



WMT-AHEC

Diversity,
Equity,
Inclusion, &
Belonging

A reflective report by
Chelsea Bellon, DEI
Practitioner, Jan-Apr 2023

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Introduction

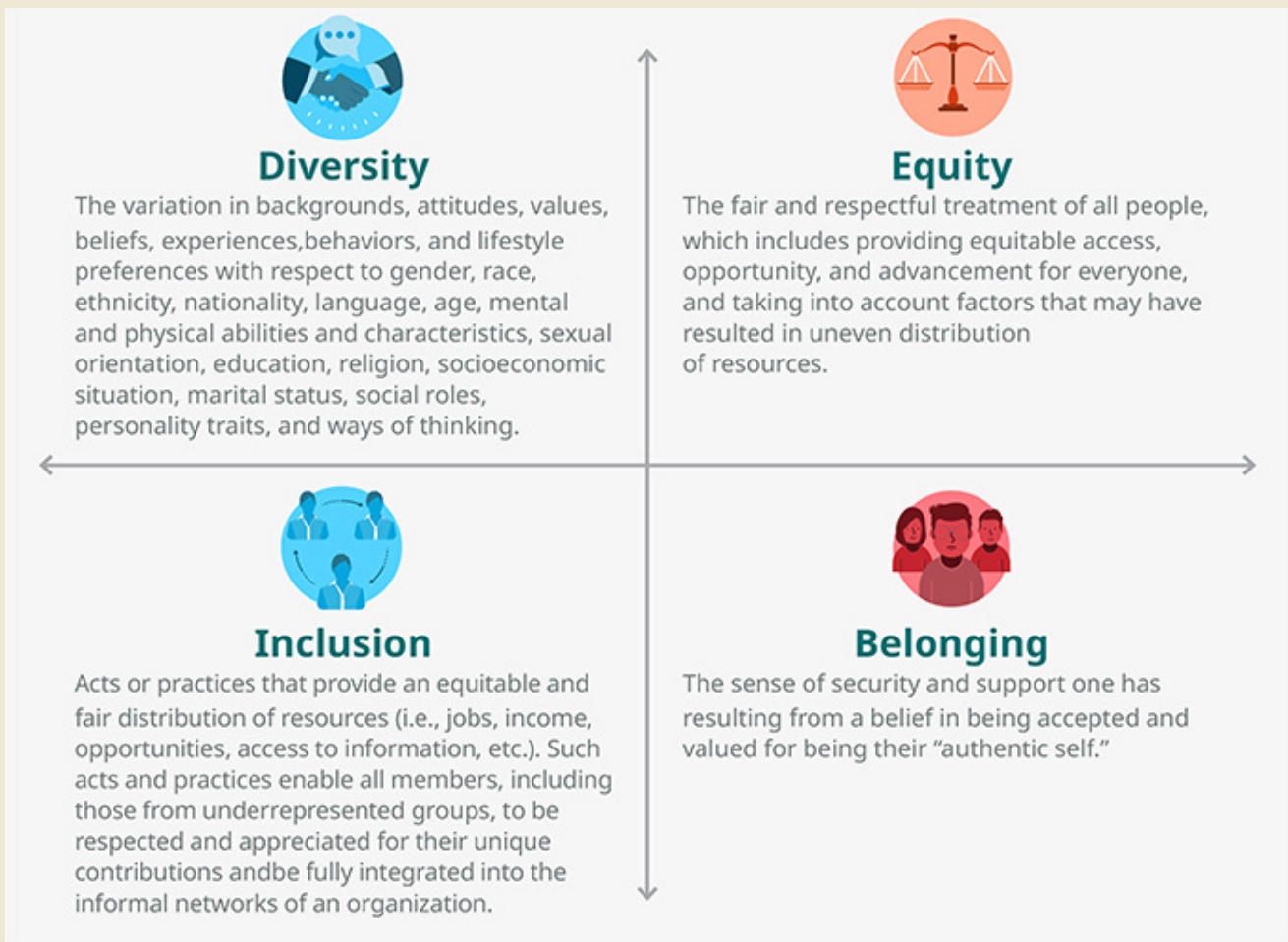
During January 2023–April 15, 2023, a reflective observation took place by WMT–AHEC staff member, Chelsea Bellon. During this reflective time, Bellon was guided by Cornell University's Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) certificate program. This program was led by national experts in the field and included various opportunities for mentorship and continued education.

