



# Washington State Conservation Commission

<b>Policy Name and #</b>	<b>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy# 23-05</b>
<b>Applies to:</b>	This policy applies to all Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) employees, applicants, contractors, and volunteers.
<b>Effective Date:</b>	November 30, 2023
<b>Approved By:</b>	Conservation Commission Board by Motion

### **Applies to:**

This policy applies to all Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) employees, applicants, contractors, and volunteers.

### **Governance:**

Listed below are some, but not all, applicable governing requirements. Note: Laws and rules may change over time and such changes may take precedence over this policy.

- [Executive Order 17-01: Reaffirming Washington's Commitment to Tolerance, Diversity, and Inclusiveness](#)
- [Executive Order 13-01: Veterans Transition Support](#)
- [Executive Order 13-02: Improving Employment Opportunities and Outcomes for People with Disabilities in State Government](#)
- [Directive of the Governor 16-11: LGBTQ Inclusion and Safe Place Initiative](#)
- [State Human Resources Directive 20-02](#)
- [State Human Resources Directive 20-03](#)
- [Governor Inslee's Memo to State Agencies - Inclusive and Respectful Work Environments](#)
- [Executive Order 13985 | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#)
- [Equity | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

## Reason for this policy

This policy makes it clear that:

- We must embed the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work;
- The SCC supports and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## Definitions

**Bias** is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way that's considered to be unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences.

There are two types of biases:

1. Conscious bias (also known as explicit bias), and,
2. Unconscious bias (also known as implicit bias). **Unconscious biases** are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

**Cultural humility** means an approach to respectfully engaging others with cultural identities different from your own and recognizing that no cultural perspective is superior to another.

**Diversity** means differences within a given setting, collective, or group. An individual is not diverse—a person is unique. Diversity is about a collective or a group and exists in relationship to others. A team, an organization, a family, a neighborhood, and a community can be diverse. A person can bring diversity of thought, experience, and trait, (seen and unseen) to a team—and the person is still an individual.

**Department of Enterprise Services (DES)** provides HR support to smaller agencies like WSCC.

**Dominant culture** means the most institutionally normalized power that is widespread and influential across societal structures and entities in which multiple cultures are present.

Equity and fairness are distinct from equality, which refers to everyone having the same treatment without accounting for differing needs or circumstances. Equity has a focus on creating outcome fairness by eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of historically and currently oppressed groups. For the purposes of the SCC this means fair and just treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in overburdened and underserved communities; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

**Historical trauma** means the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding of an individual or generation caused by traumatic experiences or events; any group of people that experience a trauma can incur historical trauma - for example genocide, enslavement, or ethnic cleansing.

**Human Resources** or HR means the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) Division of Human Resources.

**Inclusion** means intentionally designed, active, and ongoing engagement with people that ensures opportunities and pathways for participation in all aspects of group, organization, or community, including decision-making processes. Inclusion is not a natural consequence of diversity. There must be intentional and consistent efforts to create and sustain a participative environment. Inclusion refers to how groups show that people are valued as respected members of the group, team, organization, or community. We create inclusion through progressive, consistent actions to expand, include, and share.

**Microaggressions** mean everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

**Oppression** means systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people deny others something of value, while others have ready access. This can occur, intentionally and unintentionally, on individual, institutional, and cultural levels.

**Overburdened** (communities) Minority, low-income, tribal, or indigenous populations or geographic locations in the United States that often experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks. This disproportionality can be the result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards, lack of opportunity for public participation, or other factors. Increased vulnerability may be attributable to an accumulation of negative or lack of positive environmental, health, economic, or social conditions within these populations or places. The term describes situations where multiple factors, including both environmental and socio-economic stressors, may act cumulatively to affect health and the environment and contribute to persistent environmental health disparities.

**Privilege** means any unearned benefit, position, power, right, or advantage one receives in society because of their identity, be it acknowledged or unacknowledged.

**Racism** means a way of representing or describing race or any action taken that creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial categories, in other words, racism is racial prejudice plus power.

**Underserved Communities** refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of "equity." ([USDA, NRCS](#))

**White fragility** White fragility refers to the discomfort white people may experience in reaction to discussions about racism in which even a minimum amount of racial stress is deemed intolerable.

