

# NINE MILE CREEK DEIA ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



# Introduction

Nine Mile Creek Watershed District (NMCWD) is a special purpose local unit of government established in accordance with state law to manage water resources – protect and improve water quality and mitigate risks of flooding – on a watershed basis. NMCWD has jurisdiction over the land tributary to Nine Mile Creek which is about 50 square miles. NMCWD, in Hennepin County, includes parts of Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Richfield. NMCWD’s activities are directed and overseen by a five-member board of managers, and its six employees operate out of headquarters in Eden Prairie.

Central to NMCWD’s work is its watershed-management plan, a 10-year plan that guides NMCWD’s work and its role in leading water-resource management in the watershed. NMCWD’s current watershed management plan does not address environmental justice and equity within the watershed. The NMCWD Board of Managers has identified diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility (DEIA) work as important to address and as a result brought forth this initiative.

# Overall Approach

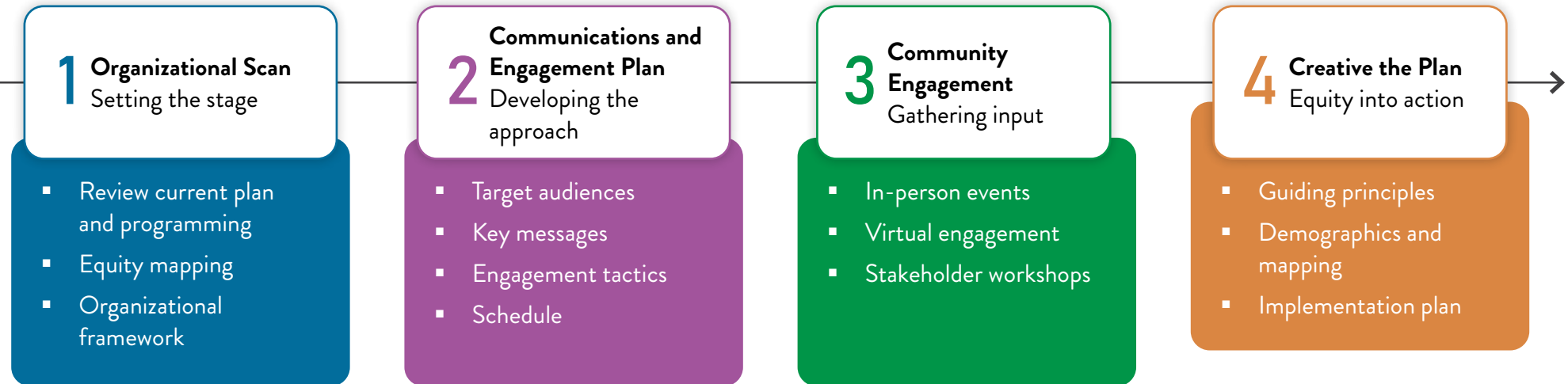
## PROJECT GOALS

Develop a NMCWD DEIA plan that will have concrete objectives and actions to fully integrate environmental justice and equity in our work. This plan should:

1. Act as a roadmap to integrate equity into the current organizational framework.
2. Include effective strategies to implement change given the unique status as their special purpose unit of local government.
3. Contain prioritized action steps connected to NMCWD’s mission and purpose.
4. Seek input from underrepresented communities on the intersection of DEIA and watershed management, action strategies, and prioritization of action strategies for NMCWD to undertake.
5. Develop a list of community groups and liaisons who serve underrepresented groups for future watershed engagement efforts.

# PROJECT APPROACH

The DEIA Plan was completed in four overlapping phases.



## 1 Organizational Scan

The first step of the process was to complete a desktop review and synthesis of the current Watershed Management Plan, existing programming, and service area characteristics. Each program lead was interviewed for deeper insight into the workings of watershed management. The purpose of the organizational scan and equity mapping was to explore questions such as the following:

- What and where are the potential community relationships to watershed programming by residency, employment, BIPOC, income, age, disability?
- Where are the areas of concentrated vulnerabilities\* in the watershed service area? What metrics could we use to understand if, and how, levels of service vary by geography and identity?

- What and where are any environmental stressors related to watershed programming? What are the associated burdens? What are the cumulative impacts and to whom do they fall?

