

Project Abstract Summary

This Project Abstract Summary form must be submitted or the application will be considered incomplete. Ensure the Project Abstract field succinctly describes the project in plain language that the public can understand and use without the full proposal. Use 4,000 characters or less. Do not include personally identifiable, sensitive or proprietary information. Refer to Agency instructions for any additional Project Abstract field requirements. If the application is funded, your project abstract information (as submitted) will be made available to public websites and/or databases including USA Spending.gov.

* Funding Opportunity Number

F-FWS-WSFR-23-001

CFDA(s)

15.628

* Applicant Name

ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

* Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Conservation Academy, Coffee Talk, and Fellowship Grant

* Project Abstract

In North America, the social and ecological context for fish and wildlife conservation is changing rapidly. Habitat loss, invasive species, declines in biodiversity, and the impacts of climate change are accelerating. At the same time, society is increasingly diverse, urban, and disconnected from nature. Our fish and wildlife agencies are finding it harder to stay (or become) relevant in today's world and must learn how to better serve broader constituencies to ensure the future of North America's conservation legacy.

In order to enhance conservation through broader engagement, we must expand upon and implement coordinated and effective diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. The diversity of talent needed to address current and impending habitat and nature challenges is critical not only to our natural resources, but also to our economy. Creating inclusion in our work and volunteer cultures is paramount to addressing the support needed to properly address our fast-changing environment. To achieve this, enhanced education and collaboration opportunities for the organizations that serve those communities is essential.

Research demonstrates the importance of diversity of thought to solve challenging problems. The conservation field is not representative of the diversity of our country. We need to help develop and encourage talent in underserved communities to join the conservation field through increased opportunities and experiences within the communities themselves.

Natural resource organizations have had conversations in the past, and some have developed strategic plans focused on diversity and inclusion. However, according to a recent report by Dr. Dorceta Taylor of Yale School of the Environment, few natural resource conservation focused organizations, government, NGOs, or educational institutes, have successfully followed through on their plans. This proposal takes a three-pronged approach to begin to address these needs by supporting the professional development of state agency staff, creating a safe space to have difficult conversations, and increasing the diversity of future applicant pools by providing an opportunity to gain experience in the conservation field and learn about the work of the state fish and wildlife agencies.

If left unaddressed, meaningful direction for state practitioners will continue to lag. Without pipelines to diverse candidates for conservation positions, our organizations will lack the broad array of expertise needed to creatively problem solve the threats to our natural resources. Limited coordinated national DEI efforts and slowed implementation of the most effective DEI strategies not only leaves our work forces depleted but will lead to reduced relevancy with the public we all serve and decreased support for the nature challenges we all face.

By providing meaningful guidance on how to build DEI into the fabric of any conservation organization, safe spaces to discuss questions surrounding DEI and the lessons our community is learning, and fellowship opportunities to increase diversity of thought in our internal conservation teams, we will provide an opportunity for a national, coordinated DEI effort to emerge. This unified front will allow our organizations to tackle some of our largest challenges facing our natural resources as one collective, beautifully diverse community, while building relevancy with future generations of conservationists.