



NATIONAL SEVERE STORMS LABORATORY (NSSL)

FY25-FY28 DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

NSSL is committed to a people first, mission always workplace.



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

As the Director of the NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory, I am proud to announce the release of the NSSL diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) strategic plan. At NSSL, we value diversity in all its forms and are committed to fostering an inclusive environment that allows us to attract, recruit, train, and retain employees who successfully carry out the mission of NSSL. It's important that we all are champions of DEIA so that every individual feels welcomed, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents to enable societal benefits that are protecting lives and property.

Our strategic plan is a roadmap to realizing the NOAA and government wide priority of incorporating DEIA into our daily work through four primary goals with clear, concise, and practical ways of implementing these activities across NSSL. Our organization must always be people-centered and focused on embracing our differences and promoting fairness and opportunities for all. Through actionable practices and intentionality, we will successfully increase the diversity of our workforce, foster a sense of belonging among our staff, and ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes.

I am pleased but not satisfied with the progress we've made organizationally, and I ask each of you to join me and commit to making NSSL the best place to work in government. Your support and engagement are critical to the success of our laboratory. Continue to lean on each other throughout the implementation of our plan, and it's absolutely necessary that consistent and transparent communication throughout the laboratory at all levels be part of who we are and who we strive to be as an organization.

As you read through the strategic plan, I challenge you to consider ways you can contribute to advancing the DEIA goals presented in our plan. I look forward to working with you and achieving great success by building commitment energy towards achieving our collective goals.

Thank you for your commitment to this important initiative.

Dr. DaNa Carlis
Director, NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory



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DEIA STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

We value workforce diversity and its positive impacts on the innovation and quality of everything we do — from administration to basic and applied research to the transition of advanced weather applications and technologies to users. We therefore work together to build and sustain an adaptive organization that promotes inclusion, equity, and accessibility in all of our work environments including fieldwork, conferences, and outreach, and with all of our collaborators and partners, so that everyone we work with feels welcomed, respected, and able to participate and contribute to their full potential.

This NSSL FY25 – FY28 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) implementation plan provides a roadmap for all Federal employees of NSSL to contribute toward and achieve four goals:

- (1) Recruit and attract a diverse, highly capable workforce,**
- (2) Build a work environment that promotes inclusion,**
- (3) Build a work environment that is equitable and accessible,**
- (4) Foster and sustain a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.**

These goals are aligned with the OPM (2021) Government-wide Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce and the OAR (2022) FY25-FY28 DEIA Implementation Plan. This plan also was developed with input from material derived from the Executive Order on DEIA (2021), DOC DEIA Strategic Plan (2022), and OAR DEIA Strategic Plan (2021).

As NSSL is a public-serving institution for whom understanding the diverse needs of the public is a necessary prerequisite to achieving our mission, we resonate with OAR’s DEIA statement:

“OAR’s unique role in NOAA’s mission of science, service and stewardship demands a diverse workforce to reflect, understand, and respond to the varied communities and stakeholders we serve.”

Through the concerted efforts of the NSSL Leadership Team and employees, and the collaboration of OAR Leadership, EEO/Diversity Staff, EEO/Diversity Advisory Committee and hiring officials, we will increase the diversity of NSSL’s workforce; encourage an inclusive environment for all team members, regardless of rank; and promote the extension of these ideals in team members’ interactions with external partners of all levels ranging from the general public to cooperative institute peers.

The actions and activities described herein will be made available to the Cooperative Institute for Severe and High-Impact Weather Research and Operations (CIWRO) staff where no/minimal costs are involved because of the close working relationship between NSSL and CIWRO employees.



DEFINITIONS



Definition of Diversity

Diversity is the unique mixture of attributes shaping an individual's identity that they bring into the workplace.

These include, but are not limited to, attributes such as national origin, language, race, color, neurological variation, physical ability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures. The concept also encompasses differences among people concerning where they are from and where they have lived, as well as their differences of thought and life experiences (all definitions are adapted from OPM 2011 and OAR DEIA Strategic Plan 2021).