This exercise guided the engagement approach and defined key messages and questions for community members. A summary of the Equity Mapping results is shown in the following sections.

## 2 Communications and Engagement Plan

The second phase of the project consisted of developing a communications and engagement plan which identified target audiences, key messages, engagement tactics, and the schedule. The community engagement served as an overarching guide for the community engagement activities completed as part of the project.

## 3 Community Engagement

Community engagement was conducted over five months in various cities within the watershed district. A summary of the engagement approach and results are described in the following sections.

## 4 Creating the Plan

Throughout the engagement process, the team continually gathered and tabulated responses to determine trends and themes. These themes drive the recommendations in the DEIA plan which include:

- Guiding principles and goals informed by engagement results
- Demographic tabulations and mapping
- An organizational framework intersectionality matrix to connect to the NMCWD mission and purpose
- An implementation plan which includes:
  - Specific actions and their implementation timeframes
  - Resources, staff time, and cost
  - Measures of effectiveness



## Equity Mapping

Working with NMCWD staff and Hennepin County, demographic data was collected to determine where the most underrepresented communities are located in the watershed. Engagement locations were determined by highlighting key demographic categories by geographic area, and identifying which of these areas may have received less services, projects, or funding.

The key demographic categories the project team focused on were:

- People of Color 25%+
- Renters
- Below 185% poverty level
- No internet access
- Speaks English less than very well
- People with disabilities

The project team identified the areas shown on the map as underrepresented communities. The corresponding demographic information is shown in the table below.

