

THE EVENT

The audience in the ballroom reached over 450; seated at over 50 round tables that filled the room. The session began with inspiring women in our industry taking the stage. These women were the supporting facilitators for the day.



Our professional facilitator, Desiree Adaway, encouraged all attendees to explore topics that often are left unattended. The audience was full engaged; thinking about the content, respectfully sharing their thoughts during the small group discussions and listening intently as groups reported out. This wasn't your normal raucous lunch presentation with different conversations happening all over the room. Few, if any, faces in the audience were reflecting the blue screens of their smart phones. Everyone was present; it was really something.



One supporting facilitator noted that "This was such a proud moment for me: For the first time since I became involved in WateReuse, we participated in a plenary session championed, curated, led, and facilitated by women in our ranks." Another commented that "Everybody walked away with a sense of belonging from the well-structured discussions at the tables and ready to pay more attention to inclusion and equality at their workplaces and communities." Many expressed appreciation to WateReuse, as an organization, and to the broad membership, for being open to these kinds of important conversations. There was overwhelming enthusiasm for the session and the hope is that the work that began on March 19th 2019 continues; with the participants returning to their organizations to create the diverse, equitable and inclusive community that is so important to water reuse.

An inclusive and diverse water sector is necessary to build trust and promote innovation for the future.



OUTCOMES



Each supporting facilitator took notes at their small table discussions; revealing the collective thoughts of the group as a whole, as illustrated to the left and summarized below:

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION (DEI) & REUSE

- > Water is a unifying factor to bring people together
- The WateReuse community shares creativity, ambitiousness, and a desire to drive and push change in the industry and find solutions to our own problems.
- > As a group we are energized, excited and willing to change
- We want all people to accept recycled water; regardless of culture and origin.
- People who drink water come with different realities (safety, etc.) based on their culture, which impacts public perception.
- We need diversity of opinion and expertise in the water industry to help communities understand and support reuse.
- We need to be inclusive in our communication efforts; recognizing people have different needs, interests and priorities
- > Organizations are becoming more diverse in their employee composition; and the culture of the organizations should reflect it.
- > Internally, if there are not many people who look like me in the organization, it is hard to see my path in the organization.
- Failure to pursue DEI will result in stalled projects, a limited pool of resources and a loss of the momentum we have gained.
- > Water equity for all, including those that are vulnerable, is integral to long-term reliability and sustainability.
- > We must not constrain our daughters, our children and future generations.

CHALLENGES

- > Many organizations have to serve many diverse populations; sometimes it is hard to reflect the different communities served.
- How do you get inclusion and fair representation from a 4-million-person service area?
- Hiring for diversity is hard; not because work places do not seek diversity, but because there is less or sometimes no access to that population.
- > Challenge is to make people feel that are part decision making, at different levels, so people feel included
- > If staff doesn't feel included; motivation goes down and complacency goes up
- As technical people we may have challenges with communication and reaching out to nontechnical community members, we need to find ways to bridge the gap with common and unique concerns.
- One size education doesn't work; you can't "carbon copy" a message effectively.
- Speaking the same "industry language" can inadvertently exclude others who are outside looking in.
- Presenting "one type of person" can lead to mistrust by the public, who are too different from the people in the industry.
- Some just don't get this whole discussion and issue "I don't need a white man to say this water is safe to drink and I am a white man".
- > As you pursue DEI, you might get answers and input you don't want, which requires you to rethink plans.
- > Our unintentional biases can perpetuate the issues if we don't interrupt and discuss, which is why we MUST do the work.

We should make a choice to shut up and listen - that is the biggest hurdle.



BENEFITS

- > Benefits of DEI to our recycled water community is to reflect different perspectives and views for accepting recycled water use.
- > Diversity of thought is born from diversity of experience.
- > Diversity in education helps form diverse teams.
- > Diverse skill sets on a team promotes inclusion of all types of people internally and externally.
- > Diverse and inclusive cultures provide a more comfortable setting to express thoughts.
- Everyone brings something to the table.
- Listening promotes understanding & solutions.
- > Creativity and respect are reflected differently if women and minorities are present.
- > Inner city communities may relate and respond better to folks in their community.
- > The more we resemble communities we serve; the easier the dialogue with constituents.
- > Outreach beyond our immediate industry will draw in new talent for diverse ideas and solutions.
- > More diversity could open up labor shortages and offer a larger potential labor pool.
- > Improving communication creates trust and safety within our organizations and to the communities we serve.
- > DEI must consider the work-life balance to attract and maintain a better workforce and better talent.

SOLUTIONS

- The reuse industry has come a long way from the non-inclusive, "we've always done it that way" kind of thinking, to now seeking the viewpoints from others. This changes the conversation.
- > Meaningful and lasting solutions requires different perspectives and experiences.
- > DEI comes from the top management and it is often not driven by women or minorities.
- Privilege influences who gets hired; we need to have intentional programs to work directly with schools, trade colleges, etc. to increase interest in our work.
- > Create opportunities to bring more diversity into the upper levels of leadership and management.
- > Offer mentorship programs to provide a career path for women and minority engineers, operators and administrators.
- > Re-examine the power dynamics in your organization to bring the perspectives and contributions of all to the table.
- > Create a safe space so that everyone feels like they can share their opinion and contribute to better projects.
- > Create opportunities for younger generations and diverse groups to be part of committees/boards that make decisions.
- > Break down the silos within our organizations (e.g. water/ww/rw) to bring different perspectives to design and implementation.
- > Establish programs to encourage contractors to hire labor from the local community.
- Develop programs where field workers present to and train the community in how to use the systems; this is good for them and good for the community.
- Retain good employees by providing equitable policies to accommodate life situations (e.g. maternity/paternity leave, flexible schedules for single parents/dual-income families, support for aging elders, extended illness).
- > Build community relationships before you need it; transformational not transactional takes years of investment.
- > Carefully consider the correct dialect for your audience and bring the right members of the community to the table.
- > Create teams that can effectively communicate with the community and build trust.
- Incorporate community priorities and perspectives to improve the project and reduce opposition; find the "win-win" solutions.
- > Accept that others think differently; listen first, then educate and craft a message to respond.

We love WATER | We have PASSION | We are LOYAL | We are WateReuse.

Understanding and practicing equity and inclusion is an essential leadership skill.



WHO HELPED MAKE THIS HAPPEN??

It takes a village.

CORE COMMITTEE

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