This report will serve as a guide to approach existing DEI practices and potential growth opportunities within WMT–AHEC program structures. Bellon approached the gathering of information from an unbiased approach. However, personal or more emotionally reflective pieces will be adequately noted due to the assignments of the program.

It is important for WMT–AHEC leadership and staff to recognize this report is from one individual and not a collaborative effort. As WMT–AHEC moves forward with strategic planning a collaborative report and reflection is recommendation. Finally, some policies, practices, or procedures within WMT–AHEC have since been addressed or discussed.

Please note the following content mentions but is not limited to:

- Racial and cultural representation.
- Age and experience differences among staff members.
- Differing communication styles.
- Academia hierarchy and systematic racism.
- Center accomplishments and purpose and how it can integrate to western Montana communities.



A Look at Our Mission & Values

WMT-AHEC Office

Question to Consider: What is unique to WMT-AHEC?

MT AHEC Program Office

Goals & Objectives

The mission of the Montana AHEC is accomplished by pursuing goals, objectives and activities which are common to all AHECs. These are changed and /or modified each year in response to decisions made by the federal granting agency and the Regional WWAMI AHEC Program Office at the University of Washington School of Medicine. The following guidelines are used in establishing annual goals, objectives and activities.

- Form productive linkages between healthcare units to the benefit of underserved and rural communities.
- Foster and encourage collaborative community-based health programs.
- Increase the number of minority and underserved youth entering health education programs.
- Serve as a resource, clearinghouse and disseminator of health information.
- Promote improved health and disease prevention through educational interventions.
- Respond to emerging community-based needs regarding health issues.
- Provide technical assistance on healthcare-related issues to underserved communities.
- Help implement collaborative community-based, multidisciplinary education and training for health professionals and health professions students.



"To enhance access to quality healthcare, particularly primary and preventive care, by improving the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals through community and academic educational partnerships."

- **Professionalism** We conduct all aspects of work in an ethical and responsible manner.
- **Collaboration** We cooperate to share information and resources to improve health and healthcare.
- **Partnerships** We respect and support the efforts of local, state, and federal stakeholders.
- **Open Communication** We strive for a transparent, respectful, and dynamic exchange of information.
- **Integrity & Accountability** We carry out all activities in an honest, trustworthy, and dependable manner.

CORE VALUES

Pathway to Inclusion

Assessment

- Internal Staff Survey: *completed March 2023*
- WMT-AHEC DEI Report: *completed April-July 2023*
- Feedback or additional comments from staff: *pending*

Commitment

- Staff idea exchange of effort, including part-time and full-time team members: *anticipated by August 31, 2023*
- Staff to draft and finalize DEI Commitment Statement: *anticipated by September 15, 2023.*

Inclusive Actions

The following items will be on-going; *anticipated to be complete by December 2023:*

- Internal policies & procedures (staff & advisory board).
- Recruitment, advertising, outreach, & communication.
- Programmatic survey plans established.

