



**U.S. Department of Agriculture**  
**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and**  
**Accessibility Strategic Plan**  
Fiscal Year 2022 - 2026

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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

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# Message from Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack and Deputy Secretary Jewel Bronaugh

It is an honor to introduce the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2022 – 2026.

USDA is often referred to as the “People’s Department,” a name given by President Abraham Lincoln who established the Department to serve the needs of all people. As such, we strive to ensure sustainable agriculture, feed Americans, and conserve our natural resources – work that touches the lives and livelihoods of people in every county of the United States and around the world. Yet, in spite of this honorable title, USDA has not always met the needs of all people. USDA has a challenging history of racial discrimination and exclusion – a history that has excluded and harmed many, including our own employees. Previous efforts have made incremental progress regarding USDA’s legacy of discrimination and increased accountability with civil rights; however, fall short in equitable service to Tribal Nations, communities of color, rural, and other underserved and underrepresented persons and to employees. There is still much to do to eliminate the systemic, pervasive challenges and thus elevate USDA’s commitment to serving all people. We have learned from the mistakes and omissions of the past and are committed to persevere until we get this right for our employees and the people we serve.

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*“The people at USDA have the passion to continuously improve how we successfully deliver our mission. I look forward to working with Dr. Bronaugh to ensure USDA lives up to its calling as the People’s Department, to be a department that works in new ways to ensure we serve all people equally and fairly.”*

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Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack

This DEIA Strategic Plan outlines USDA’s priorities, goals, and commitment to integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in all that we do. We seek to create and advance a diverse, inclusive culture that champions dignity and respect, and where employees feel welcomed and motivated to do their best.

The global pandemic has fundamentally changed the concept of work and has brought new challenges and opportunities that must be considered as we seek to become a model public service employer. While the impact of our efforts to bring employees back to the workplace and to reimagine the future of work is yet to be fully seen, early research points to the impact the pandemic has had on women, caretakers, and people from underserved



communities. We also learned about new and different ways to carry on the work, collaborate and meet our mission and we will continue to explore flexibilities and strategies to ensure an equitable and inclusive workplace. Our future of work strategies must ensure a strong DEIA commitment to address both the challenges and opportunities for all employees to be successful in a hybrid workplace.

Such a workforce can be best prepared to meet our uncompromising commitment of equitable service and mission delivery to all Americans. At the core of this DEIA Strategic Plan are six focus areas for the next five years:

- Build a culture that drives trust, belonging, transparency, accountability, and employee empathy.
- Achieve a workforce representative of Americans that inspires development of innovative ideas and best practices.
- Foster a workplace environment that is physically, mentally, and emotionally safe.
- Establish leadership and governance structures to support long-term and sustainable DEIA efforts.
- Promote empowerment, responsibility, and accountability for DEIA through developing the workforce.
- Demonstrate a commitment to a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible USDA through accountability, data collection, analysis, and effective policymaking.

As USDA makes advancements in these areas, we will be positioned for significant, long-term, sustainable progress toward a highly motivated and thriving workforce. We will nurture a culture that consistently, intentionally, and systematically places equity at the center of program and policy design, implementation, and evaluation. USDA is committed to not only embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, but to integrating and demonstrating this commitment in all we do. Our success will be based on how well we learn and adapt during this journey. This is a responsibility of great magnitude, but it is a worthy and honorable responsibility that USDA commits to uphold.

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*“It is important to listen to the people who have experienced discrimination firsthand. We want to learn from their experiences and work together to make our programs inclusive and accessible for everyone.”*

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Deputy Secretary Jewel Bronaugh

When we draw upon the creativity, and wisdom, of a workforce that reflects the population we serve, we are better able to understand and meet the needs of our customers – the

American people. USDA is committed to not only hiring, developing, and advancing a workforce that truly reflects America's rich and diverse characteristics, but also to creating a workplace environment that is inclusive so that everyone can rise to their highest potential and flourish in supporting our mission. The United States of America was founded on the ideal that "out of many, we are one" and that the whole is greater than the sum of its separate parts. This is inclusion; this is the catalyst for the specific goals and outcomes that are embedded within this strategic plan. The journey to an inclusive, empowering environment will come with learning, discovery, and with hard truths. We invite and encourage all of USDA to work together with compassion and commitment as we persevere in our efforts. While the systemic nature of DEIA challenges demand action, our individual stance and shared values are equally important if we are to ensure that all employees are able to make their best and most meaningful contributions.

To this end, we look forward to working with Acting Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO), Leslie Weldon, and leaders across USDA, to build synergy across USDA and institutionalize this commitment for the long term. Five years from now, we will see the indisputable benefits of DEIA in our workforce and in our service to the public. This is the necessary and wise thing to do.

# Message from Acting Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Leslie Weldon

It is exciting and humbling to serve as USDA's Acting CDIO. As an employee, I appreciate USDA's commitment to a diverse, inclusive, equitable and high-performing workforce and look forward to working with you to make USDA the Best Place to Work. The completion of the USDA FY2022-2026 DEIA Strategic Plan marks a significant moment of progress to achieve this goal. This first-ever DEIA strategic plan represents the many and diverse voices of our employees. This plan was informed by the concerns and aspirations expressed by a wide range of employees who participated in DEIA workgroup sessions and listening sessions. It reflects many of the findings and recommendations of the DEIA Agency Self-Assessments, focus groups, personal interviews, and of multiple reviewers. We listened, and we heard you. Consider the plan as a "living" document. While it defines clear goals and outcomes, we need to be flexible and adapt as we learn the best approaches to be successful in guaranteeing a USDA that is diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible.