Definition of Equity

Equity means the consistent and systemic fair, just, and impartial treatment of individuals to provide everyone with the opportunity to reach their full potential, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

Underserved communities include individuals who belong to communities of color, such as Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and North African persons. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (LGBTQ+) persons); persons who face discrimination based on pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions; parents; and caregivers. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration; persons who live in rural areas; veterans and military spouses; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination, or inequality. Individuals may belong to more than one underserved community and face intersecting barriers.

Definition of Inclusion

Inclusion is a culture that values the unique attributes of all team members. An inclusive culture is respectful, encourages collaborations, flexibility, and fairness; and allows for equitable access. Inclusion requires active and intentional engagement on the part of everyone and provides a feeling of belonging; connects each employee to the organization; and leverages diversity through the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential as their authentic selves.

Definition of Accessibility

Accessibility is the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. Accessibility includes the provision of accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to employment and participation in activities for people with disabilities, the reduction or elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities, a commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities can independently access every outward-facing and internal activity or electronic space, and the pursuit of best practices such as universal design (Governmentwide DEIA Plan November 2021).

NSSL Leadership Team

For the purposes of this document, the NSSL Leadership Team (NLT) shall include:



DaNa Carlis
Director



Kurt Hondl
Deputy Director



Cory Clowers
Administrative Officer



Alan Gerard
WRDD Chief



Pam Heinselman
FRDD Chief



Larry Hopper
RRDD Chief



Erik Rasmussen
FOFS Chief



Vann Chmielewski
Senior Scientist



Jeremy Gibbs
Program Manager



Goal 1
WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Attract, recruit, train, develop, and retain a diverse, highly capable workforce

Objective 1.1 – NSSL employees are encouraged and supported to seek opportunities to attract and recruit underrepresented and disabled individuals by attending conferences training/meetings targeting these populations or having a diversity component.

Actions

1. The NSSL Director's Office (DO) will set aside sufficient funds for one member of each NSSL division (DO, FRDD, RRDD, WRDD, FOFS) (DO, FRDD, RRDD, WRDD, FOFS) to attend at least one conference/meeting annually which targets underrepresented groups or has a diversity component. Emphasis for participation should be placed on NLT and Divisional Team Leads. The Division Chiefs and Deputy Director will be responsible for selecting one participant to attend the following or similar meetings ([see calendar](#)):
 - a. [Women of Color STEM Conference](#);
 - b. [American Indian Science & Engineering Society \(AISES\) National Conference](#);
 - c. [Society of Asian Scientists & Engineers \(SASE\) National Conference and Career Fair](#);
 - d. Diversity Program Meetings at professional association meetings related to hydrologic and meteorological societies, such as AGU National Meeting and AMS Annual Meeting.
2. The NLT should collaborate with the Outreach Committee and Communications staff to develop and maintain source material from which designated participants can build appropriate presentations and exhibitions. This effort decreases the overhead of participation for individuals, and promotes consistent, effective messaging about NSSL to potential recruiting pools.
3. As appropriate for the event, each participant will present NSSL research and internship opportunities to the audience for the purpose of possible recruitment. If appropriate, consider including fact sheets for potential hires on the best practices of the Federal application process, which are developed at the OAR/NOAA level.
4. After each participant attends a meeting, they will be responsible for sharing their experience at the next opportunity NSSL managers' Team Meeting.
5. Reflecting the DEIA responsibilities in the Director's performance plan, the Director will ensure Action #1 is included in each NLT member's performance plan under the Diversity or Professional Development elements.

Objective 1.2 – Develop Strategic Alliances across laboratories, line offices and other offices in NOAA that focus on Diversity & Inclusion.