## Policy Statement

SCC recognizes that in order to achieve our mission and vision in service of those who reside in Washington, we must lead with the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work.

The state of Washington is diverse, and SCC must reflect that diversity. When we are representative of the people we serve, we can better address the disparities in outcomes of our services for marginalized, underrepresented, underserved, and overburdened communities through purposeful, tailored, and equitable use of resources and programs.

SCC recognizes that although we cannot change the oppressive and discriminatory practices of the past, we have control over the workplace culture we create daily. As an agency and as individuals, we will accept our responsibility and seize every opportunity to dismantle statewide, administrative, and divisional policies, procedures, systems, and practices that perpetuate inequity.

Because of this, it is SCC's expectation that all employees, regardless of position, always treat others with respect and dignity and actively work to create inclusivity and equity, regardless of race, color, nationality, position, gender, age, or any other characteristic, background, or belief.

In keeping with this expectation, every employee should strive to do the following:

- Accept that mistakes will be made, acknowledged, and learned from. Much of this journey will require grace and learning through iterations of growth and failure;
- Recognize your role in creating and perpetuating equity and inclusion through overcoming your own individual biases, whether conscious or unconscious and be willing to walk the journey toward self-awareness and reflection;
- Co-create with your colleagues a welcoming, supportive, safe, affirming, and respectful work environment;
- Engage and support respectful dialogue and courageous conversations even when uncomfortable about racism, privilege, white fragility, dominant culture, oppression, and historical trauma;
- Participate in continuous learning, development, and training offered in the areas of diversity, inclusion, cultural humility, oppression, and equity;
- Identify and address microaggressions as they occur in our workplace, whether intentional or unintentional, and use these as opportunities to educate, learn, grow, listen, and respond with respect;
- Seek to show respect to other's values, beliefs, principles, and lived experiences.

The requirements and goals, developed by the SCC DEI working group, HR, and agency leadership, will be used in annual evaluations for employees as a specific competency required for satisfactory job performance. The agency expects supervisors to ensure all employees are complying, achieving, and exceeding the goals identified in this policy.

### **Related policy**

This policy incorporates by reference other SCC agency policies specifically the following:

- Respectful Workplace Policy;
- Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Policy;
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy; and the
- Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy.

### **Failure to follow policy**

The requirements of this policy are mandatory. By education of employees and through the expectations of this policy, SCC will actively seek to prevent, correct, and discipline behavior that violates this policy.

Employees violating this policy may be subject to disciplinary action under [chapter 357-40 WAC Discipline](#) and/or the provisions of applicable [collective bargaining agreement\(s\)](#). See the agency's discipline policy.

- SCC is committed to responding to complaints,
- SCC will take appropriate and swift action to address any violation of this policy, and,
- Any employee who initiates or participates in retaliation against individuals making a complaint pursuant to this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including, dismissal.

## **Responsibilities**

### **All employees**

- Read and comply with this policy.
- Review this policy and complete related training once a year, or as assigned.
- If you are not sure whether you are following this policy, ask your supervisor for advice or support so you can uphold the values described here.

### **Human Resources in coordination with the DEI work group**

- HR will lead and coordinate implementation of this policy together with agency departments and provide support to employees in meeting their responsibilities under this policy. Implementation includes:
  - Develop and implement an annual training program;
  - Develop and put in place measurable objectives;

- Establish a purposeful, cyclical review process to measure progress.

## **Supervisors and managers**

In recognizing the positional privilege supervisors and leaders hold and their associated responsibility, the agency directs all supervisors and leaders, with coordination and support from human resources, to do the following:

- Promote diversity in all hiring activities including recruiting, interviewing, and selection to attract diverse candidates as managers and leaders, including but not limited, to culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse candidates.
- Develop hiring practices and a hiring toolkit that address implicit biases within job descriptions and interview processes to improve accessibility.
- Actively engage in initiating, promoting, and championing inclusive strategies to retain workforce diversity in race, ethnicity, color, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, veteran status, and disability status;
- Ensure equitable access to growth and leadership development, educational, and training opportunities, succession planning, mentoring opportunities, and other resources. This includes ensuring competitive internal and external recruitments rather than direct appointments where possible.