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*"It is easy to jump to numbers and metrics, but DEIA is so much more than numbers and metrics. It is about people growing a positive and belonging work culture, adopting new behaviors, changing processes, and safeguarding fairness for all."*

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Acting CDIO Leslie Weldon

The DEIA Strategic Plan lays a foundation for delivering outcomes that will improve USDA's performance. It was also developed to build on the Department's upcoming Strategic Plan that partly focuses on making USDA the Best Place to Work. The noted outcomes below will guide our approach to the work that needs to be done:

- Anchor responsibilities for achieving DEIA outcomes to formal USDA leaders and to a clear sustainable governance structure.
- Foster a culture of inclusion, engagement, learning, and transparency.
- Align DEIA Strategy with programmatic equity efforts such as USDA Equity Action Plan, Civil Rights, Tribal Sovereignty commitments, and implementation of new authorities such as the Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Law.
- Highlight and integrate current USDA actions and practices that contribute to DEIA outcomes.
- Embed and integrate DEIA accountability practices, data, information, and performance measures into the USDA Strategic Plan, Mission Area operational plans, administrative operational plans, budget planning and learning agendas.

- Integrate customer experiences and stakeholder recommendations such as those that may come from the Equity Commission to advance equity at USDA and its programs.

USDA is committed to developing solid strategies grounded in our mission and values. We recognize that making enduring change must begin quickly and will take time. We will need consistent, focused attention. Our call to action is to listen, seek diverse perspectives, and pursue the most effective changes. I look forward to working with all of you.



## USDA DEIA Strategic Plan Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture is the Nation's leader on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related programs based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management. USDA, comprised of 29 agencies and offices with over 100,000 employees, serves the American people at 4,500 locations across the country and abroad. To ensure successful execution of our mission, the Department must create and nurture a workplace culture that consistently places equity at the center of our workforce. We depend on employees who can deliver their best work within a USDA that represents the diversity of our citizens and practices inclusion and accessibility so all employees can thrive in their contributions to mission delivery.

This DEIA Strategic Plan will serve as our roadmap in this endeavor and is written in accordance with "The Executive Order to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce (EO 14035)." In compliance with this Executive Order, USDA will submit progress reports annually to the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, the Director of Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Deputy Director for Management of Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The plan correlates and complements the USDA Equity Action Plan (EO 13985) and supports the related components of the USDA's Tribal Sovereignty Action Plan, Gender Equity and Equality and other equity related executive orders. USDA is committed to Department mission success and acknowledges that this success can only be achieved through the rich experiences of a diverse, talented workforce. For such a workforce to flourish, it is necessary that USDA create a dynamic, inclusive environment in which employees are empowered and welcomed to use their unique knowledge and expertise to rise to their fullest potential. It is also necessary that USDA demonstrates an unwavering commitment to civil rights. This commitment will be evident as USDA builds civil rights offices equipped with the skills, capacity, tools, and processes that are essential to enforce and uphold civil rights effectively and efficiently. The goals, objectives, and strategies identified within this DEIA Strategic Plan are intentionally designed to create an environment in which DEIA and civil rights are integrated into the fabric of how USDA operates. Additionally, USDA has been active in changing structures and activities aligned with these goals.

On February 28, 2022, the CDIO for USDA was named marking a key step in ensuring the successful and sustainable implementation of this DEIA Strategic Plan and all associated efforts. The CDIO will continue with the collaborative approach taken in the development of this plan to build upon actions already underway to drive the overall success and sustainability of this strategy. This requires working across USDA to centralize and amplify this work to ensure all employees understand the intent for DEIA. As the program of work is developed to implement this strategy, agencies and offices will be given guidance for developing plans that meet the objectives of this DEIA strategy and that address the specific needs of their workplaces, employees, and mission. A standard set of performance

measures will unite these agency level plans to allow outcomes for all of USDA to be tracked.

This DEIA Strategic Plan identifies specific goals and strategic objectives to advance DEIA in the Department's workforce. It builds upon the DEIA initiatives and work that are already taking place at USDA as evidenced by the Mission Areas and Staff Offices and overall Departmentwide DEIA Self-Assessments and efforts outlined in the upcoming USDA Strategic Plan 2022-2026, under the strategic goal focused on making USDA the Best Place to Work. Leaders from USDA Departmental Administration, Mission Areas, and Staff Offices, listed below, contributed expertise and insights to this plan. A list of individuals who collectively contributed to the support and development of this plan may be found in [Appendix C](#).

- Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration
- Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
- Office of Budget and Program Analysis
- Office of Communications
- Office of the General Counsel
- Office of Human Resources Management
- Office of the Secretary

USDA is committed to embracing and integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within the fabric of all that we do. It is through this commitment that USDA can live up to its name as "The People's Department."

## DEIA Strategic Plan Approach and Purpose

This DEIA Strategic Plan encourages all members of the USDA workforce to take ownership for creating a welcoming, safe, inclusive, and supportive climate. To that end, everyone within USDA must operate from a common, shared understanding of DEIA. Within this DEIA Strategic Plan and in the context of the Federal workforce, the definition for each component of DEIA is identified below, as is the definition of underserved communities.

