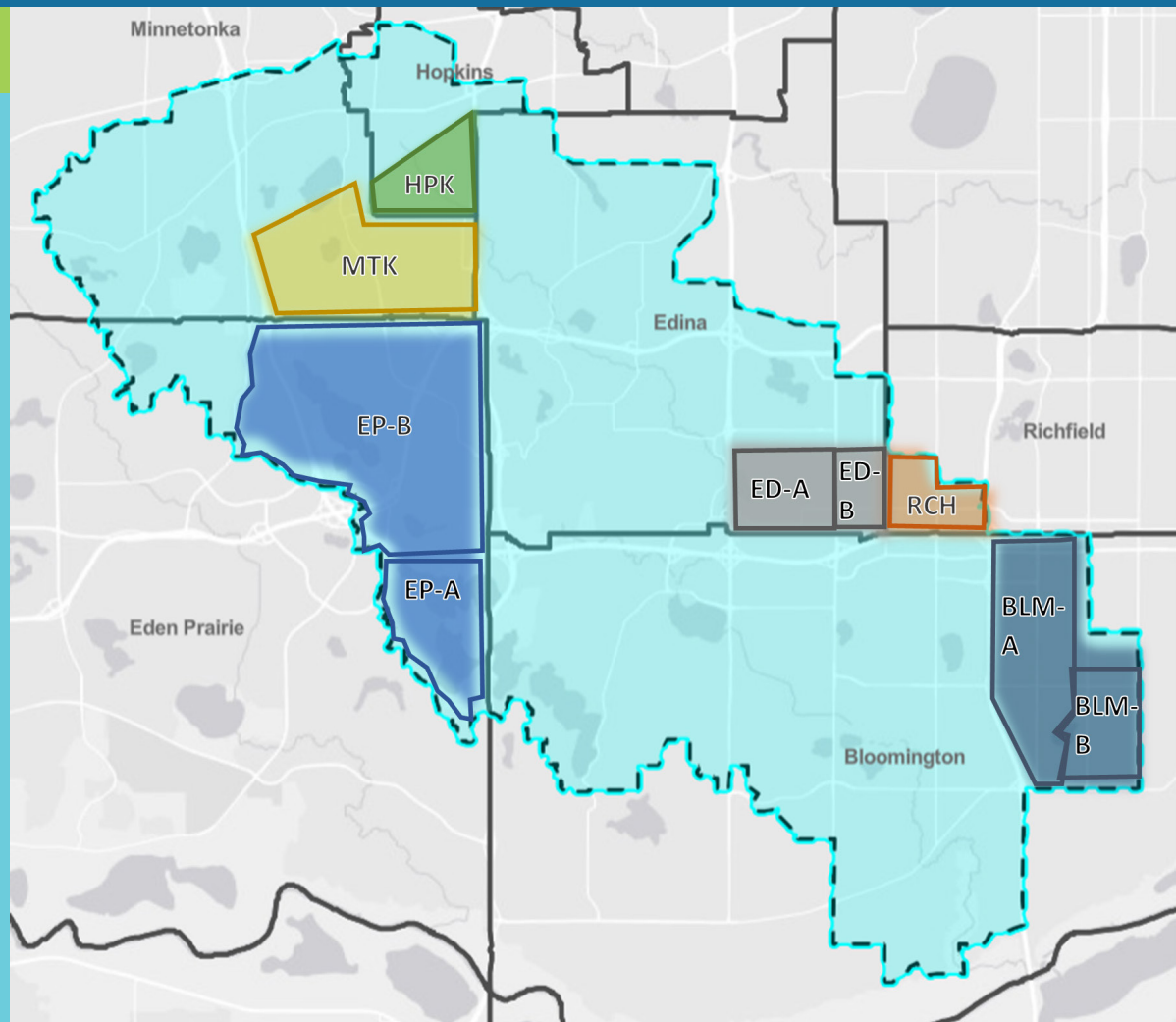


NINE MILE CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUGUST 28, 2024



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 on a watershed basis, which includes protecting and improving water quality and mitigating risks of flooding.

NMCWD has jurisdiction over the land tributary to Nine Mile Creek which is about 50 square miles. NMCWD, located in Hennepin County, includes portions of the cities of Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Richfield. A watershed is an area of land that drains to a given lake, river, stream or wetland. NMCWD was established in 1959.

