

PNWS-AWWA 2021 Diversity & Inclusion Survey Results Report

September 2021

Prepared by the D&I Subcommittee

The Pacific Northwest Section of the American Water Works Association (PNWS-AWWA), chartered the Diversity & Inclusion Subcommittee (D&I) in the Summer of 2020, as part of the Membership Engagement and Development Committee (MEDC). This subcommittee came about through encouragement by the past Chair, Ronda Farmer, as well as support from our current Chair, John Roth. The subcommittee is supported by the National AWWA Diversity & Inclusion Committee (DMIC), which provides support nationally for Sections on D&I (<https://www.awwa.org/Membership-Volunteering/Diversity-Center>).

During the initial committee meetings and in alignment with the DMIC mission statement, the PNWS-AWWA D&I subcommittee established their mission statement as follows:

“To foster a welcoming and inclusive AWWA culture that champions meaningful institutional and individual change regarding diversity and equity in the water industry”

To achieve its mission statement, the D&I established two broad focus areas for the year:

- 1) Provide Networking Opportunities to raise awareness, educate, and connect members
- 2) Create Institutional Change

In alignment with the second goal, “Create Institutional Change”, the subcommittee determined that the first step would be to establish a baseline assessment of the section’s membership demographics and more importantly members views on diversity and inclusion within the PNWS-AWWA. In order to do so, the subcommittee developed a survey to better understand 1) the diversity and makeup of its membership, and 2) areas of improvement to promote an inclusive environment. Results from the survey were intended to be used to identify gaps or areas of the PNWS-AWWA organization, the subcommittee could focus on to create institutional change.

The following report explains how the survey was distributed and how the D&I subcommittee intends to use the survey moving forward. The report then summarizes the high-level findings from the survey results and provides several recommendations on how we can shape the PNWS-AWWA into a more inclusive and diverse organization based on the survey responses. Detailed survey data are provided in the last section.

Survey Distribution

The survey was distributed electronically to the PNWS-AWWA membership via the Section's E-Newsletter and was conducted for 2 months between April 1st, 2021 through June 1st, 2021. The survey was conducted as a voluntary and anonymous survey. Anonymity was maintained in order to encourage members to be transparent and critical in their responses.

In total, 32 survey questionnaires were submitted. To encourage survey participation, the Membership committee sponsored two \$25 electronic gift cards to raffle. After participants completed the survey, a "thank you" page with another survey link to enter their personal information for the raffle was provided. This separate survey was to ensure anonymity between survey and raffle participants. However, none of the survey participants chose to participate in the raffle.

The D&I subcommittee plans to continue this survey on an annual basis to regularly measure member feedback and demographics. The survey will be conducted over the same time period, from April to June. Advertisement and increased participation in the survey will be a focus of the effort in the next round of the survey solicitation. For example, the survey will be advertised via the E-newsletter and the Section website. To increase survey participation, the subcommittee plans to advertise at the Section conference through a Membership Booth where attendees can fill it out on the spot and provide raffle prizes. In addition, the subcommittee will encourage the Board, committee and subsection leaders to encourage members to participate through focused email invitations and at in-person events. The subcommittee will continue to brainstorm and look into additional methods to engage section members, such as potentially linking the survey to event registrations.

Conclusions

To preface any conclusions/take-aways from this survey, we recognize the results represent a small subset of the PNWS membership, and may be bias toward members who are already engaged in section activities, or portions of our membership with more regular access to email as part of their work responsibilities, and therefore access to this survey. Additionally, given the nature of the survey questions there could be members who chose not to participate either for hesitation to share personal information or not feeling the survey was directed toward them. There are a number of reasons that could bias the results, and therefore these high-level takeaways should be read with that in mind.

Take-aways:

- The majority of participants agree or strongly agree the PNWS is an inclusive organization. No one disagreed fully. There were several responses that commented on specific instances/reasons they have not felt included feelings of the section being an "exclusive club" and "lack of non-engineers".