- **Diversity<sup>1</sup>:** The practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of the American people, including underserved communities.
- **Equity:** The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.
- **Inclusion:** The recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Underserved Communities provided by EO 14035.

- **Accessibility:** The design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. Accessibility includes the provision of accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to employment and participation in activities for people with disabilities, the reduction or elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities, a commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities can independently access every outward-facing and internal activity or electronic space, and the pursuit of best practices such as universal design.
- **Underserved Communities:** Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systemically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. In the context of the Federal workforce, this term includes individuals who belong to communities of color, such as Black and African American, Hispanic, and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native, and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and North African persons. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (LGBTQI+) persons); persons who face discrimination based on pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions; bring parents; and being caregivers. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration; persons who live in rural areas; veterans and military spouses; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination, or inequality. Individuals may belong to more than one underserved community and face intersecting barriers.

## How this Plan is Structured

This DEIA Strategic Plan outlines the approach USDA will take from FY 2022-2026, with specific focus on what must be done to achieve the desired outcomes and goals identified. The goals represent strategic priorities that USDA will address over the course of the next five years. Each goal is supported by a brief description of the intended outcomes as well as supporting strategic objectives for guiding the actions necessary to achieve those intended outcomes. Within this DEIA Strategic Plan, the term *underrepresented* is alongside *underserved*. This is an intentional effort to proactively ensure no member of an underserved or underrepresented community is denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of the USDA workforce. This language is also intended to align with efforts to advance USDA along the [OPM DEIA Maturity Model](#), specifically in observance of the *Level 2 maturity signal Diversity Framework* requirements that indicate USDA will apply an inclusive definition of underserved communities rather than the definition of diversity as it

is confined to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) categories. This document identifies where a particular objective is aligned to a specific maturity signal. For example, *Maturity Level 2 Activity: Pay and Compensation* indicates that a particular implementation strategy, when implemented, will support USDA in progressing from Level 1 toward Level 2 on the DEIA Maturity Model.

## **How this Plan Will be Used**

This DEIA Strategic Plan is internally focused on the USDA organization and employee experiences. It complements and integrates with USDA's Strategic Plan Goal #6, "Making USDA the Best Place to Work," and its Equity Action Plan which focuses on equitable mission delivery to the Department's customers. Together, these plans will guide USDA's journey to dismantle the barriers that historically underserved and underrepresented communities and groups, internal and external to USDA, have faced. The plans will institutionalize enduring actions that ensure equitable experiences for all employees and equitable services to all people. They provide a comprehensive approach to analyzing USDA programs, policies, systems, structures, and practices that cause barriers to inclusion or access, systemic discrimination, or perpetuate racial, economic, health and social disparities. They will inform recommendations for action, guide decision, and track learning and monitor progress. USDA's values of honesty, customer service, integrity, and respect show up in the day-to-day operations of the organization and will fortify and bolster a solid foundation for our commitment to advancing DEIA as our true measure of public service.

This DEIA Strategic Plan specifically focuses on internal DEIA goals and objectives. It provides direction and focus. It does not, however, include detailed strategies, tactics, and actions. USDA will develop this level of detail through a DEIA Roadmap and Program of Workplans at the beginning of each fiscal year. The DEIA Roadmap and annual Program of Workplans will establish an adaptive model for change to guide efforts that will influence a positive transformation of our people, culture, and systems. The Department will use the DEIA Roadmap and Program of Workplans to inform annual budget requests, quarterly strategic reviews, performance plans and learning agendas. Whereas this DEIA Strategic Plan is a multi-year plan spanning five consecutive fiscal years, the DEIA Roadmap and Program of Workplans will focus on shorter periods of time and will be informed by progress, challenges, insights, and lessons learned from prior year activities.

# Section 1: USDA DEIA Mission, DEIA Vision, USDA Core Values

Through an iterative process led by USDA representatives from each of the 29 Mission Areas and Staff Offices, stakeholders defined the USDA DEIA Mission and DEIA Vision and how they intersected and integrated with the defined USDA Core Values.

## DEIA Mission

Intentionally build and advance a culture of belonging that empowers a diverse mix of people across USDA to fulfill the USDA mission.

## DEIA Vision

To become a model employer and service provider that nurtures and sustains a workplace where DEIA is foundational and guides informed decision-making in all programs and career opportunities.

## USDA Core Values

Core values serve as guiding principles, defining appropriate behaviors, expectations for all employees, and directing decision making throughout all levels of the organization. These USDA core values are foundational to the success of the Department and this DEIA Strategic Plan, given they lay a solid foundation for the culture of USDA and how we will honor our DEIA goals and associated actions. As USDA moves forward with this DEIA Strategic Plan, it is incumbent upon every member of the USDA community to uphold the USDA core values.

- **Respect and Dignity:** We treat all people with courtesy and respect, and we value the inherent dignity of every individual.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** We seek to end discrimination in all forms, wherever it exists, and expand services and opportunities to underserved people and communities across America, starting with our workforce.
- **Trust and Integrity:** We act in a manner that is deserving of the public's trust and with the utmost integrity in everything we do as public servants.
- **Service and Results:** We listen to our internal and external customers and actively incorporate their ideas on how to best reach our diverse customers and deliver service that significantly and positively impacts the lives of all Americans and customers around the globe.
- **Science Leadership:** We base our decisions and policy on science and data that are reliable, timely, relevant, and free from political interference.



