

# BWSR Meet & Confer Meeting Notes

Tuesday, February 1, 2022 11:00 AM-12 PM

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

## Introductions & Agenda

Welcome from Melissa. Melissa reviewed the proposed agenda and noted that the committee hoped to walk through the staff workload summary distributed ahead of the meeting and begin discussions on potential solutions. No other comments on the proposed agenda. Melissa noted that two staff from the wetlands section volunteered to share their experiences regarding workload impacts. Jason Weirnerman and Steve Hofstad confirmed that those staff would not be in attendance in-person and Jason/Steve would share with the committee on their behalf.

## Workload Concerns, Draft Workload Agreement

Melissa led the presentation on the committee's BWSR MAPE staff summary regarding workload. She explained how the committee solicited input from BWSR MAPE staff and noted that overall staff participation was ~75%, with response rate by individual sections 50-100%. Melissa shared a summary of staff workload by section. Staff were appreciative of the recent movement in recruitment and hiring, as well as the extent of communication being shared with all. Almost all sections reported having workload concerns, which is impacting the quality of our work. Staff feel that workload has increased since the pandemic, but acknowledged that at times it is beyond BWSR's control. Staff are concerned about workload with a return to normal work and increased travel times, additional workload associated with new programs, and how those programs will be appropriately staffed in the future.

Gwen Steel reviewed a summary of staff self-advocacy and supervisor approachability in the context of discussing workload. Gwen explained staff noted difficulty in saying "no", that balancing self-needs with that of the team can be difficult, and items deemed high priority are difficult to decline. About half of staff feel comfortable talking about workload issues with their supervisor and staff in some sections noted having active conversations. Staff in some sections have difficulty advocating for their individual needs or feel uncomfortable approaching their supervisor to discuss.

Jason shared a summary of coverage for vacant positions. Dave Weirens asked a clarifying question about the previous slide shared, as to where lack of communication may be happening. Jason explained that some staff have difficulty beginning the conversation on workload with their supervisor and noted that reasons shared were wide-ranging. Jason continued the presentation noting that all sections have staff covering for vacant positions, and noted that staff in more than half of the sections covering for more than 2 years. In some instances, over 3 years. When we have a vacancy, the duties of that person have been assigned to others. Oftentimes, if someone is promoted, they are tasked with the duties of their previous position for many months/years. Jason noted that staff commented that the "WOC" designation was a helpful one. Jason also noted that some sections (Wetlands, Easements), have been understaffed for much longer periods of time. Jason added that by not addressing some of these vacancy issues, we are not meeting the mark/goals of our organization. Dave asked clarifying questions related to staff comments on the Wetlands and Easement sections not being fully staffed for long periods. Steve provided additional context for the Wetland section related to workload from 404

assumption and wetland training programs are diverting staff time from LGU-related responsibilities. Steve also acknowledged workload impacts to BWSR's leadership team as well. Melissa and Tim Hohn provided additional context regarding the Easements section.

Suzanne Rhees presented the staff summary on official overtime or comp time banks, and noted that staff identified that overtime/comp banks have been used, but that most staff were unable/unaware these options existed. It was noted that there have been instances where requests have been denied or staff were approved but could not utilize or hours provided were not sufficient to complete the work.

Suzanne presented on the documentation of actual time worked and noted wide variability in how time worked is tracked and reported. Overall, staff reported feeling appreciative of the flexibility allowed in this area. Easements staff noted extensively tracking time through Toggl, and that tracking methods varied across all sections. Methods differed between and within sections, and staff are unclear on the organizational standards to follow.

Suzanne presented a summary on exempt staff balancing time. Staff again noted appreciation for flexibility in managing schedules and most staff noted the ability to flex time within and balance time outside of the pay period. There were instances where the ability to balance time outside of the pay period was denied. Balanced time ratio generally was noted as 1:1, however some staff noted less. Expectations for balancing time and standards for tracking varied across and within sections. Some staff have noted imposing clearer work-life balance and some staff noted limited ability to balance due to workload and have lost time as a result.