Student & Community Impact

Anticipated in early 2024, WMT-AHEC will strengthen impact by:

- Distribution of programmatic "ground zero" surveys.
- Student representative or intern opportunity to serve.
- Community partnership/allies survey or focus groups

1. Assess Organizational Inclusion

Rate your organization on each aspect of inclusion. To the extent that you item, you should select "strongly agree" as your response. Less convincir the item. Please use the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disag

A. Diversity Practices	Organization Name: <i>NOTE: if you wish, you may use a pseudonym for the organization name.</i>
<i>My organization...</i>	Rating
1. Implements nondiscrimination policies, rules, and regulations	4
2. Has created and actively supports employee resource groups	3
3. Has in place necessary systems/practices to help ensure the success of employees who are (or have historically been) underrepresented in positions of influence within the organization (e.g., mentoring/sponsorship and leadership development programs)	4
4. Invests time and resources in organizational systems/practices designed to increase diversity at all levels of the organization	3
5. Offers flexible work arrangements to employees to help promote work-life balance	5
Average	3.80

B. Inclusion Practices	
<i>My organization...</i>	Rating
1. Has explicitly integrated inclusion principles into the organization's mission/vision and values statements	2
2. Clearly communicates the importance of inclusion principles for employee well-being and success	3

3. Clearly communicates the role that inclusion plays in helping the organization to achieve its strategic goals (i.e., in driving the organization's success)	2
4. Ensures inclusion principles are included in HR processes (e.g., performance evaluations and training that focus on inclusive behaviors)	2
5. Regularly creates the space/forums needed to foster greater organizational understanding of the importance of valuing inclusion and difference	3
6. Does not confuse inclusion with representation	4
Average	2.67

C. Senior Leadership Commitment to Inclusion	
<i>Senior leadership in my organization...</i>	Rating
1. Demonstrate through their behavior their commitment to inclusion	5
2. Demonstrate their commitment to inclusion by continually seeking feedback about how well they (and the organization) are promoting inclusion	4
3. Demonstrate inclusion principles by being transparent about their intentions and sharing information widely with employees	5
4. Demonstrate inclusion principles by involving employees influenced by a decision in the decision-making process itself	5
Average	4.75

D. Walking the Talk	
<i>In my organization...</i>	Rating
1. Decisions are made based on stated values	4
2. Managers are held accountable for upholding the organization's inclusion principles	4
3. Leaders who have successfully fostered inclusion in their departments are recognized	5
4. Inclusion is a focus of regular organizational evaluations and assessments	2
Average	3.75

15

Total Organizational Inclusion Rating **3.63**



When it comes to hiring, it's important to remember that the interview process provides applicants and candidates to evaluate WMT-AHEC's effort and standards of diversity and inclusion.

Identifying Hiring Interventions that Support DEI Office Culture

<p>Hiring Practices (Are they transparent and standardized?)</p>	<p>Our hiring practices lack inclusivity when it comes to the panel of reviewers. It also lacks the ability to transfer skills rather than having a buttoned up, similar educational information as the foundation of an acceptable candidate.</p>
<p>Interview Panels (Do we use panels to reduce unconscious bias or do we rely on individuals' opinions? Do we use objective and standard criteria, or do we rely on individual managers' subjective judgment?)</p>	<p>Panels are used; however, they lack inclusivity and they do not have a productive format for either feedback sharing or scoring. Conversations have improved around discussions of candidates but having an approach that captures everyone's ideas/thoughts would be beneficial.</p>
<p>Internal Promotion Practices (Are the practices transparent? Are they offered fairly? Are criteria for promotion written and standardized across the organization?)</p>	<p>Promotions are not typically a foundation; we are grant funded raises are often a part of the university system but not necessarily promotions. Compensation for projects do not place, grant effort are included in FTE.</p>