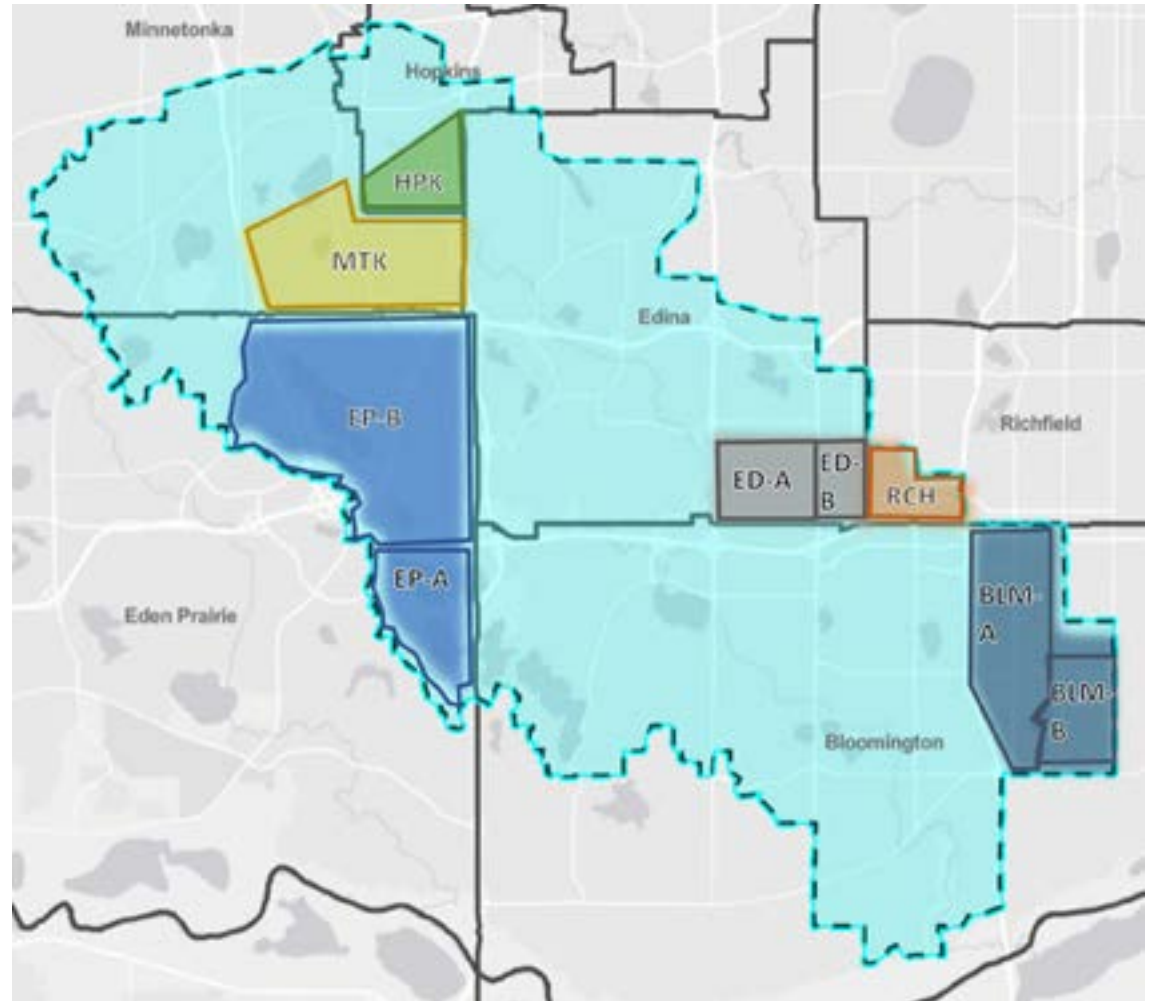


Figure 1: Underrepresented communities map

Figure 2: NMCWD demographics

	BLOOMINGTON A	BLOOMINGTON B	BLOOMINGTON A + B	EDEN PRAIRIE A	EDEN PRAIRIE B	EDEN PRAIRIE A + B	EDINA A	EDINA B	EDINA A + B	HOPKINS	MINNETONKA	RICHFIELD
<b>People of Color</b>	48%	47%	48%	32%	28%	30%	39%	20%	30%	44%	29%	35%
<b>White</b>	52%	53%	52%	68%	72%	70%	61%	80%	70%	56%	71%	65%
<b>Black</b>	16%	18%	17%	21%	13%	17%	4%	9%	6%	27%	21%	5%
<b>Native American</b>	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Asian</b>	12%	3%	7%	2%	7%	4%	20%	7%	14%	3%	3%	14%
<b>Latino</b>	11%	5%	8%	1%	4%	2%	13%	2%	7%	9%	1%	14%
<b>Renters</b>	40%	46%	43%	41%	46%	44%	58%	61%	59%	63%	54%	66%
<b>Below 185% Poverty Level</b>	19%	24%	22%	28%	14%	21%	18%	28%	23%	39%	16%	19%
<b>No Internet</b>	10%	5%	7%	10%	3%	7%	8%	11%	9%	11%	1%	3%
<b>Speak English Less Than Very Well</b>	14%	9%	12%	9%	4%	7%	11%	5%	8%	9%	2%	6%
<b>Living with a Disability</b>	13%	2%	8%	9%	6%	8%	8%	23%	15%	15%	10%	8%

# Community Engagement Summary

## ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Community engagement was conducted using three strategies: in-person pop-up activities at existing events, a targeted tabling event and focus group with target community members, and an online survey paired with a project mailer to promote the survey. From February 2024 to June 2024, over 350 people were engaged through these strategies.

The following goals guided engagement for the DEIA plan:

- Identify community partners and liaisons from underrepresented communities.
- Seek input from underrepresented communities on the intersection of DEIA and watershed management, action strategies, and prioritization of action strategies for NMCWD to undertake.
- Develop a list of community groups and liaisons who serve underrepresented groups for future watershed engagement efforts.

To target a diverse cross section of district residents, the project team used the equity map and key demographic categories to identify what areas within the watershed district to focus outreach. The following outreach methods and events were selected:

### Pop-ups

- Bloomington Community Center Fare For All
- Bloomington Metro South Resource Fair
- Richfield Community Center Fare For All
- Edina Countryside Elementary School Book Fair
- Hopkins Mainstreet Day

### Targeted Tabling and Focus Group

- Hopkins 151 on 8 Apartments

### Mailer with Survey

- Eden Prairie
- Bloomington
- Edina



## ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

**6** pop-up events

**300+** event participants

**3,000** mailers

**57** survey responses

**1** targeted focus group

## WHAT WE HEARD

- Residents' top priority are projects that improve water quality, create natural spaces for plants and animals, and increase access to these areas.
- Participants see value in putting funding towards education and outreach, specifically to teach children about water and caring for the environment.
- Participants want to learn more about the grant program and would like to see grant projects in public places.
- Overall strong interest for seeing more green spaces that are natural, have native plants, and are quiet and aesthetically pleasing.
- People are interested in seeing more amenities including walking and bike trails, quiet places to sit, and family friendly facilities.
- People are most concerned with harmful and dirty stuff in our lakes, streams, and wetlands (like plant fertilizer, road salt, and heavy metals).