- The majority of participants agree or strongly agree they can be their authentic selves within PNWS. However, 16% were neutral on the question, speaking to their hesitation to be fully themselves in a professional environment, while some folks who are multi-racial have difficulty relating to other members, their experiences, and messages about empowerment in the industry given the lack of people of color participating
- 43% of respondents participated at the local subsection level, while 73% participated at the section level. Demonstrates room for growth in subsection leadership.
- Two-thirds of participants were between 10 - 29 years, which is consistent with the age of our active members. Demonstrates an area of growth to focus on members in those age ranges, but also target younger members to participate.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The subcommittee reviewed the survey results and developed a few recommendations for the **Board, committee and subsection leaders** to consider for focus areas related to D&I, as well as an ask for feedback on the survey and results.

Recommendations:

1. **Improve access to section leadership** - Several respondents commented that there is an impression around leadership roles that those roles are not open to operations staff or that they are geared toward folks in managerial/engineer roles. This is an area of growth to improve how we recruit for Board leadership roles and how we can find ways to provide leadership training to all members. The PNWS has been working on this through the Fall Leadership Training program, which we'd expect to continue once we're able to meet in-person again. Consider increasing efforts on focused recruitment for this training program for operators and administrative staff.
2. **Focused outreach, job training and mentorship for minorities** - To make PNWS-AWWA more welcoming, a part of that is making the water industry more accessible to diverse populations who may not have had exposure to the water industry through personal connections or career assistance programs. Consider supporting more focused outreach with NW high schools and student membership offerings, paired with mentorship programs specific to marginalized groups.
3. **Make D&I part of our mission** - Each Board, committee, and subsection has some form of charter to define their mission, purpose, goals, and roles and responsibilities. Consider adding a D&I clause to each Board, committee, and subsection mission to focus intentionally on creating an inclusive environment for members to participate.

Ask:

As a Board member, committee leader, or subsection officer, what did you learn from the survey results? Do you have ideas on how we can be more inclusive and welcoming?

If you have comments on the survey, survey distribution and use, and/or results, please let us know. You can contact Esther Chang, D&I Chair, at esther.chang@jacobs.com.

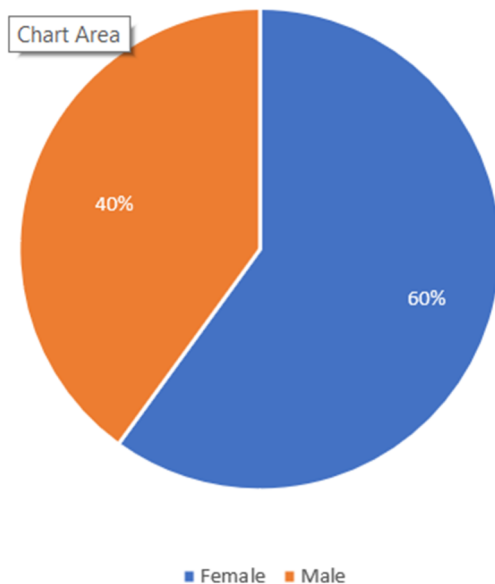
Survey Data

This anonymous survey was collected to help the PNW Section better understand the demographics of our membership, and identify areas of improvement to promote an inclusive environment where all members feel welcome. This voluntary data will be used by the subcommittee to help plan for recruiting and retention efforts. The survey was organized into two sections: demographics and feedback.