<p>Performance Appraisals (Are they standardized, based on objective performance criteria, and the same for everyone?)</p>	<p>There are no foundational practices which I think creates a sense of leadership receiving more than those not. There is a sense of equal investment.</p>
<p>Accountability (Do managers make subjective decisions, or are they held accountable and expected to be fair and objective?)</p>	<p>Decisions are typically made together but those in leadership also seem to have side conversations that can interject and change larger decisions. Conversations that take place as an entire unit often results in few staff voicing opinions.</p>
<p>Personnel Decisions (Do we have systems in place to monitor or evaluate personnel decisions made by individual managers?)</p>	<p>We do not have this as we are all individual managers of independent projects. There is not a need for micromanaging or approval outside of collaboration and discussions with leadership (Director and financial officer).</p>
<p>Performance Feedback (Are employees told how and when they will receive performance feedback? Are they told in advance the criteria for success?)</p>	<p>Our team evaluates and provides performance feedback to one another, everyone evaluates everyone else and provides comments and suggestions. The Director(s) will meet with each person individually to go over the feedback and discuss questions, concerns, needs from the staff.</p>
<p>Standardized Evaluation Forms (Do we use standardized forms, which reduce subjectivity and bias?)</p>	<p>There is a standardized form that is similar to another organization (FMRP). They can be viewed as such, but I wonder if we could change some of the questions to better reflect the individual program's work/efforts.</p>
<p>Social Networking (Do we avoid using social networking to fill job roles, since social networking can favor people in our schematic category?)</p>	<p>No, our team does utilize social networking and connections. Sometimes it works out and sometimes a different candidate is selected. There are newly established procedures to ensure unbiased, professional, and transferrable approaches.</p>
<p>Bias Language Do we avoid using male-typed words in job descriptions, such as "strong leader," in favor of evidence-based performance criteria, such as "proven sales track record."</p>	<p>This is still utilized within our organization in job announcements and descriptions. I think this is a larger issue at HR for an entire academia institution.</p>
<p>Inclusive Thinking Is there a tendency for people to focus on reasons for including people – especially people who seem "untraditional" – or excluding them because they don't fit the norm?</p>	<p>This path is newly forming within our organization and we are working toward approaching jobs and projects in a holistic and inclusive nature with various backgrounds of partners.</p>

<p>Inclusive Benefits</p> <p>Are our benefits inclusive of employees of different backgrounds (e.g., same-sex partner benefits, flexible work arrangements)? If they are, do people feel that they can take advantage of them without suffering a penalty for doing so?</p>	<p>This is a university system issue/focus rather than our inside organization. The institution does provide inclusive benefits.</p>
<p>Bias Interrupters</p> <p>Are people trained to identify expressions of bias when discussing competence and potential? For example, highlighting counter-stereotypic evidence, questioning whether behavior or performance has been evaluated similarly across people, or making sure that credit is given where credit is due?</p>	<p>No, there is nothing like this within our smaller organization OR institution (university). This needs to be something that is modeled to hopefully be a normalized practice.</p>
<p>Gender-Based Assumptions</p> <p>Is there an assumption, spoken or unspoken, that the women in the workplace will take on “housekeeping” duties such as tidying shared work spaces, organizing social events, and remembering birthdays?</p>	<p>No this is not something that is assumed and our team does a really good job of equally taking on equal responsibilities.</p>



Please note that research and deeper conversations will need to be conducted with UM HR representatives & any appropriate diversity staff at Main Hall.

Hiring & Job Description Suggestions

Now you will choose two of the policies or practices that you think need improvement. Describe your recommended intervention. What do you think your organization should do to reduce the negative effects of unconscious bias in those two cases?

Complete the grid below.

Identified Area for Improvement:	My Recommended Solution:
<p>1. Our hiring process lacks inclusivity and thoughtfulness.</p>	<p>1. I suggest we implement panel members to include DEI personnel and BIPOC members along with Directors. By including BIPOC members it will not only ensure their value and experience to the team but also provide the candidates with a sense of support if they themselves identify as BIPOC. These members should be not only within WMT-AHEC but outside partners. A panel interviewers will help promote a variety of ideas and feedback about candidates to highlight areas that some may miss. Finally, at the end of the interview process instead of just individually rating and leaving comments for each interviewee the panel will have a reflection period to understand thoughts and concerns during the interview.</p>
<p>2. Biased languages within documents and job descriptions.</p>	<p>2. In order to evaluate bias language within our organization, I would suggest a review of job descriptions initially (currently employed job descriptions). Because we have programs geared toward students in college, I would suggest looking at our intake forms and the descriptions of scholarship questions and required skills. Additionally, I would suggest looking at our website to determine what areas need to have inclusive wording. Within job descriptions, having explanations of examples of transferable skills and qualities would benefit applicants in understanding what is being asked and how to highlight their background. Viewing these goals, a conversation with HR at UM would need to take place regarding their policies and even questioning their efforts/willingness to improve.</p>

Engagement Reflection

The Experience of Being Engaged

Reflect on these questions about your experience.