Steve provided an overview for two staff (Alyssa Core & Ben Meyers) within the Wetlands section who volunteered to share their workload experiences with the committee, but were unable to attend this meeting. Steve provided an overview that staff in the Wetlands section have seen a fair amount of trickle down in terms of workload and adverse impacts with pivoting to telework. Steve noted an increase in wetland banking workload, especially since Tim Smith's departure. Review of applications has fallen directly on Wetlands staff, and the workload has been difficult. Alyssa and Ben identified that workload was very much an issue (banking, MN Wetland Cert. Program, TEP meetings, and general workload) and that LGU relationships have suffered as a result. Wetland staff want to support the LGUs, but feel like they cannot. Staff have taken on extra work to help out, but know that they are also not delivering their best work.

Gwen continued the presentation discussing staff identified solutions by section. Staff were asked to identify ideas they might have. Many comments focused on hiring, review of organizational capacity to accommodate and develop processes for managing new programs. Gwen noted that some section specific solutions appeared and that these ideas could be shared with the section managers. Themes popped up across all sections (cross training, hiring strategies).

Melissa finished the summary with a presentation of potential overarching agency workload solutions and noted a theme of three C's – collaboration, communication, consistency. Melissa noted the committee is working on drafting a form that employees and supervisors could use as a tool to document expectations when providing coverage for other positions. That draft form was not ready for review at this meeting. The committee intends to distribute once a more completed draft is ready.

Suzanne shared staff concerns that as new programs come along, additional work will be shifted to existing staff, rather than hiring new staff. Staff are concerned over adding core duties, without taking away existing responsibilities.

Steve noted that within wetlands, they are always aiming for the stars but staff are concerned about taking on new programs and are worried about burn-out. It's not just a field-staff issue, and that there are workload issues all the way to the Executive team level. There is concern for everyone within the agency.

Melissa asked Executive team staff how to start the conversation and how can this committee help the executive team address these serious issues.

Angie Becker-Kudelka thanked the committee for the strong efforts and research and noted that BWSR's best asset is its staff, and they want to find solutions. Angie stated that this information will go back to the Exec team to process. Angie noted that BERT contains BWSR's overtime policy, which limits contract options available for "special projects" – definition varies based on collective bargaining until. Angie noted the success of engineering staff to add a contract addendum related to overtime issues being encountered. Angie identified that there may be solutions which are more systemic in nature, and some which could be dealt with through individual supervisors.

Melissa asked how the committee could move forward together toward some possible solutions.

Dave stated that the Exec team would need to talk to section managers to make sure we are addressing these issues in a way that provides for addressing these concerns, as time goes on. Dave noted that each circumstance may vary, but solutions may be varied.

Melissa noted this as a discussion topic for the next committee meeting agenda and asked if there was an idea the group could begin discussion on at this meeting.

Angie stated that the Exec team would need time to process and review before the next committee meeting and thanked the committee for the thoughtful presentation.

Melissa asked if others had any further comment.

Steve added that the committee cares about the agency and staff strive to be the best. There were no other comments.

#### COVID Admin Leave

Melissa shared that administration leave for COVID isolation was brought up by other agency meet and confer teams. Since BWSR staff have not heard anything recent regarding, the committee requested that the most current policy be shared with staff.

Adam Browning shared that the admin leave is at the discretion of the appointing authority. Availability applies to staff who work on-site, are fully vaccinated, test positive, don't have a sick leave balance, and need to isolate. Have not yet seen DNR staff utilize as there are typically other leave balances available.

Melissa asked if there was a document that identified criteria that could be shared with staff. Adam was not immediately aware. Pete Marincel noted there was a memo dated 9/21/21 which outlined the provisions and would share that with the committee.

#### Bilingual Stipend (Article 24, Section 9)

Melissa briefly described that the most recent MAPE contract included language regarding a bilingual stipend. This program focused on equity and retention was brought forward by MMB. Employees who use multi-lingual skills for their job could get a small pay differential. The committee recognized this may have limited application within BWSR but wanted to start the discussion of how the pilot could potentially work for BWSR staff that are multilingual.

Angie noted that BWSR is not opposed but they are still in the early stages of understanding how this might apply and are anticipating additional guidance from MMB.

#### Next Steps

Melissa asked for clarification on the bi-monthly meeting schedule. Angie thought the next committee meeting was scheduled for April. Angie would confirm and get back to meet and confer committee.

*Melissa ended the committee meeting.*