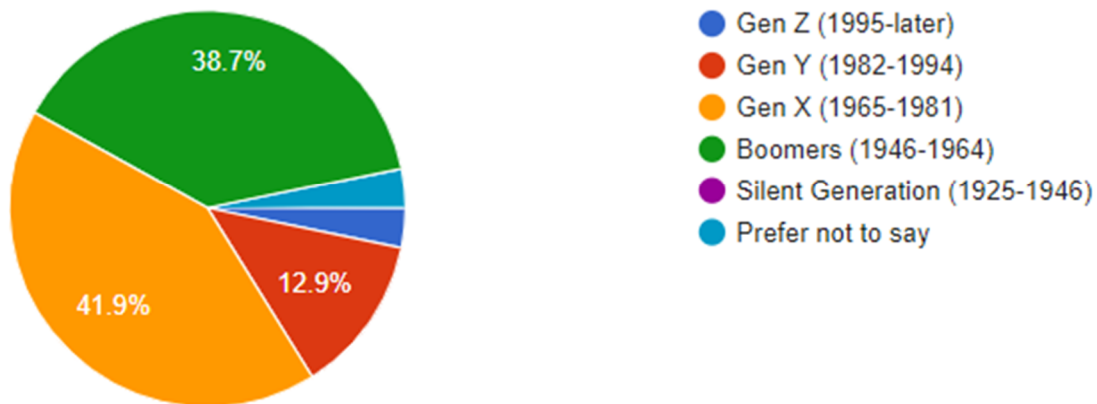
2.1 Demographics Section

Responses from this Demographic Information section are used to create a baseline to better understand the diversity of the PNW Section. The intent is to promote this survey on an annual basis to identify trends in recruitment and retention. All responses were optional and anonymous. Most demographic questions and responses followed the AWWA format with the exception of gender and ethnicity/race which were left open-ended for participants to fill in.

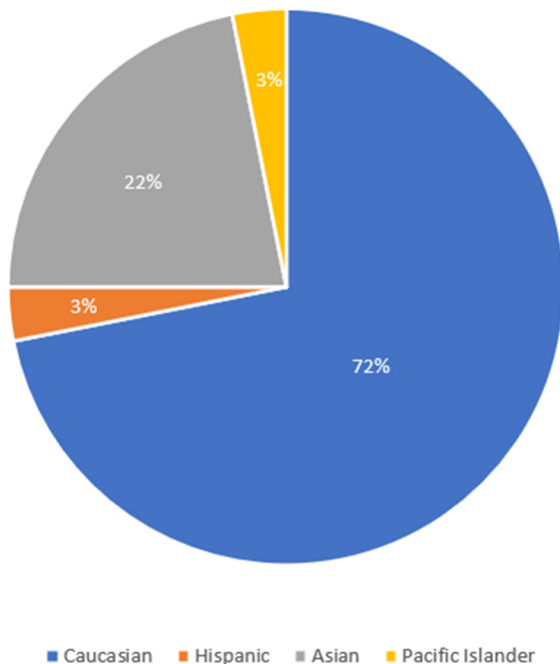
Question 1. My gender is...



Question 2. My age (defined by generation) is...



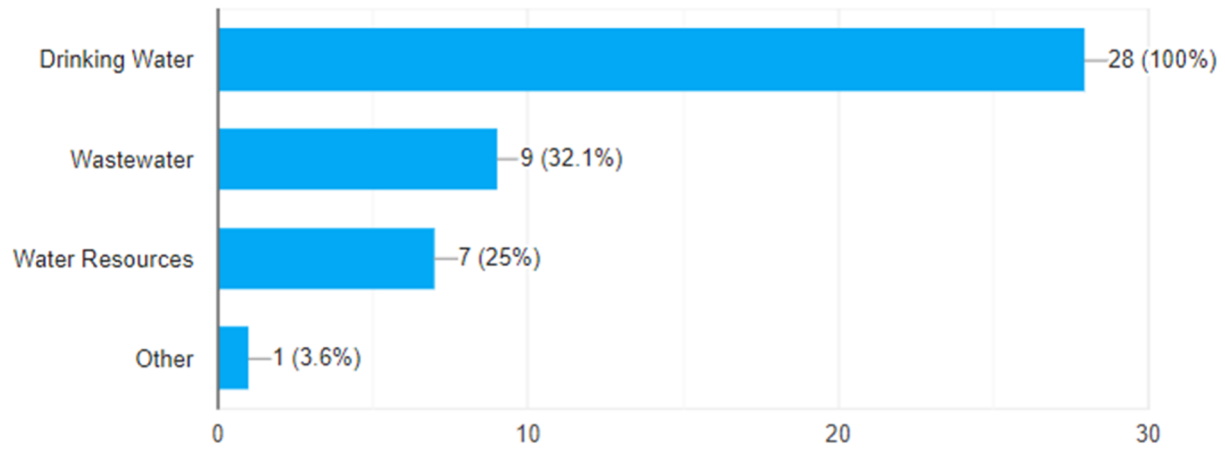
Question 3. My ethnicity is...