Describe that period of engagement with your work.

- What did you feel?
- How did you behave?
- Which of your actions demonstrated your engagement?

In the past year, I started a new role and it is one of the first times I felt engaged for a long period of time. In the past, I would be engaged for the first 4-6 months until the dust settled and I found my reigns. In this new position, I'm challenged daily and feel a sense of community and accomplishment. I have a high sense of pride in how I complete tasks, represent our organization, and the successful outcomes we create as a team. I am disappointed if something does not go according to plan but it's not the type of disappointment where I give up, I reevaluate how we can approach the idea in a better way. I think one of my biggest actions that represents my engagement is my willingness and eagerness to prepare for larger meetings and events. I put forth my best effort by anticipating negative outcomes so I can have back up plans. I communicate effectively with everyone involved so that whatever happens goes smoothly and everyone feels included.

How engaged were the people around you? How do you know?

Describe the behaviors you observed from your colleagues:

Over the last year, I've seen patterns and a sense of consistency in terms of who appears to be engaged and who may not be. Some of the observations around disengagement are:

- little to no interactions on the Teams group chat where we post updates and update one another about engagement of staff meetings.
- little to no response of emails requesting group participation. Multiple reminders and late outcomes.
- little to no input during staff meetings regarding group feedback or interest.

Those that have shown engagement:

- collaborative projects, requesting input or multiple entities working together.
- feedback, shared ideas, speaking up when there's a feeling of unease.
- excitement around new projects.
- willing to have tough conversations about needed changes.

What factors do you think contributed to your engagement in this instance? Try to identify as many relevant factors as you can.

I think my engagement contributed to my "newness" in the position and the way my skills could be utilized. I felt supported in my role by my leadership, something I didn't experience previously. I am viewed as a value and contributing member of the team, even a leader in some areas. The feeling of trust allows me to feel safe even within the hard discussions.

Increase Engagement

Suggestions

Summarize your hypothesis about the two or three factors you believe might be most important to address in an effort to increase engagement.

Provide more direct opportunities of interactive settings that is not just work-focused would create new relationships and expand any previous relationships. Family engagement night or staff lunches/ community service activities in nature really provides a sense of ownership in a work environment. Showing support around personal issues could really help staff feel supported in their culture, religion, family dynamic, and possible loss/grief journeys.

What are your recommendations for improvements?

- Making a more personal foundation as an organization would help staff to feel supported in areas that society and many other workplaces forget to prioritize—human needs.
- Employee retention policy—we could revisit this opportunity that has slightly changed within the last year to ensure staff are benefiting from the opportunity. (Gym, phone, parking, etc.).
- Personal leave procedures or policies could allow a sense of respect around culture/background that would allow for transparency and a more connected relationship. If someone is out of office due to personal loss or medical issue, can someone else serve as an emergency contact (automatic reply) to ensure the employee feels supported and stress is lessened by simple communication within their organizational work role. This process would also support the students and other staff when there's a delay during important times.

Our 2023 Staff Program Feedback

During March, WMT-AHEC staff were surveyed anonymously to provide feedback around DEI efforts. Below you will find suggestions, comments, and shared needs to improve DEI.

