekly in OCWA staff newsletter (e.g. Days/Months of Significance, Importance of Pronouns)

Equity Lens

Development of OCWA's Equity Lens

In the three years since we developed the strategy, like most organizations, OCWA was influenced by internal and external factors which shaped its employees, programs and practices. On an international scale, the Covid-19 pandemic, heightened awareness of societal inequities and unprecedented levels of uncertainty which many individuals and organizations to reflect and reassess their priorities. While we responded to the changing environment around us, we continued to make strides in advancing EDI.

OCWA measured its EDI related priorities, activities and progress through assessments such as:

Engagement Survey & Census

Conducting OPS Employee Experience Surveys in 2019, 2021, and 2022 has provided vital census data and key performance indicators, such as the Inclusion Index, offering valuable insights into our progress and employee engagement across different groups.

Gender Assessment in Operations

Partnering with Canadian Equality Consulting (CEC) for a gender-based assessment, including a confidential survey and one-on-one interviews, showcases a proactive approach to understanding and addressing gender-related dynamics in the workplace. This initiative aligns with OCWA's commitment to fostering a respectful and psychologically safe environment, promoting employee retention, and upholding organizational values.

GDEIB Assessment

Utilizing the Global Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (GDEI) Assessment as a benchmarking tool reflects a commitment to comparing organizational practices against established DEI best practices. The self-assessment not only acknowledges existing efforts but also identifies areas for improvement, guiding the development of a more comprehensive and effective EDI strategy.

Pulse Survey and Focus Groups

Implementing a Pulse Survey to gauge the impact of the DEI program, coupled with facilitated virtual focus groups, demonstrates a commitment to understanding employee perspectives on inclusion, belonging, and respect. Seeking input on program direction and encouraging open discussions further emphasizes the organization's dedication to continuous improvement and responsiveness to employee feedback.

Insights

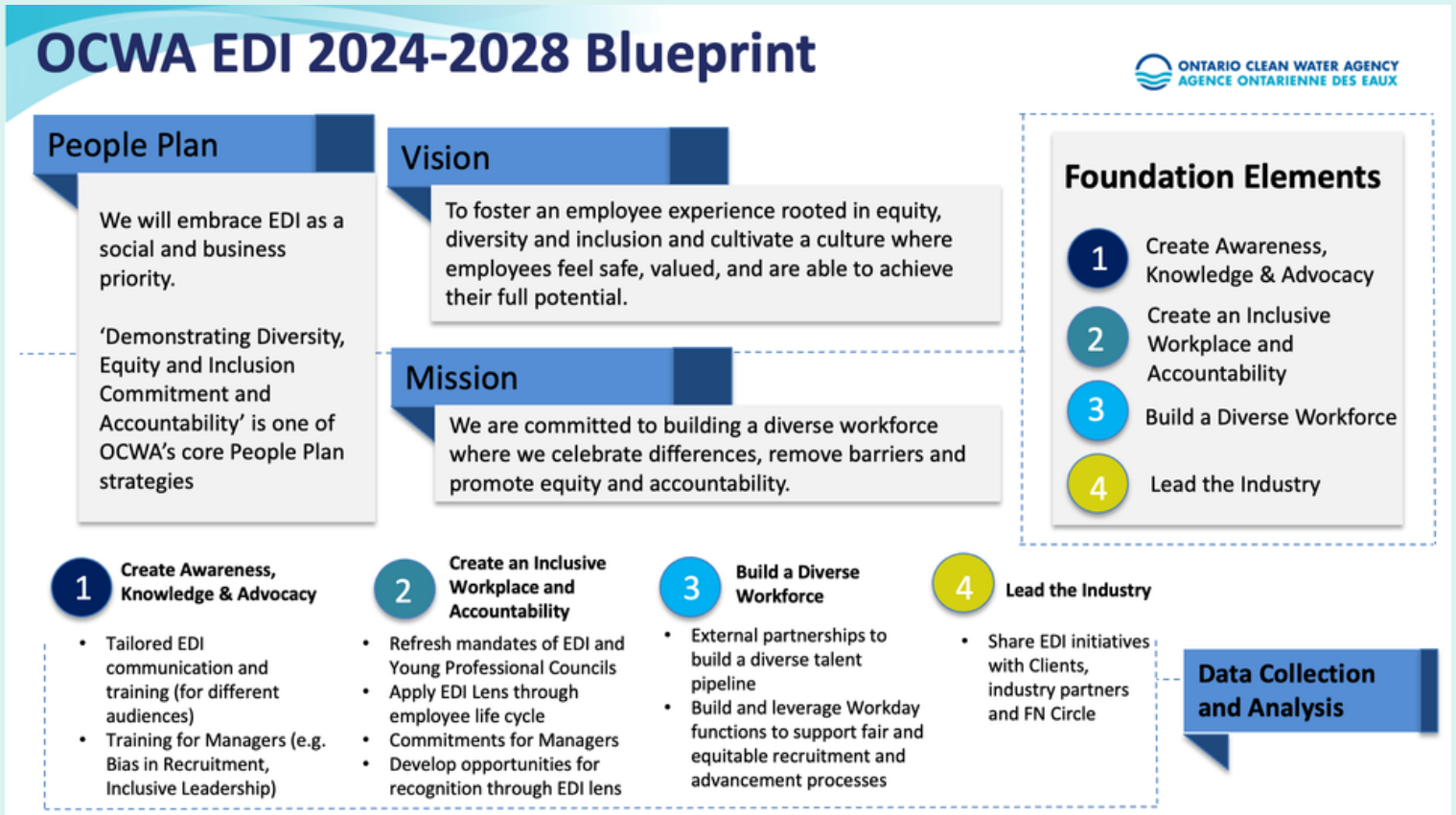Through this information gathering and assessment period, several key insights emerged:

