

BWSR Meet & Confer Meeting Notes

Tuesday, October 5, 2021, 11:00 am – 12 pm

Attendees

- BWSR MAPE Meet & Confer (M&C) Committee members: Melissa King (chair), Jason Weinerman (co-chair), Annie Felix-Gerth, Matt Fischer, Steve Hofstad, Tim Hohn, Suzanne Rhees
- BWSR Executive (Exec) Team staff: Angie Becker Kudelka, Kevin Bigalke, Dave Weirens
- Other Participants: Adam Browning (DNR Human Resources), Pete Marincel (MAPE Business Agent)

BWSR M&C Committee Chair Melissa King began the meeting at 11:00 am.

Introductions

All meeting participants introduced themselves.

Meeting Norms, Agenda (Melissa)

Melissa reviewed items proposed for discussion on the draft meeting agenda and proposed meeting norms. There were no revisions proposed to the meeting agenda. All participants agreed to the meeting norms as proposed:

- We are a partnership between BWSR management and staff, with a goal to develop mutually agreeable solutions to real or perceived organizational challenges in a timely fashion
- Participate and engage as coequals
- Balance participation - listen with intent to hear, ask questions to seek clarity and understanding
- Focus on agenda topics, 'parking lot' other items or conversations longer than allotted times for discussion at a later meeting

BWSR MAPE Staff Listening Session Summary (Melissa, Jason)

Melissa led a presentation and described how the BWSR MAPE M&C committee formed in 2021. Jason reviewed the M&C Committee process to collect and analyze input from BWSR MAPE staff. Jason noted that three listening sessions were held from July through August 2021 and had 40+ staff participate.

Melissa presented a word art graphic of the values and reasons staff identified for what they liked about working for BWSR. Jason identified four main themes (human resources, communication, workload & retention, and diversity, equity and inclusion) and nine subcategories of staff concerns that emerged from the analysis of the listening session input. Melissa reviewed the results of BWSR MAPE staff survey regarding the prioritization of the nine subcategories and noted that the survey had a 46% response rate with vacant positions, workload, and retention identified as the top three priorities identified. Melissa stated that all but two survey respondents identified at least one of those three subcategories as a top priority.

There were no questions regarding the process to solicit staff input.

Melissa and Jason reviewed the BWSR staff concerns matrix document which summarized staff concerns heard in the input sessions and provided additional context of the four themes, nine subcategory issues, and issues examples included on the document.

Melissa asked if there were questions on the input summary presented. Angie thanked the group and asked if other members of the M&C Committee had comments. Steve and Suzanne both noted that the M&C Committee was a cohesive group, and that the summary represented the process and concerns that staff raised. Dave stated that at the Exec Team level, staff were aware of some of the issues, but that the summary provided good clarification and context behind the survey results. Kevin concurred with Dave's statement and added that the additional context was valuable.

Dave asked Pete how the M&C process works at other agencies. Pete responded that he works with multiple M&C committees at MDH, MDA, DHS, etc. and that the process is variable. Pete added that the M&C process allows for high-level discussions and collaboration to improve work environment and noted that it is not intended for grievances and other personnel issues. Pete noted that some M&C committees have focused on internal employee experiences, others on formal processes, etc.

Pete asked Exec Team staff for clarification on what the team is currently working on, related to the staff identified issues presented. Dave noted that vacant positions and impacts to staff workload are the main issues. Angie noted that the agency like others, are recovering from a 1+ year hiring freeze and that BWSR needs to assess each position to determine if needs are less, more, the same, different or new opportunities are needed. Angie also noted that balancing the current pandemic situation with what comes next is a constant state of pivoting. Kevin noted that the agency needs to factor in new expectations and requirements that are also trying to be met. Dave noted that hiring decisions are important.

Priority Topic Discussion (Melissa)

Vacancies

Melissa shared the BWSR staff concerns matrix document to continue discussion on vacant positions. Suzanne asked if hiring decisions were matching the greatest needs per staff input. Melissa added that during input sessions staff burnout was raised multiple times and concerns have been continually raised in regional operations and all staff meetings regarding vacant Board Conservationist and grants positions. Angie noted that the legislature will never fully fund every staffing need and that staff should reach out to their supervisors with concerns and assistance to prioritize workload.

Jason asked for clarification on the process for filling vacancies and asked Exec Team staff if there was a consistent process/strategy and the current priority for filling vacancies that can be shared with staff, recognizing that things may change. Jason provided an example of organizational impacts if there were to be further personnel loss in the grants program. Annie also asked in the meeting chat if there was a priority plan for vacancies.

Angie noted that the Exec Team staff will review that request on information to be shared with staff. Angie indicated that the process for hiring is currently available on BERT and also noted that staff in each section may have a different viewpoint on what the priority staffing plan may be. Angie identified that Assistant Directors have been sending emails to staff in the individual sections, as applicable, with staffing updates. There was discussion that those communications may be able to be stored on BERT for all staff and further discussion on the reclassification and audit processes. Pete also recommended centralizing staffing information as job audits and classification processes take time to complete.

Annie noted that the time allotted for this agenda item had expired.

Meeting Schedule, Next Steps (Melissa)

Melissa identified that the Exec Team agreed to a quarterly standing meeting schedule, as needed. Melissa asked if Exec Team staff would be willing to meet every other month, given the extent of staff concerns captured from listening sessions. Exec Team staff agreed to increased meeting frequency if there were clear meeting purposes and specific items to discuss and directed Melissa to work with Rachel to schedule. Melissa asked for clarification on whom to coordinate meeting agendas & minutes with and was directed to copy Angie, Kevin and Dave on emails.

Melissa asked for confirmation and received concurrence on the outcomes of the meeting discussion which included:

- Exec Team staff will review the level of detail that can be shared with staff regarding strategy and priority for filling vacancies. This also includes sharing Assistant Director communications on staffing updates that have been sent to individual sections, with all staff via BERT.
- Detail regarding BWSR hiring process is currently available on BERT: <https://bert.bwsr.state.mn.us/hiring-process>
- M&C Committee will review if the proposed strategy is addressing member concerns ahead of the next M&C meeting.
- Staff should reach out to their supervisors regarding workload concerns and prioritization.
- M&C Committee will share this information with members.

Melissa identified two topics for discussion at the next meeting, 1) review how well today's outlined process is working and 2) staff workload; and asked for suggestions of other agenda items. Suzanne suggested workplace culture, retention and communication as discussion items. Melissa asked if there was any specific information that would be helpful for the M&C Committee to provide in advance of the next meeting. Kevin stated that additional staff perspectives on what makes a good workplace culture and ideas regarding retention would be helpful.

Melissa thanked meeting attendees and ended the meeting at 12:04 pm.