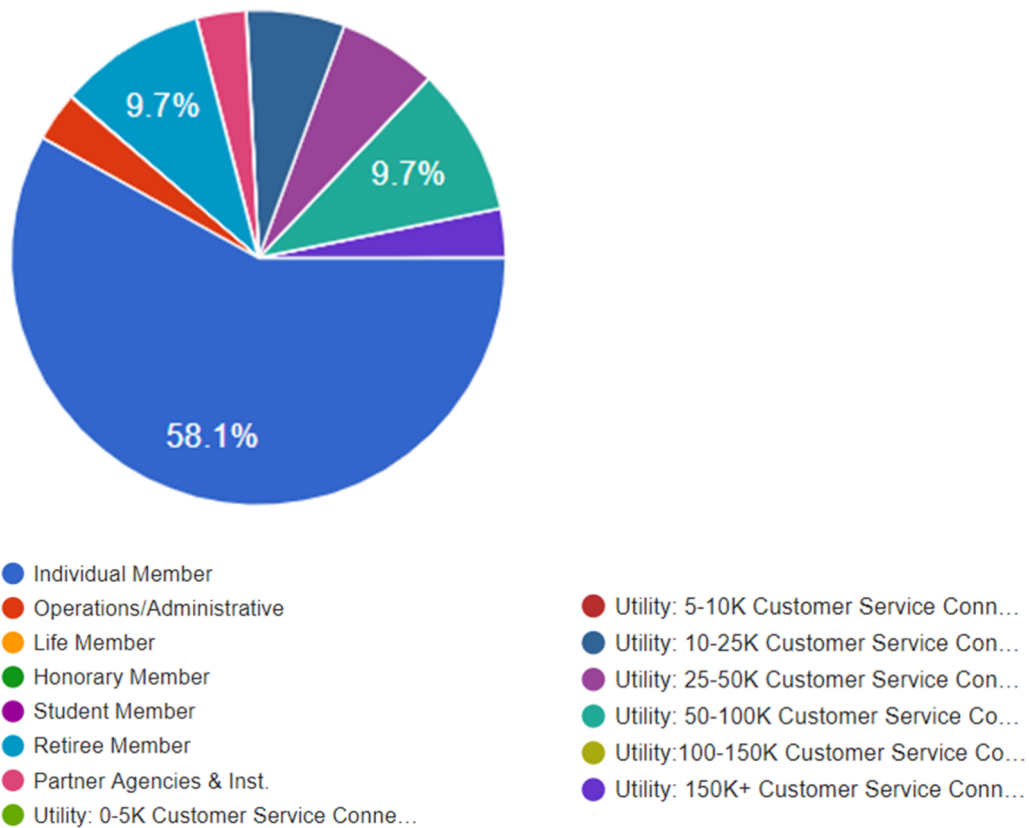
Long response answers on this question included:

- Indian
- Volga German
- Kazakh
- Asian American
- Ashkenazi Jewish
- Chinese
- Italian
- Danish American
- Irish American