Actions

1. NSSL Leadership will interact with the NOAA's Office of Education and the Educational Partnership Program (EPP) to:
 - a. Foster relationships with Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). The most broadly relevant of these EPP/MSI programs to NSSL's core mission foci are:
 - i. Center for Atmospheric Sciences and Meteorology (Howard University, lead institution);
 - ii. Center for Earth System Sciences and Remote Sensing Technologies (City College of New York, lead institution).
2. NSSL Leadership will seek opportunities to collaborate with partner OAR laboratories and programs in DEIA activities.
3. The NLT will include references to DEIA alliances and partnerships in strategic plans, program plans, project goals, etc.

Objective 1.3 – Develop and support an internship program focused on diversity.

Actions

1. NSSL will develop and support a robust internship program, wherein at least one student from an underrepresented/minority group will be hosted or sponsored remotely each year.
 - a. Priority support should be assigned on a rotating basis through the divisions, funding permitting.
 - b. The NLT will promote these opportunities to each division and share resources on recruiting interns/students for these opportunities.
2. NSSL encourages all employees to utilize the following programs:
 - a. Undergraduate
 - i. NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU)
 - ii. NOAA Hollings Students
 - iii. NOAA Educational Partnership Program (EPP)
 - b. Graduates
 - i. NOAA Cooperative Science Centers (CSC)
 - ii. NSF Graduate Research Internship Program (GRIP)
 - iii. Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) National Internship Program (HNIP)
 - c. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Tribal Nations Water Project
 - d. NOAA Pathways Program
 - e. NOAA Lapenta Program

Objective 1.4 – Establish a clear emphasis on diversity in recruitment and selections for Federal positions, minimize or remove biases in hiring, and reduce barriers for and enhance training of highly qualified candidates on the application and selection process.

Actions

1. NLT will support training for Federally permissible recruitment and selection practices of underrepresented groups, including education material developed by OAR EEO on the hiring and selection process for potential candidates.
2. NLT will use the list of organizations that represent minority groups compiled by OAR to distribute vacancy announcements broadly.
3. NLT will develop an internal process by which diversity is clearly a considered factor in selections. This will include:
 - a. Diversity among the members of a recommending panel.
 - b. Require that diversity training is completed by all members of selection recommendation panels prior to the onset of selection processes when standard training is available.
 - c. Diversity-related evaluation tools to be used in the selection process.
4. NLT will stay informed about hiring authorities available and apply those that are most appropriate and accessible to the broadest communities and groups of individuals with the intention to recruit a diverse pool of qualified candidates.
5. NLT will conduct an annual review of the hiring and exit activity in Federal positions across NSSL and share the findings with NDIST and broader staff as appropriate.
 - a. The reviews should include:
 - i. Summarizing the number of positions created, lost, changed, etc., and their types/levels
 - ii. Summarizing the hiring authorities used for hiring and diversity of candidate pools
 - iii. Summarizing the reasons or types of exits (e.g., separations, retirements)
 - b. These reviews should be made available to the workforce via the NSSL intranet.



Goal 2
WORKFORCE INCLUSION

GOAL 2 - WORKFORCE INCLUSION

Build a work environment that promotes inclusion

Objective 2.1 – Cultivate an inclusive work environment that encourages collaboration and flexibility to empower and engage every NSSL employee so that all individuals can contribute to their full potential and NSSL can maximize employee retention and wellbeing.

Actions

1. NLT will assess its processes, policies, procedures, and practices that create barriers and issues to equity and inclusion. This will be accomplished by ensuring that federal staff are aware of and understand these policies (including flexible workplace policies, work-life balance, mentor opportunities, etc.) and then developing a baseline understanding of the perceptions of staff/employees through activities such as surveys, focus groups, and other means that identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of these administrative practices. This analysis will be used to develop correlating mitigation strategies.
2. NLT will encourage and elevate employee participation in resource/affinity groups, DEIA committees and training, mentoring opportunities, and outreach through:
 - a. Timely lab-wide information sharing on these opportunities
 - b. Forums (e.g., listening sessions and Gab at the Lab presentations) where employees communicate their experiences and accomplishments
 - c. Inclusion of a DEIA element or major activity within all employees' performance plans
3. NLT will identify, communicate, and reinforce equitable and inclusive behaviors across all employee types.
 - a. NLT will encourage and support employee participation in NOAA DEIA training opportunities and provide training for all Laboratory employees at least once every two years, with the expectation that the more employees converse about diversity of perspectives, the easier it is to have these types of crucial conversations.
 - b. Each NLT member, especially those with supervisory responsibilities, will encourage their federal staff and non-federal partners (e.g., CIWRO and other contractors) to speak openly about issues related to DEIA. The NLT member will listen carefully, without judgment or criticism.
 - c. NLT members will hold each other accountable for creating an environment across NSSL where considerations of DEIA are integrated into their daily activities. This will be accomplished through communication of NSSL values and expectations and by providing opportunities for professional service. Also, NLT members should informally and formally recognize employees (e.g., acknowledgments, awards, etc) who are building and demonstrating DEIA practices within and external to our workplace.