## **Section 2: USDA Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer**

As part of Executive Order 14035, USDA has established a CDIO position. The CDIO will report to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture as a distinctly separate role from an equal employment opportunity officer with sufficient seniority and influence to coordinate efforts to promote and elevate DEIA across USDA. The CDIO will lead the execution of this DEIA Strategic Plan by communicating, collaborating, and engaging with USDA leadership and all Mission Areas to ensure Departmentwide, Mission Area and Staff Office DEIA efforts are reflected, integrated, and aligned to support DEIA goals, objectives, and strategies. The CDIO is a key voice and influential leader in helping to ensure USDA is the best place to work where all USDA employees are expected to: (1) advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, interdependent with USDA Human Capital Management and Civil Rights objectives; (2) create a culture that respects, welcomes, and supports all employees; and (3) deliver excellent public service for all USDA mission outcomes.

## Section 3: USDA DEIA Goals FY 2022-2026

To fulfill the opportunities and meet the challenges before us, USDA will advance the below goals and strategic priorities. This will ensure that the mission to intentionally advance a culture of belonging that empowers a diverse mix of people across USDA comes to fruition.



**Culture:** Build a culture that drives trust, belonging, transparency, accountability, and employee empathy.



**Workforce:** Achieve a workforce representative of Americans that inspires development of innovative ideas and best practices.



**Environment:** Foster a workplace environment that is physically, mentally, and emotionally safe.



**Governance:** Establish leadership and governance structures to support long-term and sustainable DEIA efforts.



**Accountability:** Promote empowerment, responsibility, and accountability for DEIA through developing the workforce.



**Commitment:** Demonstrate a commitment to a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible USDA through accountability, data collection, analysis, and effective policymaking.

The Governmentwide Strategic Plan to Advance DEIA includes a maturity model to assess the effectiveness of DEIA within a workforce. Within the Governmentwide Strategic Plan's signals of maturity, the following considerations apply:

- **DEIA Approach:** How well DEIA is integrated into the Department's mission, vision, values, and practices to mitigate barriers, if any.
- **Diversity Framework:** How well the Department understands what DEIA is and embraces it.
- **Organizational Structure:** How well the Department has resourced DEIA-related efforts and integrated it across the Department.
- **DEIA Integration:** How well DEIA is integrated into the Department's strategic planning, performance management, and learning agendas.

## Governmentwide DEIA Executive Order 14035 Priorities

While the origins of the DEIA Strategic Plan are rooted in EO priorities of the Biden-Harris administration, the strategic priorities and goals are crafted with the explicit intention of deeply integrating DEIA best practices, outcomes, and performance measures permanently into how USDA delivers its mission. The EO priorities act as the foundational roots of this DEIA Strategic Plan. However, USDA intends to nurture the goals and objectives within this plan, so they serve as branches with an impact and influence that are far-reaching.

The EO 14035 priorities are identified in [Appendix A](#). In [Appendix B](#) a table provides a crosswalk between the goals identified within this DEIA Strategic Plan and each EO priority. This crosswalk illustrates that the group of goals in this DEIA Strategic Plan address and thus advance each EO Priority.



## **Goal One: Build a culture that drives trust, belonging, transparency, accountability, and employee empathy.**

A culture of transparency, accountability, and empathy is essential to building a workforce that engenders DEIA and a positive work culture. Such a culture is formed by collective efforts to advance equity for all employees with special attention to underserved and underrepresented communities.

### **Objective 1.1**

Foster a culture that is defined by a shared understanding of what DEIA is, why it is important, how it shows up, and how each individual contributes and is held accountable to its success and advancement.

### **Objective 1.2**

Build an equity-focused framework that provides access to purposeful and unbiased employee development and growth opportunities for USDA's current and future workforce.



## **Goal Two: Achieve a workforce representative of Americans that inspires development of innovative ideas and best practices.**

USDA must focus on recruiting, hiring, and sustaining a diverse workforce aligned to DEIA core values and merit promotion principles. A diverse and representative workforce that draws from a range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives results in a team that inspires innovative ideas and best practices. Such an environment, supported by paid internships, deeper broader partnerships, and targeted recruitment efforts, will attract a motivated, capable pool of recruits. These recruits will see themselves in the workforce and leadership at all levels, specifically managers, supervisors, and the SES cadre.

### **Objective 2.1**

Promote and practice innovative and bold outreach and awareness strategies that brand USDA as an employer of choice for individuals of all backgrounds, experiences, and abilities.

### **Objective 2.2**

Enhance relationships with current partners and develop new, sustainable partnerships to build an increasingly diverse pipeline from underserved and underrepresented communities.

### **Objective 2.3**

Eliminate barriers and bias in the recruitment, hiring, and onboarding of underrepresented candidates, and use data to develop strategies designed to address the needs of specific populations.





### **Goal Three: Foster a workplace environment that is physically, mentally, and emotionally safe.**

Creating and maintaining an inclusive workplace requires emotional, mental, social, and physical safety. Such a workplace leads to an environment where employees thrive, develop their potential, and contribute to the success of their workplace. This requires a comprehensive reviews and updates of agency policies and processes for responding to harassment and supporting federal employees who have experienced workplace harassment, violence, and retaliation. This also requires actively monitoring employee experiences through surveys, assessing trends in responsiveness complaints.

#### **Objective 3.1**

Embed standardized anti-harassment and safety policy and response system protocols and standards at every level and ensure leadership engagement in harassment prevention and response efforts.