## EVENT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The project team created two different engagement activities for in-person events. An explanation of the activity, goals, and results are located below.

### **Priori-trees Activity**

The priori-trees activity was used at the first four pop-ups with the goal of understanding community priorities for how Nine Mile Creek Watershed District should focus their efforts. Participants were asked to place a “leaf” on the “tree” that corresponded with the program they were most interested in. They could choose between Education and Outreach, Grants, or Projects. Participants were also asked what their top three water-related concerns are for their local community and the environment. This activity was used at the following events:

- February 15: Bloomington Fare For All Pop-up
- February 20: Richfield Fare For All Pop-up
- March 5: Metro South Resource Fair Pop-up
- March 7: Countryside Book Fair Pop-up

A breakdown of the combined results are shown on the following page.



Figure 3: Priorities activity results

PRIORITY	VOTES
<b>Education and Outreach:</b> Offers classes, workshops, and chances to learn about water and taking care of the environment.	19
<b>Grants:</b> Gives money to residents, businesses, and cities for projects that make water cleaner or bring back the natural homes of plants and animals.	24
<b>Projects:</b> Leads projects that lower the chance of floods and make lakes, streams, and wetlands healthier	31
What are your top three water-related concerns for your local community and the environment?	VOTES
Flooding	4
Using too much water from the ground and running out	3
Harmful and dirty stuff in our lakes, streams, and wetlands (like plant fertilizer, road salt, and heavy metals)	13
Lake water is too green	3
People being able to use the lakes and creeks	3
Losing natural spaces for plants, fish, and other animals to live	21
Other	0

**Takeaways:**

- People’s top priority was projects due to concerns about polluted water
- People were most concerned about losing natural spaces for plants and animals and harmful/dirty stuff in the lakes, streams, and wetlands
- Respondents were also interested in grant programs that would allow them to make improvements to their yard

**Spending Activity**

- The spending activity was created for participants to collect information about how they would spend Nine Mile Creek Watershed District’s funds and to better understand residents’ priorities. This activity was used at the last two pop-up events. Participants were given five coins to split between the three programs: Education and Outreach, Grants, and Projects. They were also asked more specific questions about each program and could vote by placing a marble in a cup.

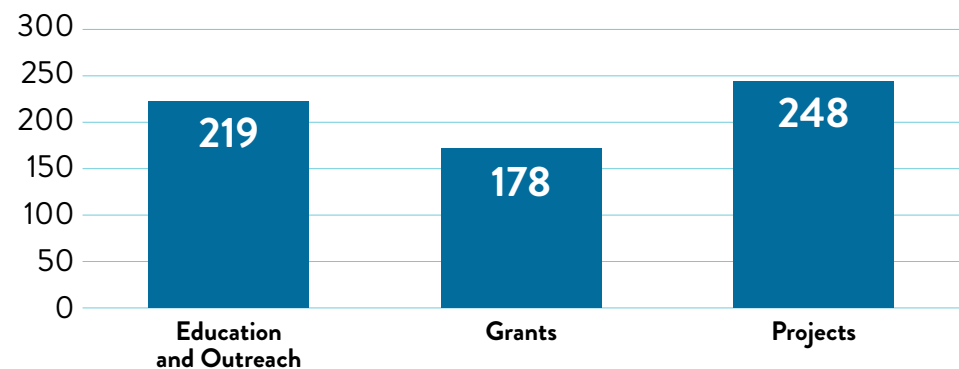
**Events:**

- May 18: Hopkins Mainstreet Day Pop-up
- June 6: 151 on 8 Targeted Pop-up

**Total Participants**

- 129 people

**HOW WOULD YOU SPEND NMCWD FUNDS?**



### Additional questions:

After the initial “vote by coin” activity was complete, participants were presented with follow up questions. They were asked to choose the projects and activities that interested them most. They could choose as many as they wanted or choose not to participate at all. The tallied responses are shown below.