☑ The 2019-2022 strategy and 3-year action plan built a solid foundation for work to continue to advance EDI at OCWA.

☑ According to the 2023 GDEIB assessment, OCWA has matured against DEI best practices (when compared to 2018 results).

☑ The Inclusion Index (from the OPS Employee Experience Survey) has increased since 2019 (from 72 to 74.1). Notably, this improvement is observed across equity-seeking demographic groups including Women, racialized employees and those with disabilities.

☑ While employees report they feel respected and have positive relationships with their manager, there is room for improvement in ensuring that all managers demonstrate inclusive leadership behaviours.

☑ An environmental scan of municipalities and Canadian/U.S utilities revealed that organizations are prioritizing similar objectives and implementing comparable initiatives indicating alignment with OCWA's areas of focus and collective advancement of EDI practices within the industry.

We've laid a solid foundation and we continue to press forward. We recognize advancing equity, diversity and inclusion is simply the right thing to do as a business leader in the communities where we live and work. While OCWA will continue with our current efforts, **we're committed to evolving and advancing,** and actively seeking ways to integrate EDI into our daily operations for a practical and tangible impact.

The Blueprint

Following an assessment of the impact of our 3-year EDI action plan, and guided by our vision—to cultivate a culture where every employee feels safe, valued, and empowered to achieve their full potential—we embark on the next stage of our transformative journey. Our mission is clear: to build a diverse workforce where we celebrate differences, dismantle barriers, and promote equity and accountability.

OCWA's EDI Blueprint ("the Blueprint) is not merely a roadmap; it is a living document that captures our collective aspirations, commitments, and actionable strategies. It is as dynamic as the people it is designed to support and will evolve as needs, interests, and priorities shift.

OCWA EDI 2024-2028 Blueprint

ONTARIO CLEAN WATER AGENCY
AGENCE ONTARIENNE DES EAUX

People Plan

We will embrace EDI as a social and business priority.

'Demonstrating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commitment and Accountability' is one of OCWA's core People Plan strategies

Vision

To foster an employee experience rooted in equity, diversity and inclusion and cultivate a culture where employees feel safe, valued, and are able to achieve their full potential.

Mission

We are committed to building a diverse workforce where we celebrate differences, remove barriers and promote equity and accountability.