#### **Objective 3.2**

Ensure facilities and emergency response mechanisms promote personnel safety across USDA operations.

#### **Objective 3.3**

Create a USDA-wide victim-centered and trauma-informed anti-harassment program.



## **Goal Four: Establish leadership and governance structures to support long-term and sustainable DEIA efforts.**

The CDIO will lead the execution of this DEIA Strategic Plan by communicating, collaborating, and engaging with USDA leadership and all Mission Areas. This will help ensure Departmentwide and Mission Area DEIA efforts are reflected, integrated, and aligned to support goals and objectives. Senior officials play an essential role in establishing clear leadership intent and strategic priorities as well as closing opportunity gaps. The USDA DEIA governance structure, led by the CDIO, will ensure USDA is a Best Place to Work where employees are expected to: (1) advance DEIA, interdependent with USDA Human Capital Management and Civil Rights objectives; (2) create a culture that respects, welcomes, and supports all employees; and (3) deliver excellent public service for all USDA mission outcomes.

### **Objective 4.1**

Establish formal shared leadership structure, systems, policies, metrics, and support functions, for the CDIO with sufficient authority and resources to lead DEIA efforts.

### **Objective 4.2**

Partner across the Department for the CDIO to use people-centric best practices to transform USDA by developing, championing, implementing, and managing USDA's DEIA strategy and portfolio.



## **Goal Five: Promote empowerment, responsibility, and accountability for DEIA through developing the workforce.**

Sustainable integration of DEIA values and behaviors requires USDA to equip its leadership and workforce with the skills, competencies, and behaviors to understand how to “live” best practices, create an environment of inclusivity and equity, and deliver results. Furthermore, integrating and creating accountability for upholding these behaviors and values is a cornerstone to the long-term success and degree to which diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are embedded in the fabric of USDA. This goal and its intended outcomes are guided by the priorities of continuous learning, development, and advancement.

### **Objective 5.1**

Prioritize diversifying the workforce through targeted education, training, development, outreach, and advancement opportunities. This objective and its activities align with *Maturity Signal, Level 2: Data-driven, Professional Development, Inclusive Workplace Culture*

### **Objective 5.2**

Promote consistency and accountability in learning and development at all levels. This objective and its activities align with *Maturity Signal, Level 2: Data-driven, Professional Development, Inclusive Workplace Culture.*

### **Objective 5.3**

Integrate DEIA in expectations, competencies, performance requirements, and behaviors that result in career advancement and progression. This objective and its activities align with *Maturity Signal, Level 2: Data-driven, Professional Development, Inclusive Workplace Culture.*



## **Goal Six: Demonstrate a commitment to a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible USDA through accountability, data collection, analysis, and effective policymaking.**

To ensure success in fostering equity in career advancement, professional development, pay, performance evaluation, and recognition, it is essential to leverage policy, processes, data, and analysis. Data helps create accountability, identify barriers to equitable access and opportunities, and systemic discrimination, conscious or unconscious, in the USDA policies, processes, and guidelines. This essential keystone requires prioritizing data collection, considering pay equity factors, and completing policy reviews.

### **Objective 6.1**

Create a plan for reviewing USDA policies and procedures (e.g., assessment tests, vacancy announcements, eligibility criteria, suitability requirements, etc.) to integrate civil rights and equity in the design of policies, programs, and in decision making. This objective and its activities align with *Maturity Signal, Level 2: Strategy*.

### **Objective 6.2**

Support fairness and equity through the development and consistent application of equity principles and practices. This objective and its activities align with *Maturity Signal, Level 2: Pay and Compensation Strategy*.

### **Objective 6.3**

Develop a data infrastructure that is consistent and transparent that allows for standardized quantitative and qualitative data collection, management, reporting and governance; to include the measurement, tracking, and monitoring of progress for DEIA initiatives. This objective and its activities align with *Maturity Signal, Level 2: Data-driven*.

## Section 4: Framework to Promote Safe and Inclusive Workplaces and Address Workplace Harassment

Section six of EO 14035 highlights safe and harassment-free environments as necessary to healthy and respectful workplaces. This section, in conjunction with goal three above, outlines how USDA defines and addresses safety and anti-harassment within the Department. Section six states, “maintaining a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace requires commitment and prioritization from senior leadership, as well as access to relevant tools, policies, and resources to support the workforce. Workplace safety is multi-dimensional and includes all efforts to minimize risks to the *physical, mental, and emotional* well-being of the federal workforce, including providing support for Federal employees who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.”

USDA believes in the value and benefits of a physical, emotionally, and mentally safe work environment and is committed to building such an environment for the whole USDA workforce.

- At the USDA, *physical safety* encompasses personnel, infrastructure, and facilities where effective and efficient security standards and emergency response procedures are followed with the goal of creating the most accessible, secure facilities and safest workplaces within the Federal Government. Employees who feel safe can better ensure programs and services are delivered without interruption.
- At the USDA, *emotional safety* is defined as employees feeling they can flourish without fear of retribution for mistakes, setbacks or differing opinions with the goal of enhancing morale, creativity, productivity, and team effectiveness. Emotional safety is deeply tied to a feeling of belonging, feeling safe to learn, contribute, and challenge “the way we always do it.”
- At the USDA, *mental safety* in the workplace is ensuring employees feel safe enough to express their needs and when they need help with the goal of every employee feeling confident and comfortable enough to discuss any mental health issues with their employer, especially if they are seeking help.