## **Executive Leadership Team including Commission members.**

With support and coordination from human resources, leadership will do the following:

- Annually review this policy during the May strategic planning work session and make changes as necessary.
- Make diversity, equity, and inclusion a continuously-present focus and a core value in our agency decisions, especially as the decisions relate to the allocation of resources;
- Use the voices and perspectives of marginalized and oppressed communities to influence and inform our priorities now and in the future;
- Make SCC an anti-oppression institution with inclusive, full participation in decision-making and a purposeful commitment to restored relationships with marginalized and oppressed communities;
- Support progressive facilities and environment planning to transform the workplace into a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible environment for all staff and customers;
- Actively listen to the experiences of staff, especially those from marginalized groups, and take action to change discriminatory or exclusionary practices;
- Continue to assess and correct workforce inequities throughout the agency including leadership appointments, promotional opportunities, training requests, access to flexible and alternate work modalities, and compensation.
- Support the long term development and improvement of internal and external communications that facilitate accessibility and access to SCC resources and business.

## Procedures

Please click here for the [Process for Reporting a Complaint](#), or you may request a paper copy from HR. Written process is also written at the end of this policy.

SCC has put in place a process to make sure protection and relief is available from any form of discrimination or sexual harassment. Protection and relief is available to all State Conservation Commission (SCC) employees, applicants, contractors, and volunteers.

## History

First Effective: March 16, 2023

Updated and Finalized: November 30, 2023

# Harassment, Discrimination, or Retaliation Complaint Process

We are committed to promoting an inclusive, respectful, and safe culture. Because of this, we will respond to all complaints related to harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. To help make sure this happens, we have put in place a complaint reporting process to make sure protection and relief is available from any form of discrimination or sexual harassment. No complaint is insignificant if it means an employee doesn't feel emotionally or physically safe in the workplace.

## About the complaint reporting process

This complaint process supports and is used together with these agency policies:

- Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Policy,
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy,
- Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy,
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy, and the,
- Respectful Workplace Policy.

There are occasions that must inform employees that we are under a legal obligation to respond to allegations of behaviors covered by this policy. We are committed to responding because we want to promote an inclusive, respectful and safe culture.

## Who can file a complaint?

Anyone who works, volunteers, interns, or does contracting work for the small agency can report or file a complaint. If you are a represented employee, this process will not conflict with a formal grievance process. Please refer to the [appropriate bargaining agreement](#) regarding complaints and grievances.

## Should I submit a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, discontent, or unhappiness with an action, decision, or omission within the control or responsibility of the agency and includes an unresolvable problem or dispute. Use this process if the issue cannot be resolved informally at the supervisor level or falls into one of the categories below, a complaint should be submitted.

Use this process for:

- Unlawful discrimination (racial, sexual orientation, disability, religious, age, etc.)
- Personal harassment (inappropriate comments, offensive jokes, intimidation, ostracizing behavior, etc.)
- Physical harassment (hostile behavior, intimidation by destruction of property, direct threats, etc.)
- Sexual harassment
- Quid pro quo sexual harassment
- Third-party harassment (an individual outside of the organization)
- Bullying

- Cyberbullying
- Retaliation

We encourage everyone to raise issues that are of concern as soon as possible. We follow a transparent, fair, and timely process for addressing complaints and problems so that:

- Everyone involved is treated equitably.
- That no one who reports a complaint is penalized or disadvantaged.
- SCC will do our best to preserve confidentiality, handle all issues with discretion and preserve a space of respect.

How do I submit a complaint?

Complaints may be made in writing or verbally. Depending on the situation and your level of comfort, you can report the issue directly to your supervisor for resolution or schedule a conversation with your [assigned HR Business Partner \(HRBP\)](#).

We encourage you to use the [Personnel Incident form](#) when making a written complaint. If you choose to submit a complaint form to a trusted supervisor, manager, member of the leadership team, or to your HRBP, follow the directions on the form.

What happens once HR receives my complaint?

The assigned HRBP will review your complaint to determine next steps based on the issue described in the complaint. In all situations, we will make sure you are kept informed of the status of your complaint. Depending on the situation, you may be asked to provide additional supporting information for your complaint – requests for more information, if needed, may come in a variety of forms.