Foundation Elements

1. Create Awareness, Knowledge & Advocacy
2. Create an Inclusive Workplace and Accountability
3. Build a Diverse Workforce
4. Lead the Industry

1 Create Awareness, Knowledge & Advocacy
- Tailored EDI communication and training (for different audiences)
- Training for Managers (e.g. Bias in Recruitment, Inclusive Leadership)

2 Create an Inclusive Workplace and Accountability
- Refresh mandates of EDI and Young Professional Councils
- Apply EDI Lens through employee life cycle
- Commitments for Managers
- Develop opportunities for recognition through EDI lens

3 Build a Diverse Workforce
- External partnerships to build a diverse talent pipeline
- Build and leverage Workday functions to support fair and equitable recruitment and advancement processes

4 Lead the Industry
- Share EDI initiatives with Clients, industry partners and FN Circle

Data Collection and Analysis

STRATEGIC FOCUS
1: Foster awareness, knowledge and advocacy on the individual and organizational level

Fostering awareness, knowledge and advocacy are fundamental to continuous improvement in equity, diversity and inclusion.

Employee sentiment gathered following the initial EDI strategic plan highlighted that individuals are at different stages in this learning journey. In this area of strategic focus, our aim is to empower all OCWA employees, regardless of their current point in their journey, to deepen their understanding of EDI principles and foster an inclusive mindset. Through intentional efforts focused on continuous learning and open dialogue, we strive to establish a foundational understanding of EDI across OCWA where knowledge is continuously shared, perspectives are consistently respected, and advocacy becomes an ingrained part of our collective ethos.

Tactics

Equip people leaders with comprehensive training and ongoing support to empower them with the skills and understanding to champion EDI within their teams and throughout the organization (including topics like inclusive leadership behaviours, neurodiversity and psychological safety) as an integral aspect of inclusive leadership.

Improve supports for individual learning journeys by increasing access to resources to strengthen foundational understanding of EDI.

Integrate EDI considerations into learning plans to ensure employees, at all levels, are not only aware of EDI principles but are also accountable for demonstrating inclusivity within their roles.

Progress Indicators

Employee Experience Survey Question: "The OPS is taking appropriate action to build an equitable workplace".

Employee Experience Survey Question: I am confident that the person I report to will effectively address instances of discrimination or harassment if they occur in my workplace (e.g. race, disability, sexual orientation, etc.)"

ONTARIO CLEAN WATER AGENCY
AGENCE ONTARIENNE DES EAUX

This area of strategic focus underscores the crucial role of accountability in shaping and sustaining a culture of inclusion.

By establishing clear expectations, fostering transparency, and aligning programs and policies, we aim to weave accountability into the fabric of our organization, ensuring that equity, diversity and inclusion become integral elements of our collective success.

Accountabilities

Role	Contribution
OCWA Executives	**Embed** the Blueprint vision into strategic planning and **lead by example** to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging
OCWA People Leaders	**Communicate** and **Connect** teams with the Blueprint's vision and mission
OCWA EDI Council	**Provide** perspective and **champion** the EDI Blueprint
OCWA Community	**Understand** and **engage** with the principles of EDI

Tactics

Develop EDI accountability framework and EDI-related performance goals for Managers and Executives (and learning goals for staff) starting in 2024/25, aligning their actions with OCWA's new EDI Blueprint (for advancing an equitable, diverse and inclusive culture at OCWA).

Review and revise business processes supporting the employee life cycle (e.g. starting with recruitment and onboarding programs) through the application of OCWA's Equity Lens, fostering inclusivity for all employees.

Align legacy employee initiatives with the Blueprint Mission and Vision, including but not limited to the Youth and Young Professionals Network, EDI Council, Aspiring Managers/Leaders Program, OCWAmarine Awards.

Address opportunities for the improvement of safety and accessibility in Operations through a gender-equity lens as outlined in the 2023 Gender Assessment in Operations.