Section 6 also calls upon agencies to “adopt a comprehensive framework to prevent and address workplace harassment including updating policies and practices; promoting multiple mechanisms for reporting misconduct, including anonymous reporting; promoting respectful workplaces and bystander intervention; improving training and monitoring; and creating a culture that does not tolerate workplace harassment, discrimination, or retaliation.”

The USDA is committed to creating workplaces free of all forms of harassment. There is an abundance of work USDA has completed to date, and USDA knows there is more that needs



addressed to reach this goal. USDA has conducted a comprehensive review and is in the process of updating Department policies and processes on harassment and supporting Federal employees who have experienced misconduct, harassment, domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. The draft USDA anti-harassment policy establishes a departmentwide program that is focused on a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach to addressing harassment.

Within USDA, some Mission Areas have developed policies and procedures for addressing harassment. While approved by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as being legally compliant, they are not necessarily aligned with DEIA goals and objectives. USDA assembled a cross-Department team to begin development of a USDA-wide anti-harassment regulation establishing USDA's program. The draft regulation is in official clearance. Additionally, individual Mission Areas and staff offices have conducted climate assessments, but these have yet to be developed or coordinated at a national level.

### **Determining Safety and Anti-Harassment Program Needs and Next Steps**

USDA has established a cross-department team to plan and implement the new anti-harassment policy. This team will determine:

- Resources needed to effectively implement prevention strategies
- Effective responses to incidents of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation that are needed outside of the existing civil rights accountability and EEO led process
- The level and scope of support needed for Federal employees who have experienced workplace discrimination, harassment, and retaliation
- How to deliver effective support to the workforce
- How to ensure this new process is truly victim centered and trauma informed and achieves the outcome of safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace

## Section 5: USDA DEIA Maturity Model

As per EO 14035, agencies are asked to develop goals, objectives, and strategies that advance DEIA within their agency. One means by which to measure advancement and assess the effectiveness of DEIA initiatives within USDA's workforce policies and culture is through a DEIA-related maturity model. A DEIA maturity model is an industry best practice for improving organizational outcomes as it enables agencies to identify their DEIA maturity along a continuum, from building foundational capacity for DEIA work, level 1, to leading and sustaining practices, level 3.

Based on the example shown below, USDA's internal review and OPM's assessment of USDA's DEIA department-level self-assessment, USDA is assessed at a level one for all Signals of Maturity as of January 2022. Level 1 is considered USDA's baseline.

Signals of greater maturity include building DEIA organizational structure and governance that improves accountability, transparency, consistency, and equity within the workforce. Other signals of maturity include, but are not limited to, using data and DEIA principles and values to drive decisions around programming, recruiting and hiring, strategic planning, partnerships, goal setting, writing policies, and training.

The goal for all agencies, including USDA, is to seek to continually improve along the continuum and share best practices within a culture of continuous improvement.

OPM recommends the model below as an example from which USDA can adapt to meet its unique structure and needs. The levels of the example maturity model are summarized below.

- **Building Foundational Capacity, Level 1:** On the first level of the maturity scale, an agency's focus is on complying with statutory and regulatory requirements related to DEIA. The agency's DEIA work is ongoing but may be siloed or decentralized.
- **Advancing Outcomes, Level 2:** On the second level of the maturity scale, the agency is adopting DEIA priorities and policies throughout the enterprise and showing improved results beyond statutory and regulatory requirements. DEIA is a critical component of the agency's mission and work but may not be fully embedded into the strategic plan and vision.
- **Leading and Sustaining, Level 3:** On the third level of the maturity scale, the agency is demonstrating DEIA is an integral part of the overall organizational strategy by embedding DEIA in its vision, values, policies, and practices. The agency is executing its DEIA strategic plan, monitoring progress, and making appropriate adjustments. The agency may also be acknowledged, cited, and benchmarked by others for its DEIA accomplishments.

To measure advancement, sustainability, and effectiveness of DEIA initiatives within USDA workforce policies and culture, USDA will utilize a maturity model into its measurement, reporting and communicating practices. Under the guidance of the CDIO, USDA will

customize, publicize, and implement the DEIA Maturity Model by which USDA commits to measuring advancement and assess effectiveness of its initiatives. The objectives and implementation strategies in this DEIA Strategic Plan, when accomplished, will advance USDA through the maturity model. USDA will align to the sample model below from the “Government-wide Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility” in the Federal Workforce, Appendix II document from the OPM.

## DEIA Maturity Model Overview

This Maturity Model is an example tool for agencies to consider employing to assess the effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) within their workforce policies and culture. This DEIA Maturity Model supports agencies in effectively building an infrastructure for DEIA within their organization to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and equity within their workforce. This model can be adopted or adapted to meet an Agency/Component's unique structure and needs. The practices described here serve as examples within each level and are not exhaustive.