In October 2022, the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District Board of Managers held a board retreat to identify District priorities. At the retreat, the board of managers identified diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) improvements within District processes and overall work as a priority. In April 2023, the board of managers adopted a DEIA policy statement:

The Nine Mile Creek Watershed District strives to understand and to prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. Within the context of strategic watershed management, the district will work toward addressing current and historical inequities in every facet of its operation.

In August 2023, the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District hired Zan Associates to develop this DEIA Plan. An organizational scan, equity mapping, and community engagement were all completed to help inform the plan development. This DEIA Plan will be used by District staff to integrate a DEIA lens into District policy and programs.

Goals of the Plan

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



Engagement Summary

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

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 existing community relationships and outreach, demographic disparities in services, and environmental stressors related to current programming.
- 2. Communications and Engagement Plan:** The second phase of the project consisted of putting together the communications and engagement plan, which identified target audiences, key messages, engagement tactics, and the schedule.
- 3. Community Engagement:** This phase was conducted over five months in various cities within the watershed district. Various strategies were included to gather input including; in-person pop-ups at existing events, a targeted tabling event and focus group, and an online survey paired with a mailer. A full summary of the engagement approach and results is described in the full engagement summary. (add hyperlink)
- 4. Creating the DEIA Plan:** Throughout the engagement process, the team continually gathered and tabulated responses to determine trends and themes. These themes drive the recommendations included in the plan.

1 Organizational Scan: Setting the stage

- Review current plan and programming
- Equity mapping
- Organizational framework

2 Communications and Engagement Plan: Developing the approach

- Target audiences
- Key messages
- Engagement tactics
- Schedule

3 Community Engagement: Gathering input

- In-person events
- Virtual engagement
- Stakeholder workshops

4 Creating the DEIA Plan: Equity into action

- Guiding principles
- Demographics and mapping
- Implementation plan

What we learned

Key Takeaways

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



Accountability Measures



1. NMCWD staff will review goals and outcomes annually. A key question will be “Did we accomplish what we set out to do?”
2. Staff will provide DEIA progress updates annually via:
 - The NMCWD website
 - NMCWD’s annual publications in both analog and digitally
 - To the Board and Citizen Advisory Committee
3. New goals will be set annually based on outcomes from the previous year.
4. The next 10-year plan will include DEIA plan guidance and action steps.
5. Internal checklists with action items will document progress.
6. For more information about success measures or accountability reporting please reach out to eboor@ninemilecreek.org.






Initiatives

NMCWD is committed to implementing the following 5 comprehensive initiatives in the coming year.

For more information about any of the initiatives, please reach out to eboor@ninemilecreek.org.

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION
 Accessibility	<p>NMCWD is committed to making their physical workspace, digital access, and interactive materials accessible to all. Plans and action items are in place to improve ADA accessibility of Discovery Point, the District's main office and educational space. These modifications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gender inclusivity▪ Additional language options (plain and inclusive language, translations, etc.)▪ Disability accessibility▪ Family accommodations
 Inclusivity and Representation	<p>Inclusivity and representation are important attributes of an equitable workplace. NMCWD staff understand that equity practices should be included in every aspect of their work, therefore focused efforts will be made to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Learn and grow best practice hiring and committee membership strategies to increase organizational diversity▪ Appoint an equity leader and team who are responsible for leading initiatives and ensuring that DEIA is embedded in all aspects of their work and operational environment▪ Develop internal awareness (training) of equity and inclusion issues related to populations, businesses, and organizations near or in the Watershed District. Use insight to create and modify program initiatives▪ Build and nourish relationships with community members, businesses and organizations

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION
 <p>Education and Outreach</p>	<p>NMCWD conducts outreach to District community members to increase the public’s understanding of water resource management and issues in the watershed. This outreach is both informative and shares actions that can be taken to protect and improve water quality in lakes and creeks. To broaden their reach and commitment to serve the watershed equitably, they plan to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sharpen their focus on deepening relationships with people and entities in underrepresented areas ▪ Identify and build a greater understanding of these communities and businesses/organizations ▪ Develop customized outreach to build understanding and interest
 <p>Cost Share Programs</p>	<p>NMCWD offers grant funds for efforts that protect and improve water and natural resources within the watershed. Cost-share grants are awarded for projects that prevent stormwater pollution or restore native plant and wildlife habitats. They are available to residents, associations, nonprofits, schools, businesses, and cities for projects located within the district. NMCWD is committed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adjusting the cost share program to meet the needs of more residents in specific focus areas ▪ Making residents, businesses, and other entities more aware of the funds available ▪ Ensuring that the information about funding options and access to the applications are available to all ▪ Reducing barriers to entry for the grant program
 <p>Capital Improvement Projects</p>	<p>The district implements projects on its own and with partners aimed at reducing flooding and improving water quality. Example projects include creek restorations, rain garden installations, and in-lake management. Projects are identified during the development of the 10-year plan by district engineers, staff, board, and other stakeholders. To ensure equitable project disbursement and implementation, the following initiatives will be put in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop project implementation approval criteria that includes DEIA scoring in project selection ▪ Utilize NMCWD Equity tool to engage residents and incorporate their feedback into projects when feasible ▪ Prioritize improvements that address community values and increase opportunity for public involvement in decision making

NMCWD Equity Tool

NMCWD's Equity Tool is a flexible, interactive implementation guide. The tool focuses on key equity goals for Watershed projects and initiatives, thoughtful implementation strategies, and accountable outcomes.

The tool is broken up into 3 phases: Pre-Project Engagement, Progress Check, and Post-Engagement. Each phase is meant to be completed at different points throughout a project or initiative to ensure that NMCWD's Equity Commitments are embedded in every aspect of the organization. The unique phases include guiding questions, recommendations and an interactive space to respond, research and take notes. At the end of each phase, action steps are identified, and a checklist ensures no important considerations are missed.

The final phase includes reflection prompts and space to record outcomes and goals met. Authenticity and transparency are the cornerstones of the tool.

For more information about this tool, please reach out to eboor@ninemilecreek.org.

Community Profile

Complete the information in the Pre-Project Engagement section in the planning stages of the project.

In this section consider what you need to know about the stakeholders in the community - all those that will be impacted by the objectives of the project. This section requires research and input from the project team and community. The information gathered here will strongly shape the project action plans.

PRE-PROJECT ENGAGEMENT

GUIDING QUESTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS/INSIGHTS	RESPONSE
<p>How was this project chosen?</p> <p>Understanding why the project started and the source helps explain the balance of power and expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">What criteria was used to approve this project for implementation?How are residents, community organizations and businesses being made aware there is money available to do residential and community projects in this area?What specific strategies are used to get information to underrepresented watershed?Is the information accessible through modalities (technology, word of mouth, conversations, paper, etc.) and in multiple languages? Is there a support website for people to get further information?Are you intentionally going to "work" to make sure they have access to the resources available to them?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Develop "official" criteria for determining project approval. For example: A. Review the NMCWD Equity Map (see appendix) to note which areas have had the least attention. Consider factors that have influenced implementation decisions and how they should be updated with an equity lens.Once the project has been approved, determine a communication plan for the project.	

Engagement and Communication

Complete this section half way through the project to monitor progress.

In this section evaluate how well the community has been engaged authentically and respectfully during the project so far. Refer to the responses in the Demographics and Community Insights pages of the Pre-Project Engagement section when reflecting on your responses to the following questions.

PROGRESS CHECK

GUIDING QUESTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS/INSIGHTS	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have you connected with all of the prioritized groups as planned?As you review the events/actions completed so far, do you need to adjust priorities/strategies?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Review your equity goals. Have you connected with the targeted demographics in your plan? Be specific.Re-prioritize if necessary and make a plan to move forward with a focus on those groups.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have the strategies used been far?How might you course correct?		

Reflection

The following questions are important to help you look back on what worked and what didn't, where changes need to be made for next time, and how you have grown. This will also provide information to share progress and outcomes of your goals with the Board and public.

POST-ENGAGEMENT

GUIDING QUESTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS/INSIGHTS	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Did the project meet its intended goals?What outcomes did it meet?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">List your outcomes and successes and celebrate a job well done.Develop a presentation/document to share outcomes to the public and the Board.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Describe all the ways the project was successful.Keep track for future use.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Keep a successes and "learnings" chart in the office. Refer to it when stuck.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">What have you learned from this project?Reflect and set new goals for your next project.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">This is a critical step. Spend time discussing and documenting what was learned.	

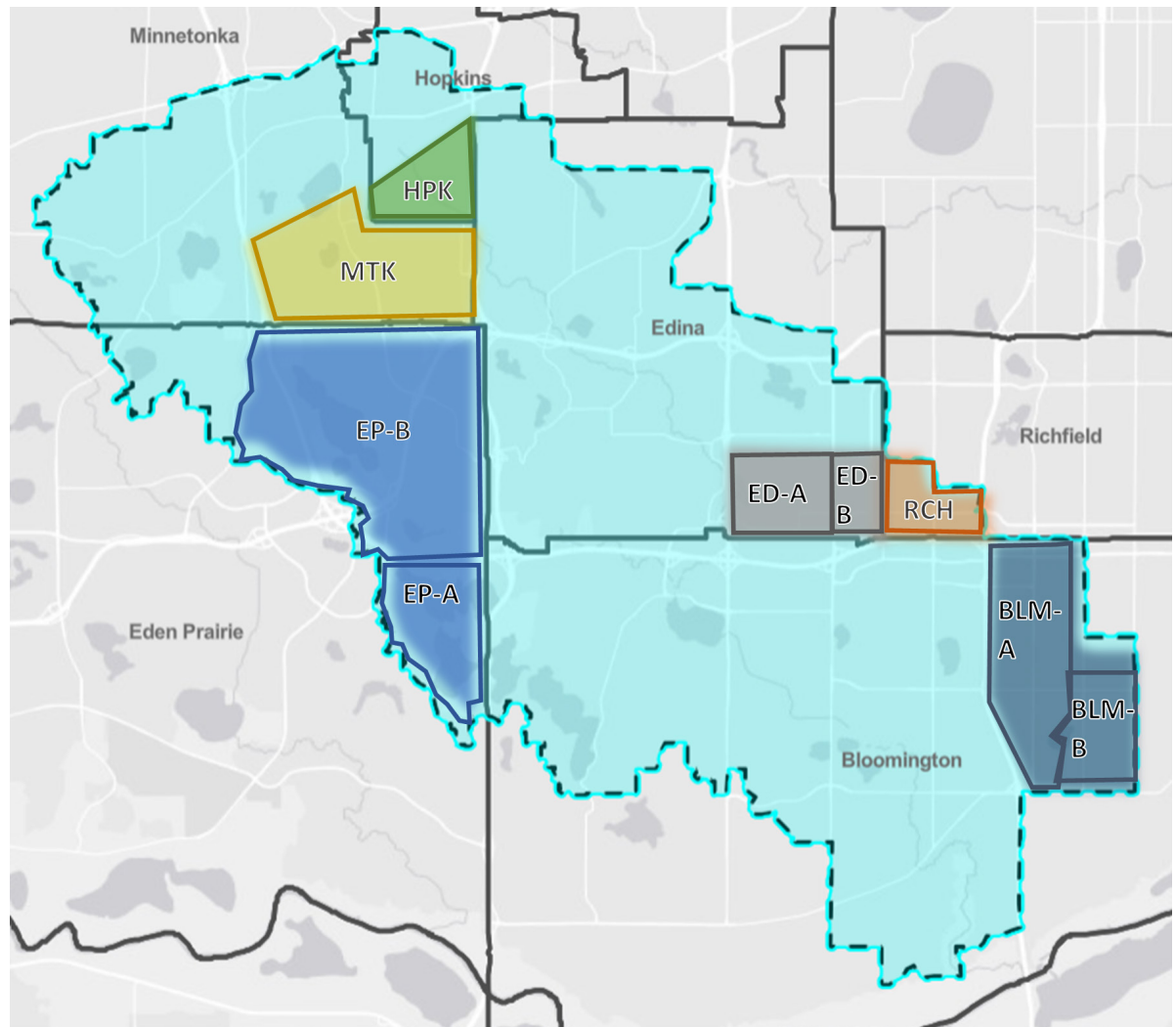
Equity Mapping

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.



Underrepresented communities map-see next page for area IDs

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