Progress Indicators

Leadership and Inclusion Indices informed by the Employee Experience Survey

Employee Experience Survey Question: "I feel like I belong at my workplace"

This area of strategic focus involves intentional efforts to attract, develop and retain individuals with diverse backgrounds, ensuring OCWA's workforce reflects the richness of perspectives present in the communities we serve.

Tactics

Establish strategic external partnerships (postsecondary, associations, and community groups) to support attraction initiatives with a focus on increasing opportunities for equity seeking groups.

Increase access to OCWA's youth and attraction initiatives for neurodiverse students (e.g through Career Fairs, Sponsorships, and Scholarships).

Develop and amplify OCWA's employer branding to align with EDI principles and foster a sense of belonging among diverse audiences, emphasizing inclusivity in messaging.

Utilize Workday analytics to track diversity metrics, inform talent acquisition and management programs to align with OCWA's commitment to fairness and equity.

Progress Indicators

Continue to analyze demographic data and trends, report on them and use them for decision making using existing tools like the OPS Survey, EDI Snapshot and Workday

ONTARIO CLEAN WATER AGENCY
AGENCE ONTARIENNE DES EAUX

This area of strategic focus encompasses initiatives to address underrepresentation in the Water/Wastewater Industry, promote awareness and champion industry-wide collaboration. By actively engaging with industry stakeholders, OCWA aims to set a precedent, leading the water industry toward a more equitable and inclusive future.

Tactics

Collaborate with industry peers, organizations and stakeholders to share best practices, and collectively address underrepresentation in the Water/Wastewater Industry.

Advocate for the inclusion of EDI-related training as "director-approved" training hours for obtaining and maintaining water and wastewater licenses in Ontario, underscoring its role in driving industry-wide change.
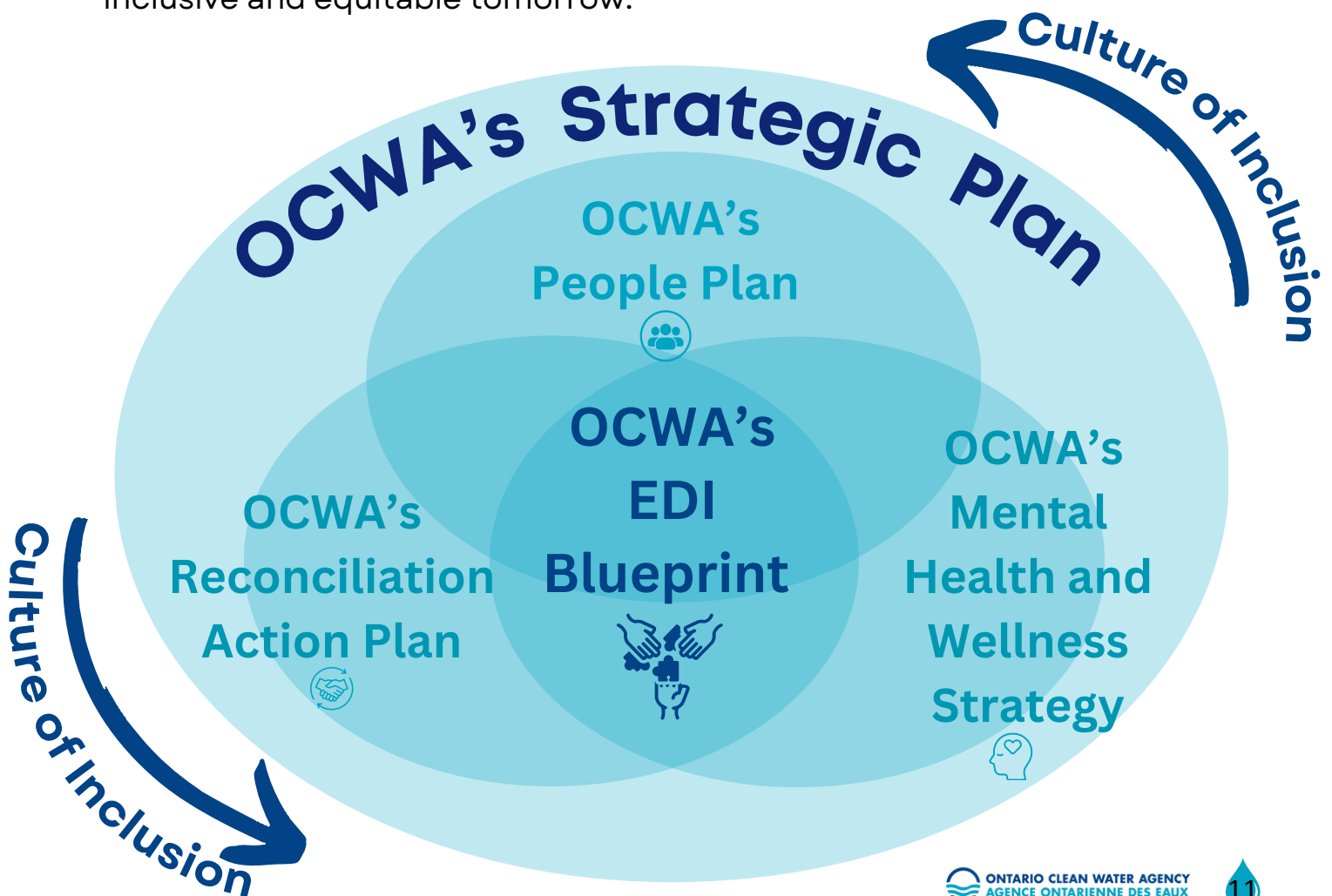
Progress Indicators