SIGNALS OF MATURITY	LEVEL 1 Foundational Capacity	LEVEL 2 Advancing Outcomes	LEVEL 3 Leading and Sustaining
<b>DEIA Approach</b>	Focused on complying with non-discrimination legislation and regulatory requirements.	DEIA initiatives yielding improved results and outcomes driven by dedicated resources, strategic planning, goal setting, and evaluation. Agency/Component practices promote the values of DEIA, but DEIA may not yet be integrated across Agency/Component mission and strategic planning.	DEIA is an integral part of overall Agency/Component mission, vision, values, strategy, policies, and practices. Systematic implementation of DEIA driven through goal setting, data-driven analysis, and continuous improvement. Agency/Component undertakes structural reforms of policies and practices to mitigate barriers, if any.
<b>Diversity Framework</b>	Definition of diversity confined to EEO categories.	Inclusive definition of underserved communities.	Connecting, interrelated approach embraces multiple identities.
<b>Organizational Structure</b>	DEIA work may be under-resourced within the organization and/or decentralized across the Agency/Component.	DEIA work integrated across EEO, HR, civil rights, and D&I program offices.	DEIA work fully resourced and led at highest levels of Agency/Component leadership with significant and sustained SES responsibility.
<b>DEIA Integration</b>	DEIA work may be siloed within the Agency/Component and/or disconnected from the mission and strategic planning.	DEIA goals reflected in Agency/Component strategic planning.	DEIA goals fully and strategically integrated with Agency/Component strategic planning, performance management, and learning agendas.

Table showing the DEIA Maturity Model and the specific signals associated with Levels 1, 2, and 3.

## Section 6: USDA DEIA Reporting Plan

USDA strives to be a model employer and a Best Place to Work, believing that when we draw upon the wisdom and experiences of a workforce that reflects the population we serve, USDA is better able to understand and meet the needs of our customers. We are committed to not only hiring a workforce that truly reflects America's rich and diverse makeup but to creating a workplace and environment that is inclusive so that diversity of experience, perspective, and more can truly flourish.

USDA is committed to embedding DEIA principles and practices into the Department at all levels and that commitment requires a continuous growth cycle, building toward leading and sustaining practices that create a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workforce. It also requires continuous and thorough measurement, analysis, and reporting.

For the duration of this DEIA Strategic Plan, USDA commits to:

- Creating annual, Department-level goals with annual and quarterly measures used to assess progress
- Building quarterly and annual reporting and evaluation processes for the Department and Mission Areas to track progress
- Reporting on Department progress and plans to address gaps
- Supporting Mission Areas to create, execute, track, and report quarterly and annual goals and associated measures
- Developing a department-specific DEIA Maturity Model to measure DEIA advancement
- Collaborating with other agency DEIA leads to develop evidence-based approaches to assess progress

## Closing

USDA leadership is committed to successfully carrying out the mission of the Department to draw upon the rich experiences of a diverse, talented workforce that reflects those that we serve, the American people. We will use the goals, objectives, and implementation strategies identified within this DEIA Strategic Plan to support the USDA workforce with a dynamic, inclusive environment where employees are empowered, feel welcome, and can use their unique knowledge and expertise to truly rise to their fullest potential.

# Appendix A: Governmentwide DEIA Executive Order Priorities

EO 14035 requires a governmentwide approach to cultivate DEIA across agencies. It charges all Federal agencies with taking steps to reinvigorate and advance DEIA policies and practices across all aspects of employment. Agencies will accomplish this through the governmentwide DEIA priorities:





- **Data Collection:** Improve the collection of voluntarily self-reported demographic data about the Federal workforce to take an evidence-based approach to reducing potential barriers in hiring, promotion, professional development, and retention practices.
- **Promoting Paid Internships:** Remove barriers for low-income and first-generation professionals, including by reducing reliance on unpaid internships and expanding paid internship opportunities.
- **Partnerships and Recruitment:** Establish new recruitment partnerships to build a more diverse pipeline into public service and facilitate recruitment, including the recruitment of individuals from underserved communities.
- **Professional Development and Advancement:** Advance equity and transparency in professional development opportunities.
- **DEIA Training and Learning:** Expand the availability of DEIA training so that Federal employees are supported and have the tools to promote respectful and inclusive workplaces.
- **Advancing Equity for Employees with Disabilities:** Serve as a model employer for disabled employees by charging key agencies with coordinating across the Federal Government to develop processes to increase accessibility and reduce barriers to employment.
- **Advancing Equity for LGBTQI+ Employees:** Advance equity for LGBTQI+ employees by striving to ensure that the federal health benefits system equitably serves all LGBTQI+ employees and their families, expanding the usage of gender markers and pronouns that respect transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary employees, and working to create a more inclusive workplace.
- **Pay Equity:** Advance pay equity so that public servants are fairly compensated for their talents, including Federal employees who may face discrimination based on race or gender, and working with agencies to review and, if necessary, revise job classifications and compensation practices.
- **Expanding Employment Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals:** Assess potential barriers that formerly incarcerated individuals face when seeking Federal employment and seek to expand job opportunities for individuals with past convictions.

- **Safe Workplaces:** Create a framework to address workplace harassment, including sexual harassment; and promote training, education, prevention programs, and monitoring to create a culture that does not tolerate harassment or other forms of discrimination or retaliation and that supports employees who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
- **Chief Diversity Officer:** Establish or elevate Chief Diversity Officers or diversity and inclusion officers within agencies to promote diversity and inclusion within the workforce.



# Appendix B: DEIA Goals and Executive Order Priorities Map

The EO priorities act as the foundational roots of this DEIA Strategic Plan; however, USDA intends to nurture the goals and objectives within this plan, so they serve as branches with far-reaching impact and influence. The EO14035 priorities are identified in [Appendix A](#). In [Appendix B](#), a table provides a crosswalk between the goals identified within this DEIA Strategic Plan and the EO priorities. This crosswalk illustrates that the group of goals in the DEIA Strategic Plan address and thus advance each EO priority. Alignment of each goal and its associated objective of this DEIA Strategic Plan to focus on outcomes in diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility are identified using the indicators shown in the legend below.