Objective 2.2 – Develop and maintain a workplace in which (1) exclusivity is not tolerated and (2) the physical and motional safety of employees is prioritized.

Actions

1. NLT and supervisors are to take all matters of physical and emotional safety concerns seriously and should appropriately address the concern(s).
2. All employees are to abide by all expectations listed in the table below.
3. NSSL will maintain a way (e.g., by a Google Form or similar) by which personnel can anonymously report actions or events pertinent to DEIA. NDIST members are to read and, if needed, discuss the anonymous report. If deemed appropriate by NDIST members, the NLT should be informed of the feedback received so that action can be taken to address concerns or comments provided.

Expectations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Treat each other with respect regardless of lived experiences or professional expertise - Respect other’s requests and risk tolerances within the workplace - Don’t mock, chastise or pressure others - Approach difficulties with optimism, focus on what we CAN do - Offer your ideas and listen to other’s ideas for how to overcome challenges - Try not to assume you know what others are dealing with or feeling - Be adaptable to the needs of your co-workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen actively - Practice kindness - Don’t be shy about expressing your appreciation for colleagues - Reach out to connect with others - Be welcoming of new colleagues - Show patience - Be considerate of other’s challenges - Promote an environment in which people are comfortable expressing their vulnerabilities



Goal 3
WORKFORCE EQUITY
AND ACCESSIBILITY

OBJECTIVE 3.4 – NSSL will promote an inclusive environment by ensuring that its facilities are accessible for its workforce in adherence to the law.

Actions

1. NSSL will be in full compliance with the standards of Section 501, 504, and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.
2. Managers and employees should be aware of their responsibilities to maintain an accessible and adaptable workplace that's inclusive of employees with disabilities.

Objective 3.5 – Guarantee easy access and increase awareness of available accessibility accommodations and processes.

Actions

1. NLT will collaborate with NDIS to assess the ability and methods to request accommodations at NSSL.
 - a. Evaluate the complexity of the request process and the time taken to resolve those requests.
 - b. Develop processes to mitigate issues identified in (a). Evaluate the time taken to resolve those requests.
2. Invest in infrastructure and education to provide timely and effective response to accessible accommodation requests.

Objective 3.6 – Ensure the spaces in which we work (physical and digital) are accessible.

Actions

1. NLT will demonstrate and enforce efforts to embed accessibility into both physical and digital spaces instead of waiting for an accommodation request.
2. NLT will lead the effort to ensure new technologies and digital materials are Section 508 Compliant.

Objective 3.7 – Offer training to all staff to meet the goals of creating an accessible work environment.

Actions

1. NLT collaborate with NDIS to envision, evaluate, and develop training for all staff on providing accessibility and accommodation in their work.
 - a. Training should address several topic areas in both physical and digital spaces.
 - b. Examples: Section 508 Compliance, Accessible Documents, Alt Text, etc.
2. NLT collaborate with NDIS to build criteria for recommending training to encourage our IT partners to actively for providing accommodation solutions in our digital spaces and for digital tools.
3. NLT will lead by example by creating and providing accessible work environments at every possible opportunity.



Goal 4 SUSTAINABILITY



Create and maintain accountability of NLT to foster a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible culture

Objective 4.1 – Establish a support infrastructure to sustain NSSL’s DEIA efforts.

Actions

1. The NLT will be a champion for DEIA and actively support a NSSL Diversity and Inclusion Sustainability Team (NDIST) to foster DEIA activities in NSSL, monitor results, and schedule regular collaborative meetings between the NLT and NDIST. NDIST members will be composed of (see Appendix 2 for the names of those serving in these positions) the following:
 - a. NSSL Director or Deputy Director (also Chair of NDIST)
 - b. NSSL Representative to OAR’s D&I Advisory Committee (ODIAC)
 - c. NSSL Representative to OAR’s EEO Advisory Committee (EEOAC)
 - d. At least one representative from each of NSSL’s divisions (DO, FOFS, FRDD, RRDD, and WRDD as of 2023), serving rotating two-year terms.
 - e. Members of the NSSL Outreach Committee
2. NSSL Director and Deputy Director will increase the visibility of leaders in diversity-related activities, including the provision of regular updates to NSSL workforce on OAR’s and NSSL’s progress toward the goals outlined in this plan.
3. Quarterly DEIA meetings will be held between NLT and the NDIST to discuss what is and is not working regarding DEIA in the Laboratory.
4. Contribute to the fulfillment of this plan by keeping DEIA activities alive in the Laboratory at all levels through annual review and updates of this document.

Objective 4.2 – Establish a continuous learning environment focused on DEIA for all NSSL employees.

Actions

1. The NDIST will schedule regular Lab-wide brown bag lunch and learn sessions or special DEIA presentations at Lab-wide seminars or forums to have continuing conversations about DEIA. The frequency of meetings will be determined by NDIST.
2. The NDIST will emphasize DEIA training for Principal Investigators and field work participants (e.g., the FISST Training available through NOAA Workplace Violence Prevention and Response – <https://sites.google.com/noaa.gov/wvpr/training-webinars>; the Fieldwork Initiative – <http://fieldworkinitiative.org/> on a regular basis.
3. The NDIST will recommend [resources](#) for lab PIs who prepare proposals about the importance of DEIA in their selection of associate scientists, post docs, and students.



REFERENCES & APPENDIX

REFERENCES

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Phillips, K.W., 2014: How Diversity Makes Us Smarter: Being around people who are different from us makes us more creative, more diligent and harder-working. Scientific American,

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APPENDIX 1

DEIA Student Programs of Opportunity

Program	Support Org.	Level	Duration	Cost to NSSL?	Student Sources
Hollings*	NOAA OEd	Undergrad	9 weeks	None	Anywhere
EPP*	NOAA OEd	Undergrad	9 weeks	None	Anywhere
NCAS M*	NOAA OEd	Grad	3–12 months	None	Anywhere
HNIP	HACU	Grad	15 weeks (10 wks in summer)	Yes	Anywhere
GRIP*	NSF	Grad	2.5 to 12 months	Partial (\$5K/mo from NSD)	Anywhere
Pathways	NOAA	Either	Summer	Yes	Anywhere
REU	NSF	Undergrad	Summer	No	Anywhere

*Access through the Student Scholarship Internship Opportunities (SSIO) interface.

APPENDIX 2

NSSL Diversity and Inclusion Sustainability Team (NDIST) Members

Position	Name	Term
NSSL Director/and or Deputy Director	DaNa Carlis / Kurt Hondl	Permanent
NDIST Lead (& NSSL Representative to OAR D&I Advisory Committee)	Pam Heinselman	Committee appointment
NSSL Representative to OAR's EEO/Diversity Committee (Also Outreach Committee)	Jeremy Gibbs	Committee appointment
DO Rep	YBD	2022–2023
FRDD Representative	Elizabeth Smith	2022–2023
FRDD Representative	Brandy Griffis	2022–2023
RRDD Representative	Jeff Snyder	2022–2023
WRDD Representntative	Jian Zhang	2022–2023
WRDD Representative (Also Outreach Committee)	Vanna Chmielewski	2022–2023