EDI related key messages are incorporated into external materials and shared at Industry related events to amplify OCWA and oppurtunities within the Water/Wastewater Industry.
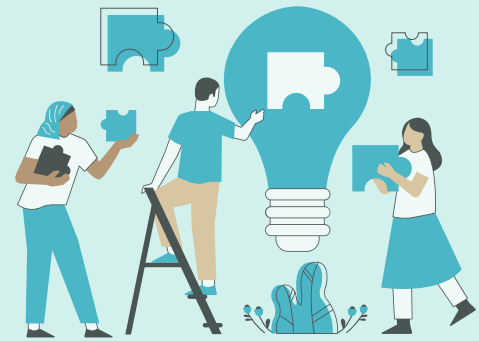
Bringing it All Together:

Building a culture of inclusion at OCWA

This blueprint will serve as our guiding compass, connecting and steering us towards a future where EDI principles are not just embraced but deeply rooted in our culture. As we continue to move forward, we recognize that this work cannot be pursued in isolation. It requires a holistic view of our organization, harnessing the synergies between our people, programs and priorities to inform intentional actions and drive meaningful change.

At OCWA, we are united in our commitment to turn the aspirations of Blueprint into a reality, powering our collective journey toward a more inclusive and equitable tomorrow.

OCWA's Strategic Plan

Culture of Inclusion

OCWA's People Plan

OCWA's EDI Blueprint

OCWA's Reconciliation Action Plan

OCWA's Mental Health and Wellness Strategy

Definitions and Terminology

Accessibility

Accessibility is ensuring that people of all abilities have equitable and barrier–free access to physical spaces, products, programs and services, as well as employment opportunities

Anti-Racism

Anti-racism is a specific approach to eliminate racism that acknowledges that systemic racism exists and that takes proactive steps to fight racial inequity. It actively confronts the unequal power dynamic between groups and structures that maintain it.

Diversity

Diversity is the range of visible and invisible qualities, experiences and identities that shape who we are, how we think and how we engage with, and are perceived by the world. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical or mental abilities, religious/spiritual beliefs, or political ideologies. They can also include differences such as personality, style, capabilities, and thoughts/perspectives.

Equity

Equity is fairness, making sure everyone has what they need to succeed and removing barriers that disadvantage some groups over others. This is different than treating people equally, which is behind the concept of "equality."

Inclusion

Inclusion is recognizing, welcoming and making space for diversity. An inclusive OCWA capitalizes on the diversity of thought, experiences, skills and talents of all of our employees.

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects.