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Date: June 20th, 2024

To: Portland Utility Board

From: Erich Pacheco, Joanne Johnson, Jill Winsor, and Blake Dye

RE: Response to inquiry about progress on employee engagement survey, recruitment, and retention

Dear Members of the Portland Public Utility Board,

Thank you for your interest in the Portland Water Bureau's efforts regarding recruitment, retention, and addressing the findings from our 2022 employee engagement survey. We are committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace, and we are pleased to share the comprehensive steps we have taken to achieve these goals.

Current actions and plans

Our response to the engagement survey has been based on best practices for catalyzing organizational change. Following the survey, each manager and supervisor held listening sessions with their groups to discuss the findings. We provided guidance and coaching to ensure these discussions were productive and inclusive. The goal was to make it clear to all employees that their voices are heard and that we are committed to creating a healthy and supportive workplace for everyone. Each team reviewed the data, findings, and recommendations, and developed their own talking points and action plans based on their unique needs and the survey results. This approach leverages the strengths identified in the survey, focusing on what works well and encouraging more of those positive practices across the bureau. Our highest and lowest scoring categories both highlighted the critical role of managers and supervisors, guiding our focus on enhancing their capabilities.

We have resourced two new teams: the People Operations Team and the Employee Experience and Development Team. The People Operations Team manages payroll, recruitment, and building workforce pipelines, while the Employee Experience and Development Team provides programming for employees and coaching for managers and supervisors. These teams are essential in supporting a high-performing work culture that promotes career development and equitable recruitment practices. Our holistic approach aims to build on our strengths, reflected in an employee engagement level of 73% consistent across demographic groups.

Recruitment strategies

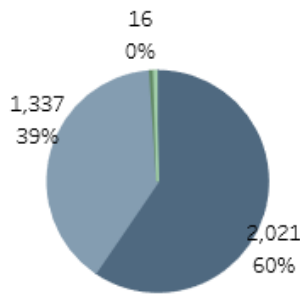
Since 2022, we have significantly diversified our workforce through strategic outreach and policy changes. We now post job openings on sites that attract a more diverse pool of applicants, ensuring we reach a broad and varied audience. The People Operations Team, still in the process of building its full capacity, is dedicated to supporting our employees, managers, and supervisors in achieving equitable recruitment practices. Improved recruitment practices have resulted in more diverse applicant pools and hires over the past three years. Additionally, we have recently hired a position focused specifically on creating a pipeline of diverse candidates in the water utility field, ensuring we continue to build a workforce that reflects the community we serve.

Figure1: FY 2022, FY 2023, FY 2024 Portland Water Bureau qualified applicant and hire diversity.

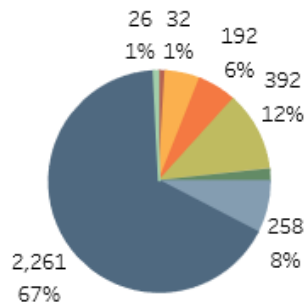
Qualified Applicants = 3,394

Hires = 274

Applicant Gender



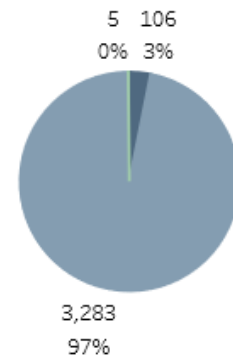
Applicant Race/Ethnicity



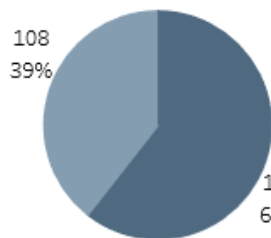
Applicant Disability Status



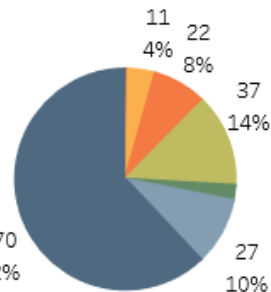
Applicant Veteran Status



Hire Gender



Hire Race/Ethnicity



Gender

- Male
- Female
- X
- Not Disclosed

Race/Ethnicity

- American Indian ...
- Asian or Asian A...
- Black or African ...
- Hispanic or Latin...
- Middle Eastern o...
- Native Hawaiian ...
- Two or more races
- White or Europe...
- Not Disclosed

Disability Status

- Disabled
- Non-Disabled
- Not Disclosed

Veteran Status

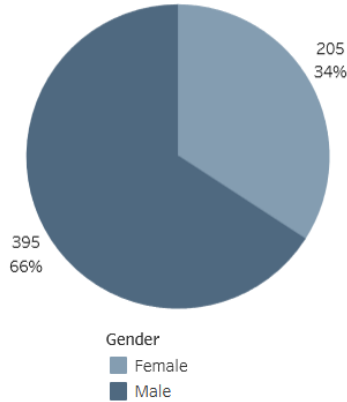
- Veteran
- Non-Veteran
- Not Disclosed

The impact of the bureau’s recruitment practices is clearly demonstrated by the data: from July 2021 to July 2023, the bureau diversified its workforce, increasing the percentage of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Multiracial employees from 22% to 28%.