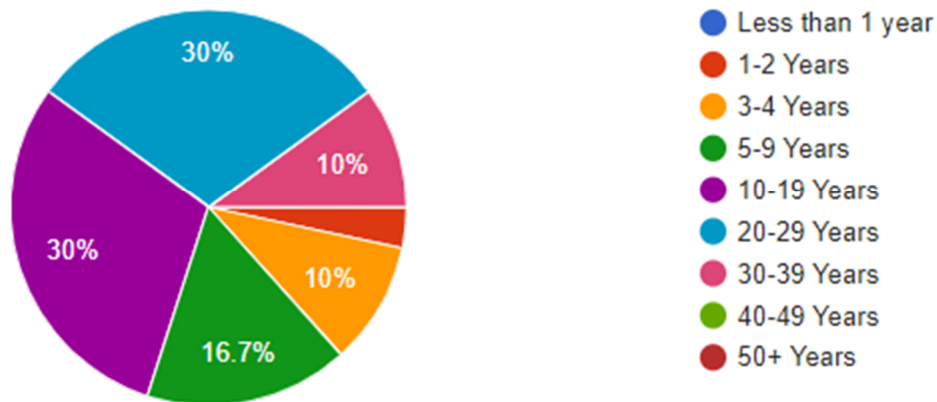
Question 4. I work in...



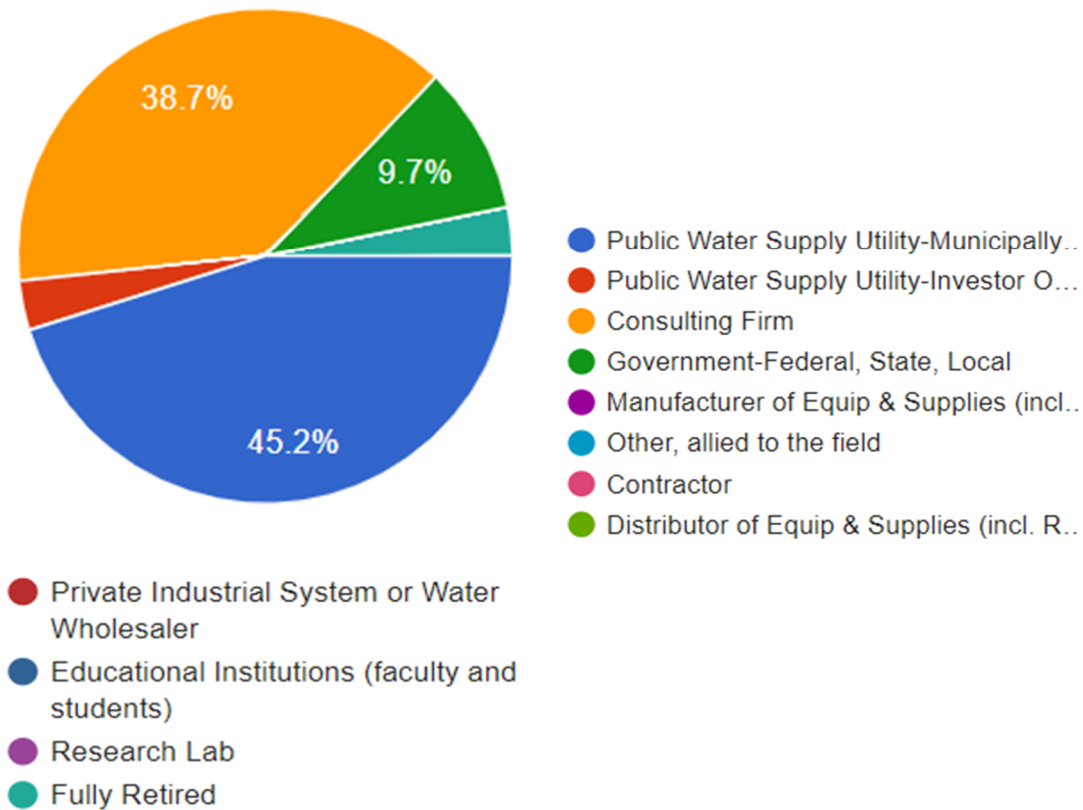
Question 5. My AWWA membership type is...



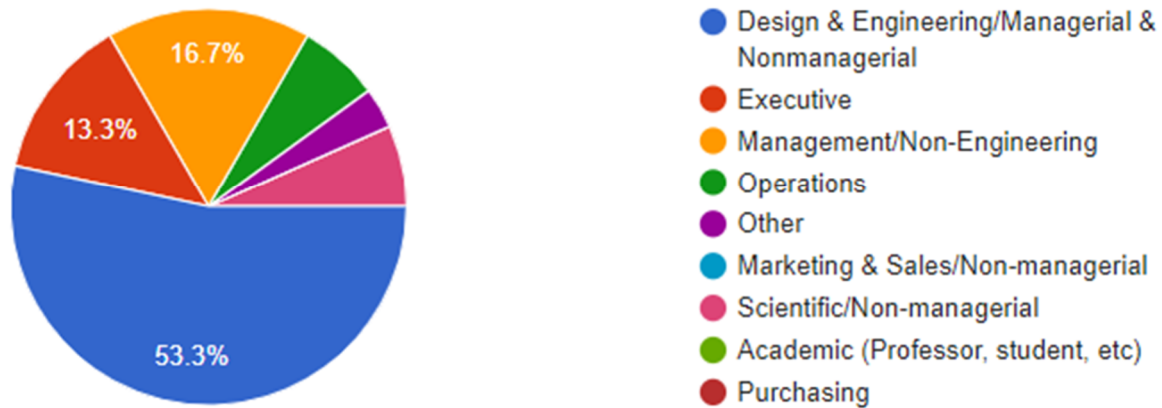
Question 6. I have been an AWWA member for...



Question 7. My business activity is...



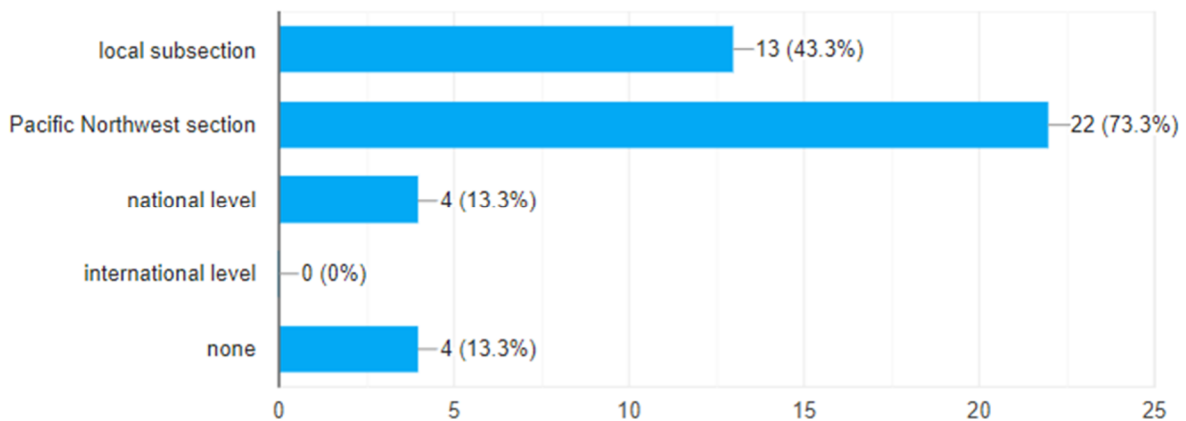
Question 8. My job position is...



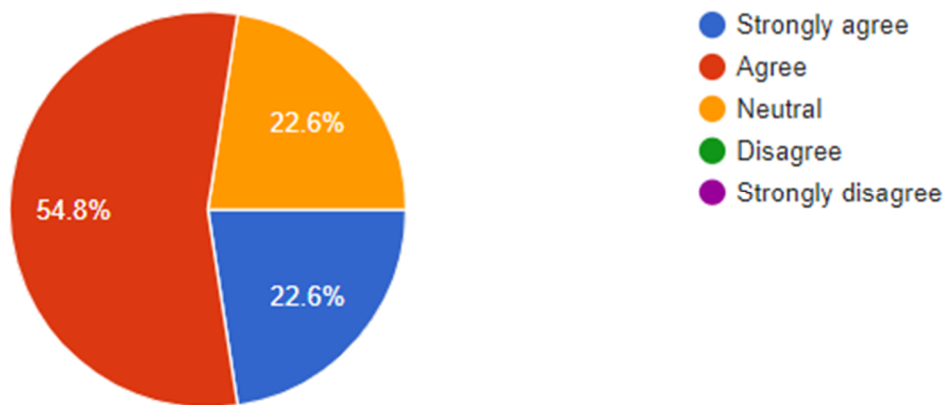
2.2 Feedback Section

Response from this Feedback Section includes long response options for survey participants to elaborate on personal experiences, observations, and/or change they'd like to see happen in the PNW Section.