- Reach out to more diverse populations to offer shadowing
- Include more **gender-affirming educational** opportunities in AHEC Scholars
- More focused efforts in career awareness programs to further opportunities for underrepresented students, especially American Indian students.
- Share more **resources to students regarding DEIB info**-sent from Chelsea or found online through different outlets.
- Wording could be more **inclusive for rural rotation application** (preferred name vs legal name)
- **Email signature standard** for all WMT-AHEC staff (pronouns, land acknowledgement).
- Encourage a more diverse applicant pool for all programs.
- Offer **accommodations in future interviews** email/phone calls (keeping in mind mental and physical disabilities).
- WMT-AHEC staff should all undergo continued DEIB training to eliminate biases and create additional learning opportunities. Work with UM to bring trainings to departments across the campus, help them build a more robust and **comprehensive DEIB framework for the University** as a whole.
- Specific goals: section/box in the framework could be specific to our programs and how we can specifically attend to DEIB. This could still be written with higher-level language rather than very granular detail, but still could give some general goals - i.e.: certain number of **FMC topics per year with this focus, attention to career awareness programs specifically targeted to underrepresented populations, AHEC Scholars programming, etc.**
- Find/host workshops or educational **training opportunities for students to join or look back on.** This could include handouts or recorded talks regarding areas of improvement that fall under the DEIB focus.
- Participation from **all staff members around feedback and discussion topics,** even if the opinions are different there are questions about “best practices”—all voices bring value to our learning.
- Outward service day, staff can volunteer at a location supporting an underserved population—**staff building day.**
- **Educational trainings** might bring in scholars who are NOT working in the health professions to **share their knowledge.**
- Communication: review our **website to make sure themes of DEIB are present,** maybe have a statement on home page. Is there a way to build these internal office **DEIB goals into future grant goals** and objectives for AHEC or through other funding sources?

Suggested Actions

1

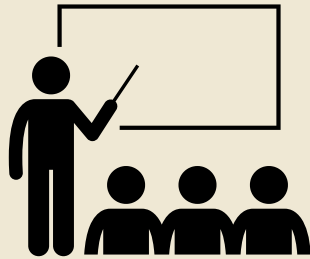


Inclusive recruitment, advertising, & outreach within current and future programming.

Creating an internal system of inclusivity will allow WMT-AHEC to serve students and communities with health equity as a priority. Proposed suggestions include:

- Commitment to DEI statement crafted by staff.
- Signature template/expectations implemented by all staff.
- Website overhaul & edit focusing on inclusive language, alt text, resources & user-friendly outline.

3

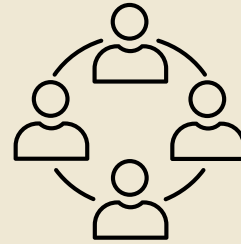


Staff training and professional development:

Staff hired, represented, or partnered with WMT-AHEC shall attend two professional development trainings each fiscal year. One of two trainings should be completed as a staff/team effort. Topics focusing on but not limited to:

- State-focused history around Indigenous communities or health needs.
- Montana Disability Network
- DEI in the workplace
- Identifying unconscious bias
- LGBTQIA+ Equity

2



Creating a work culture to support staff in DEI efforts.

To support WMT-AHEC staff and provide a level of accountability for DEI efforts, internal policies and procedures need to be established. Policies include but are not limited to:

- Hiring process: application, interview, and onboarding.
- Staff retention & support policies option(s).
- On-site DEI staff to support with public presentations or content review upon request.
- Monthly team check-in around DEI needs or questions.

4



Assess & listen frequently:

DEI accountability, awareness, and improvement is the result of the center's ability to listen and understand where improvements and changes should take place.

- All programs or initiatives serving students, professionals, and communities should implement surveys (pre and post).
- Underserved & marginalized communities should be included in WMT-AHEC advisory board.

Acknowledgements

This report was completed over the course of several months and with the guidance and tools featured in Cornell University's online DEI Certificate Program.

Any findings or observations could have been addressed currently, but it is worth mentioning due to the starting point of growth for WMT-AHEC.

It's important to note the growth and changes within the WMT-AHEC team since the beginning of this review process.