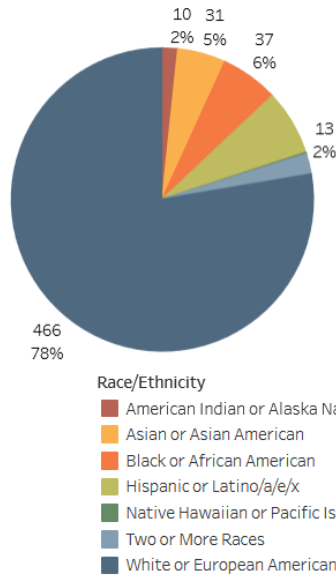
Figure2: July 2021 Portland Water Bureau employee demographics
Employee Demographics

Total Employees = 600

Gender



Race/Ethnicity



Roster Date: July 1, 2021

Bureau: Portland Water Bureau

Representation: (All)

Class Title: (All)

Casual or Non-Casual: (All)

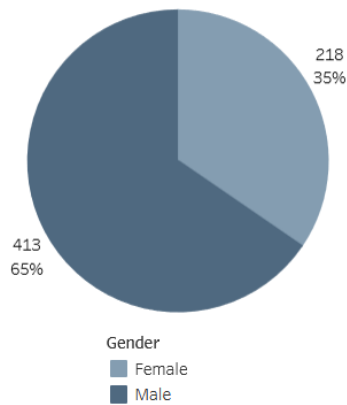
Employee Group: (All)

Note: If you select a Class Title with fewer than 5 employees, no data will be displayed to maintain confidentiality.

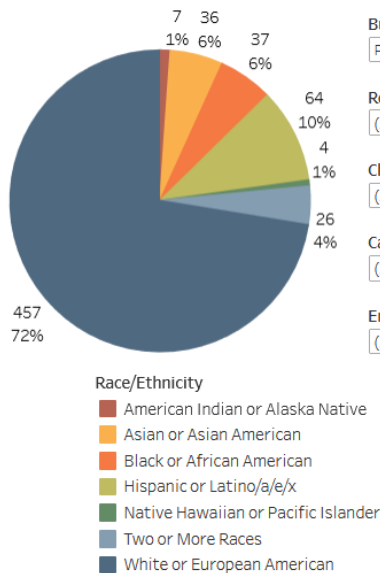
Figure3: July 2023 Portland Water Bureau employee demographics
Employee Demographics

Total Employees = 631

Gender



Race/Ethnicity



Roster Date: July 1, 2023

Bureau: Portland Water Bureau

Representation: (All)

Class Title: (All)

Casual or Non-Casual: (All)

Employee Group: (All)

Note: If you select a Class Title with fewer than 5 employees, no data will be displayed to maintain confidentiality.

Retention strategies

Employee programming

To create a more inclusive and supportive work environment, particularly for BIPOC employees and employees with disabilities, we established the Employee Experience and Development Team. This team organizes several key programs aimed at enhancing the employee experience:

- **TAP (The Ambassador Program):** A cross-group cohort designed to help staff build connections with each other and build the skills necessary to increase connections across the bureau. Participants are encouraged to engage with their colleagues and gather employee input and feedback.
- **SOAKED (Sharing Our Assets and Knowledge for Employee Development):** A cross-group learning opportunity where employees spend six days getting to know how the bureau works through site visits across our various facilities and programs.
- **Management Advisory Committee:** A group of mid-level managers with representatives from each work group who convene to improve the Water manager and employee experience and bureau policies and processes. **People Management Learning Journey:** A combination of people management training and skill share cohorts for managers designed to build manager leadership skills so that they can support employees in bringing their best to work. Currently in the design phase, we hope to launch this fall.
- **First Drop:** A comprehensive new employee welcome program.
- **Job Shadow Program:** Facilitates career development through job shadowing opportunities. Currently in the research phase, identifying the specific needs of each work group.
- **The Watering Hole:** Informal professional and personal development opportunities.
- **LinkedIn Learning:** Available for free to all staff members, providing a wealth of learning resources.
- **Manager's Digest Newsletter:** Offers coaching content and information for managers to share with their teams.
- **Monday Message:** Keeps all staff updated on bureau news, recognizing staff achievements and addressing their needs.
- **Executive coaching for leadership team:** the bureau's executive Management Team has been receiving coaching from a consultant on people management, communications, conflict management, appreciative inquiry, leading inclusive and belonging teams, feedback skills, and effective listening.

Inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-racism training

From January 2023 through March 2024, the Equity and Policy Team trained all bureau staff on a water equity foundations training, specifically developed by bureau staff for bureau staff. This training covers key concepts such as inclusion, equity, diversity, and anti-racism, ensuring all personnel understand our equity plan, our approach to achieving our equity goals, and their individual roles in this effort. The training includes topics on systemic racism, social justice and disability, privilege, and key language on equity. Starting on January 2024, the bureau provides an Equity Topic of the Month, which includes trainings and optional guided conversations. The bureau is engaging a consultant to deliver tailored training for field staff, focusing on fostering gender and sexual orientation inclusivity in the workplace. This initiative comes in response to employee feedback highlighting instances of comments and conversations that have made female and LGBTQAI2S+ employees feel marginalized, unwelcome, and/or subjected to harassment. Our approach focuses on fostering a learning mindset of personal and collective growth, rather than calling out, shaming, or blaming.

Accessibility

The Water Bureau Accessibility Policies also include a Workforce section to address language access and disability access for employees, supporting the bureau to meet its obligations under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The workforce accessibility policies include conducting an accessible recruitment, reviewing job descriptions, creating a welcoming workplace, providing language access services and disability accommodations for employees, and training accessibility for employees.

Conflict management

To specifically address concerns about employees not feeling comfortable speaking up without fear of reprisal, the People Operations Team has implemented open-door policies. This team is specifically tasked with addressing interpersonal conflicts between managers and employees and/or between employees. The bureau is also partnering with the Portland State University Conflict Management Department to partner on creating a set of guidelines and capacity development materials for the bureau on preventing, deescalating, and managing conflict. This initiative aims to build capacity for fostering healthy dialogues, support managers in developing their coaching skills, facilitate de-escalation, and prevent issues from escalating to HR. These policies provide a safe and confidential avenue for employees to voice their concerns and suggestions, reinforcing our commitment to a supportive and inclusive work environment.

Feedback mechanisms

We have implemented several methods to gather and act on employee feedback effectively. The Ambassadors Program, aimed at gathering employee input and feedback, includes representatives from every workgroup to ensure diverse perspectives are considered. Additionally, we conduct focus groups and surveys through key bureau and city initiatives to gauge employee preferences and attitudes on various topics. For example, employee feedback has led to more flexible work schedules, such as 9/80 or 4-10s, which have been well-received.

Communication channels like the Monday Message and Director's Corner allow us to share information directly with employees and understand their needs better. These channels are instrumental in communicating the changes made based on employee feedback, ensuring transparency and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Impact and measurement

We'll be measuring the success of our initiatives through biennial employee engagement surveys. These surveys provide critical insights into the effectiveness of our programs and initiatives, allowing us to make data-driven decisions. A shorter version of the survey will likely be released later this year to gauge ongoing improvements and identify areas needing further attention. This continuous feedback loop is essential in maintaining high levels of engagement and satisfaction among our employees.

Evaluation is built into each employee program we offer and allows us to collect input on what we offer as well as identify additional programming and training needs across the bureau.

Leadership and accountability

Since January 2022, the Water Bureau has onboarded four new members to its executive management team, with over half of the team changing in the past four years. This new leadership team is steadfast in its commitment to strengthening our workplace culture. We have a dedicated executive coach who has led

multiple sessions over the past year, focusing on best practices in people management, such as positive framing, giving and receiving feedback, and managing conflict. Each workgroup hosts monthly or quarterly all-staff meetings with their directors and managers, fostering open communication and accountability.

Managers and supervisors are encouraged to participate in the city's Leadership Experience and Development (LEAD) program, which provides valuable leadership training and development opportunities. Additionally, the supervisor/manager cohort program allows managers and supervisors to share peer-to-peer advice and best practices, further enhancing leadership capabilities across the bureau.

In conclusion, the Portland Water Bureau is committed to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace where all employees feel seen, heard, valued, safe, and their work matters. We appreciate your interest in our efforts and look forward to continuing our collaboration with the Portland Utility Board to achieve our shared goals.

Thank you for your continued support.

In partnership,

Erich J Pacheco, Equity and Policy Manager

Joann Johnson, Accessibility Analyst

Jill Winsor, Employee Experience and Development

Blake Dye, People Operations Manager