Question 9. I am active at the...



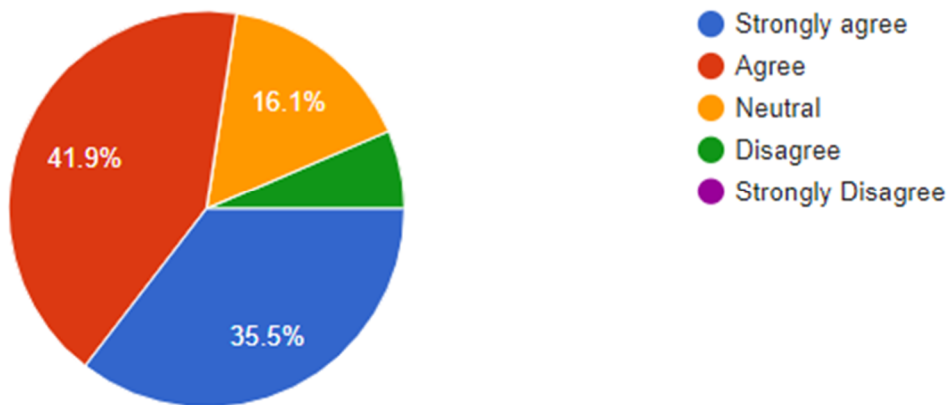
Question 10. PNWS-AWWA is an inclusive environment...



Question 11. Please elaborate on your selection above.

- Strongly agree/agree
 - Some folks personally feel included
 - Some folks are not active in committees but believe they would feel
 - Some folks feel the Section represents a cross-section of those in the water industry
 - Some folks haven't seen or heard of anyone being excluded from activities
 - Some folks think the Section is inclusive of gender and ethnicity
 - Some folks feel it takes time to feel comfortable and develop a network
 - Some folks who have heard of others not feeling included due to
 - their gender, race, professional etc being underrepresented
 - "our section feels like an exclusive club"
 - "Operations staff do not feel included at the section level. They feel the organization is geared towards higher level positions"
 - Lack of presence of non-engineers such as scientists (biological, geological, chemical), planning, and business administration
 - Section comes across as "clique-y"
 - Some junior folks find that senior folks are not interested in networking with them
- Neutral
 - Unsure, not actively involved
 - Often feel isolated
 - "Not one of the boys"
 - Some folks feel that while improvement are occurring, too many members still behave exclusively
- Strongly disagree/disagree
 - N/A

Question 12. I am comfortable being my authentic self in PNWS-AWWA...



Question 13. Please elaborate on your selection above.

- Strongly agree/agree
 - Some folks feel they can be themselves
 - Some folks feel a sense of belonging to the AWWA community
 - Some folks can see how others may not be comfortable given industry demographics being underrepresented
 - Some folks feel the organization is very open and inclusive
 - Some folks feel their privilege in identities allows a lower cost of authenticity, and a responsibility to be authentic
 - Some folks feel comfortable being their authentic selves everywhere and don't need to change for the organization
 - Some folks feel like they were easily accepted after getting to know more members
- Neutral
 - Some folks who are multi-racial have difficulty relating to other members, their experiences, and messages about empowerment in the industry given the lack of people of color participating
 - Some folks do not ever feel entirely comfortable being their authentic self in any professional setting as it relates to their career and require a level of professionalism
- Strongly disagree/disagree
 - "Not really. Engineers are an uptight bunch that seem very competitive. Makes for a tense situation at times."

Question 14. Are you involved in a committee? If so, which committee(s) are you involved with? If not, what prevents you from participating?