PROJECTS	
Which type of projects would you most like to see in your community?	
Reduce the chance of flooding	6
More natural spaces for plants and animals	36
Make lakes and ponds cleaner and less green	30
More access to natural spaces	36

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH	
Which activity interests you the most?	
Workshops on how to keep water clean on your property	23
School visits to teach children about water and taking care of the environment	62
Education hikes for children and families	24

GRANTS	
Where would you like to see a grant project implemented?	
Near my home	23
Public natural spaces	62
Public use spaces	24

### Takeaways:

- **Participants placed the most coins in the projects program (38% of coins)**
  - They were most interested in projects that created more natural spaces for plants and animals, increased access to natural spaces, and made lakes and ponds cleaner.
- **Participants second priority was education and outreach (34% of coins)**
  - They were significantly most interested in school visits to teach children about water and taking care of the environment.
  - Respondents were also interested in workshops on how to keep water clean and educational hikes for children and families.
- **Participants third priority was the grants program (28%)**
  - They were most interested in seeing grant projects implemented in public natural spaces like parks, lakes, and ponds.
  - They were also interested in seeing grant programs offered for improvements near their home and public use spaces.

### Focus Group

The project team conducted a focus group with 10 apartment residents (151 on 8th) to get detailed feedback about how they interact with public spaces and water. A summary of key points are shown below.

- **Want to see more aesthetic and natural park spaces.**
  - Participants enjoy public spaces that are aesthetically pleasing to walk around and recreate in. They would like to see more flowers and botanical gardens and gave the Rose Garden in Minneapolis as an example.
  - Participants want more spaces to enjoy and use with their families. Important to some cultures to have beautiful spaces to take photos and celebrate for family events. Others would like to see more

equipment at the parks like jungle gyms and playgrounds for their children.

- Would like to see more flowers and green space at Central Park. Many of the participants do not currently go there since it is very sports focused.
- **Overall want to see more green spaces, walking trails, and spaces to relax and enjoy with family.**
  - Overall interest in seeing more spaces to sit, relax, and take in the beauty of the water and natural spaces.
- **Overall support for education about water and the environment.**
  - There is interest in participating in educational hikes and would like to see more signage about native wildlife and plants.
  - Importance placed on educating youth and ensuring teachers are aware of the programs NMCWD offers to students.
- **Participants want to see more community and interactive opportunities at parks.**
  - Interest in community gardens to plant flowers and grow their own food.
- **Concerns about access and recreation opportunities at cleaner lakes.**
  - Participants would like to see lake access be free for everyone, specifically Shady Oak Beach.
  - Some go to Bryant Lake since it is free, but noted that there is trash and the water looks dirty.

## Online Survey

The project team put together the survey to gather more detail about how residents interact with the waterbodies and greenspaces in the district. This survey was advertised at events and shared through a mailer to target areas

within the district. A summary of the results is described below. There were 57 total respondents.

### Takeaways

- **Most people indicated that they do spend time in or around the lakes and streams near their home. (90%)**
  - Most respondents like to walk or jog in or around the lakes and streams. (96%)
  - Respondents also like to view wildlife (62%), Hike (49%), exercise (42%), and gather with family and community. (40%)
- **Some people said they do not spend time in or around the lakes and streams near their home. (9%)**
  - Some reasons people indicated they do not spend time in or around the lakes included not having time or they are dirty.
- **Most respondents indicated that they spend time in their community parks. (65%)**
  - Most respondents spend their time walking or jogging (94%), viewing wildlife (56%), and exercising. (43%)
- **Some people said they do not spend time in their local parks due to not enough fun offerings, time, or not living near any parks.**
- **Respondents were most concerned with harmful and dirty stuff in lakes, streams, and wetlands. (73%)**
- **About half of respondents were concerned with losing natural spaces for plants and animals to live and trash in the lakes, streams, and wetlands.**
- **Residents want to see more natural spaces and wildlife, recreation amenities and increased accessibility, clean bodies of water, and natural management techniques used in their neighborhood.**