

# BWSR Meet & Confer Meeting Notes

July 24, 2023 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Virtual (Teams) Meeting

*BWSR Meet and Confer (MC) Committee Chair Melissa King began the meeting at 1:00 pm.*

## Introductions & Agenda

Melissa King started the meeting and welcomed everyone. No changes were made to the agenda.

## Staffing Strategy Update

Melissa asked for an update regarding agency's efforts to assess/review staffing capacities. This was mentioned at a Regional Operations staff meeting.

Justin Hanson, for regional operations he didn't want to propose too many changes at first. It is now clear to Regional Operations that new programs will require new staffing and that we are thinking more strategically now that session is over. Acknowledged difficulties projecting needs further than 3 years.

It was noted that Resource Conservation trying to address immediate needs. Discussion on staff turnover, and individual unique reasons for departing BWSR. BWSR is conducting exit interview and paying attention what staff are sharing. All have been appreciated of time and experience at BWSR, and each left to pursue unique goals. Dave Weirens shared staffing needs are always discussed with program managers. Easements is almost fully staffed. Rita is working on new positions. Tom is adding capacity. Wetlands has significant growth potential -- Exec Team just approved a new Wetland Specialist position. Andrea Fish share BWSR is also evaluating areas where work might expand or contract, not just the staffing.

Melissa shared this was a previous committee topic shortly after the committee was formed. Exec Team at that time identified that staffing information would be shared at a time it was able to be shared. The MAPE M&C committee members are still hearing from staff about workload concerns; particularly in the Easements and Wetlands Sections.

Suzanne Rhees noted it would help to know where things are in the "pipeline". Understand that no guarantees that positions will end up as originally planned. Andrea shared that timeline is unpredictable until a position is posted, but will think about this as we don't to appear to mislead people.

Annie Felix-Gerth noted some sort of graphic would be appreciated; just to know that a position is being proposed in a specific section, without knowing more than that. For example, use the org chart, put a symbol next to a vacant position that shows its status. People feel distressed when they see a position being vacant for long periods.

Melissa noted that some info gets shared through word of mouth, monthly staff calls, etc., but long-range planning is unclear. Steve Hofstad acknowledged that information is confidential and expressed appreciation for any information shared. The group discussed experiences with inconsistencies about sharing position information prior to posting.

## Contract Pilot Programs, Appointing Authority Discretion

Melissa shared a spreadsheet which outlined current contract and tentative agreement pilot programs and contract items (e.g. professional development, memberships, etc.) of agency discretion and changes outlined.

BWSR MAPE staff have inquired if or what programs/efforts BWSR intends to participate in or make available to staff. Many staff have asked for training. It was noted the best path forward, is to go through the employee's supervisor. Some staff have memberships or certification paid for.

Patty Sweep noted she hopes to get direction from MMB but likes idea of tuition reimbursement. Melissa asked how to move these ideas forward and what information would be needed/helpful in agency decision-making. Andrea stated it would help to have a concrete ask to get a response from MMB. Sometimes if there are multiple options, then the pilot option doesn't necessarily fit.

Melissa asked for clarification on the agency's general budgeting timeline and how would a request need to fit on that timeline. Patty and Andrea were not aware. Dave shared that there is a specific staff training budget. Andrea indicated budgeting for FY26-27 starts this fall. It was noted that student loan reimbursement was not a small amount and further discussion on what information is needed with BWSR decision making on participation in the initiatives.

Annie indicated that information needs to be shared with staff so they are aware of options available. No information is currently on BERT. The group discussed going to membership and to identify which topics are of the greatest interest. These are all good incentives to work at BWSR, if implemented. Matt Fischer agreed.

Suzanne asked about about engineers and wetland specialists with employee certifications and memberships. Dave confirmed BWSR covers those expenses where professional certification is a condition of employment and identified that BWSR would need to evaluate other requests, since there are so many possibilities.

MMB must approve if an agency decides to carry forward some pilot programs. MPCA is doing phased retirement outside of supplemental agreements. The committee asked what other information would be needed if there were to be a specific ask?

Patty expressed reviewing the criteria other agencies have used and indicated that we are waiting for guidance from MMB. Discussing on timing that guidance would be released. Noted that many of these efforts are carry-overs from the current and previous contracts.

Patty stated she will look into the HR Toolbox. Group speculated as to why BWSR may not opted to previously offer (unclear) and discussed building additional resiliency and incentives to weather staffing changes. Andrea stated that information of how other agencies have initiated pilot programs would be helpful.

Meeting time expired and the meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.