-  Goals and objectives that will advance **diversity** at USDA
-  Goals and objectives that will advance **equity** at USDA
-  Goals and objectives that will advance **inclusion** at USDA
-  Goals and objectives that will advance **accessibility** at USDA

## USDA Goals and Objectives:

**Goal 1: Build a culture that drives trust, belonging, transparency, accountability, and employee empathy.**

- 1.1 Foster a culture that is defined by a shared understanding of what DEIA is, why it is important, how it shows up, and how each individual contributes and is held accountable to its success and advancement.
- 1.2 Build an equity-focused framework that provides access to purposeful and unbiased employee development and growth opportunities for USDA's current and future workforce.

**Goal 2: Achieve a workforce representative of Americans that inspires development of innovative ideas and best practices.**

- 2.1 Promote and practice innovative and bold outreach and awareness strategies that brand USDA as an employer of choice for individuals of all backgrounds, experiences, and abilities.
- 2.2 Enhance relationships with current partners and develop new, sustainable partnerships to build an increasingly diverse pipeline from underserved and underrepresented communities.

- 2.3 Eliminate barriers and biases in the recruitment, hiring and onboarding of diverse candidates.

**Goal 3: Foster a workplace environment that is physically, mentally, and emotionally safe.**

- 3.1 Embed standardized anti-harassment and safety policy and response system protocols and standards at every level and ensure leadership engagement in harassment prevention.
- 3.2 Ensure facilities and emergency response mechanisms promote personnel safety across USDA operations.
- 3.3 Create a USDA-wide victim centered and trauma informed anti-harassment program.

**Goal 4: Establish leadership and governance structures to support long-term and sustainable DEIA efforts.**

- 4.1 Establish formal shared leadership structure, systems, policies, metrics, and support functions for the CDIO with sufficient authority and resources to lead DEIA efforts.
- 4.2 Partner across the Department for the CDIO to use people-centric best practices to transform USDA by developing, championing, implementing, and managing USDA's DEIA strategy and portfolio.

**Goal 5: Promote empowerment, responsibility, and accountability for DEIA through developing the workforce.**

- 5.1 Prioritize diversifying the workforce through targeted education, training, development, outreach, and advancement opportunities.
- 5.2 Promote consistency and accountability in learning and development at all levels.
- 5.3 Integrate DEIA in expectations, competencies, performance requirements, and behaviors that result in career advancement and progression.

**Goal 6: Demonstrate a commitment to a diverse, equitable, inclusive and accessible USDA through accountability, data collection, analysis, and effective policymaking.**

- 6.1 Create a plan for reviewing USDA policies and procedures (e.g., assessment tests, vacancy announcements, eligibility criteria, suitability requirements, etc.) to integrate civil rights and equity in the design of policies, programs, and in decision making. *This objective and its activities align with Maturity Signal, Level 2: Strategy.*
- 6.2 Support fairness and equity through the development and consistent application of equity principles and practices. *This objective and its activities align with Maturity Signal, Level 2: Pay and Compensation Strategy.*
- 6.3 Develop a data infrastructure that is consistent and transparent across the enterprise that allows for standardized quantitative and qualitative data collection,

management, reporting and governance; to include the measurement, tracking, and monitoring of progress for DEIA initiatives.

Executive Order 14035: "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in the Federal Workforce"  
**Government-wide DEIA Executive Order Priorities**

	Data Collection	Promoting Paid Internships	Partnerships & Recruiting	Professional Development & Advancement	DEIA Training & Learning	Advancing Equity for Employees with Disabilities	Advancing Equity for LGBTQ+ Employees	Pay Equity	Expanding Employment Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals	Chief Diversity Officer	Safe Workplaces
<b>Goal 1: Build a culture that drives trust, belonging, transparency, accountability, and employee empathy.</b>											
1.1	D	D	E	E	D	I	A	A	I	I	
1.2	D		I	E	E				A		
<b>Goal 2: Achieve a diverse workforce that inspires development of innovative ideas and best practices.</b>											
2.1		I	I								
2.2	I	D	E								
2.3	I		D								
<b>Goal 3: Foster a workplace environment that is physically, mentally, and emotionally safe.</b>											
3.1					A						I
3.2						E					A
3.3					D						D
<b>Goal 4: Establish leadership and governance structures to support DEIA efforts.</b>											
4.1										D	
4.2					A					D	
<b>Goal 5: Promote empowerment, responsibility, and accountability for DEIA through developing the workforce.</b>											
5.1	E			A	E						
5.2					I				A		
5.3				D							
<b>Goal 6: Demonstrate a commitment to a diverse, equitable, and inclusive USDA through accountability, data collection, analysis, and effective policymaking.</b>											
6.1	A					D	I	A	I		
6.2	D						D	E	D		
6.3	E		A								

Table showing the alignment of the USDA DEIA Strategic Plan goals and objectives with EO Priorities.

## Appendix C: Acknowledgement of Support for DEIA Strategic Plan Development

The following individuals served as representatives of Mission Areas and key functional areas across the Department in support of the USDA DEIA Strategic Plan, FY2022 - 2026. We thank the following individuals for their insights, commitment, and expertise. We also recognize there are others who may have been missed; we apologize for the oversight and thank you for your efforts.

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