Participants listed being involved in the following committees:

- Utility Management
- Women in Leadership
- Engineering
- MEDC
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Young Professionals
- Washington Water Utility Council
- Treatment
- AWWA Cybersecurity
- Water Resources
- Budget
- Water Research

Participants not active in a committee shared the following reasons for not participating:

- Involved in local subsection or board
- Lack of time
- Busy workload
- Introverted personality
- Was uncomfortable after joining the committee and became inactive
- Change in work focus, considering options
- Retired

Question 15. Suggestions on how PNWS-AWWA can be more inclusive.

- Pair section leaders with small groups of new members to get them engaged early in their membership
 - Provides members with a positive experience with the section and connects people with small groups that they can recognize and interact with at future events
 - Could be a year long effort like a new member mentorship program
 - Leaders are ideal to lead this since they have section wide knowledge of options/opportunities for members to engage in
 - New members are likely from different backgrounds so small cohorts would increase their network diversity
- Continue D&I events
- Speak out against hate
- Denounce white supremacy
- Some event registration forms still require an organization. For example, AWWA retiree memberships still affiliate with one's last employer. Uncomfortable being nudged to identify an affiliation that no longer exists.

- AWWA needs to do a better job assisting diverse populations to seek jobs in the water field, especially in the NW. AWWA should develop training programs geared towards minorities and job finding programs for diverse populations. The issue is not an issue of racism, the issue is that minority populations are not even aware of the jobs available in the industry and how to tap into them and they are therefore not seeking the available positions. This is very much an issue in the construction trades, which are often stepping stones into higher level operations positions. Outreach programs to inner-city NW high schools and providing AWWA membership opportunities to students could help get minorities involved.
- Keep promoting inclusion
- Start having explicit exercises/training for inclusion
- “Inclusive? AWWA is inclusive and there is no need to be MORE inclusive!”
- The Board level could use some line-level operations folks represented. It seems to be heavy on supervisory, management and engineering levels. Encourage operations folks to run for trustee and other committee leadership positions. Folks seem to congregate at the sub-section level.
- Keep open to the range of folks who work in drinking water/wastewater. Go beyond depicting the treatment plants as the workplace.
- More specific events for marginalized groups
- Setting aside a budget to support diverse members because cost can be a barrier to attending events or being involved in committees and conferences.
- A mentorship program specific to marginalized groups
- A diversity/equity track at the next Section conference

Question 16. Are there any other thoughts or comments that weren’t asked above that you’d like to share? Responses:

- What are folks doing to self-educate on diversity, equity and inclusion issues?
- What resources would folks like to see regarding DEI?
- The latest revision to the bylaws and loosening of pre-requisites for the treasurer and nominating committee were a good step.
- I think we are being mindful about race and gender inequities.
- At some point in the future, I would like to see some analysis on the job tasks performed by our members. I suspect operators are in the minority, as opposed to engineers or vendors or managers, and we need a better balance. I also see on the street (at least in urban areas) that many younger operators appear to be a more diverse group, and outreach to that group could enable us to meet multiple diversity and inclusivity objectives
- When you talk about being your authentic self, I think you should be clearer about what you really mean. Women and people from the non-majority group (i.e., white Christian) have unique challenges when it comes to being their authentic self in the workplace. That is different from other ways that people are not their authentic self that may not have to do with being part of a traditionally oppressed group. I think this distinction is important so as not to create the impression that actually everyone is in the same boat.

- There are not nearly enough African Americans or Hispanics at the operations level in the NW. When you look at some of the trades in construction, they are present, but they are not finding their way into the realm of the water utility positions for some reason.
- If these questions only have to do with race and inclusiveness then let's set the bar: What percentage of minority people (yes, non-white males) graduate from college, trade school or other training with aspirations of being involved in water? Then we target that number for inclusiveness! If the percent of white males graduating decreases, then the target moves! I see companies trying to reach 50% minority inclusiveness in engineering when 80% of engineering graduates are white males.
- Given the high salaries of engineers, there is a separate class issue to consider.