

FISCAL YEARS 2022-2026

NIH Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity (COSWD) RFI Response Analysis Summary Report



National Institutes of Health
Office of the Director
Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity

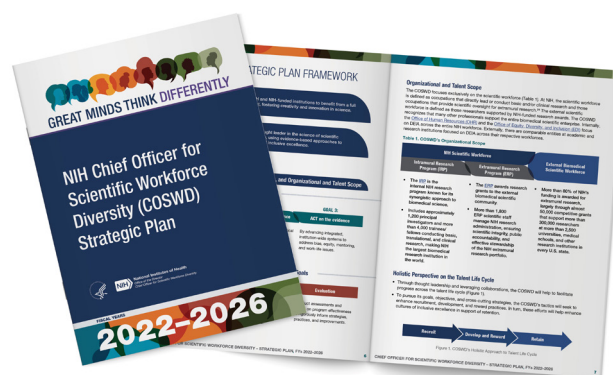
COSWD STRATEGIC PLAN FY 2022–2026

RFI Response Analysis Summary Report

Background and Purpose

In January 2022, the Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity (COSWD) released a draft document of the COSWD Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years (FYs) 2022–2026 and solicited public comment through a Request for Information (RFI). The COSWD intended to gain insight into perspectives on the drafted COSWD Strategic Plan for FYs 2022–2026, particularly focusing on the following elements:

- **Three key goals**—build, disseminate, and act on the evidence to advance scientific workforce diversity—including benefits, challenges, or alternative or additional goals for consideration.
- Objectives to support each of the three goals, including benefits, challenges, or alternative or additional objectives that may be considered to achieve the stated goals.
- Cross-cutting strategies—**collaborations**, **accountability**, and **evaluation**—to be leveraged to pursue the **goals**, including benefits, challenges, or alternative or additional strategies that may be considered.



Upon receipt of the RFI responses, the COSWD team conducted a review and synthesized the responses. The RFI responses affirmed efforts made by the COSWD team in their initial draft and provided insight into critical or frequently mentioned issues. The COSWD used feedback from the RFI responses to revise the Strategic Plan, which was [published on March 31, 2022](#).

The COSWD is providing a qualitative synthesis of RFI responses through this publicly available RFI Response Summary Report to summarize the feedback to the draft COSWD Strategic Plan. In addition, the report provides an overview of how the COSWD team modified the Strategic Plan for FYs 2022–2026 using the considerations outlined in the RFI responses.

RFI Respondents

Between January 12 and February 10, 2022, the COSWD received 47 RFI responses from various sources. The members who responded to the RFI included individual community members (n=23), professional groups (n=5), and organizations (n=19). Most individual respondents identified themselves as staff members for various National Institutes of Health (NIH) offices, scientific societies, or academic institutions. Two individual respondents did not identify a place of employment. Professional group respondents consisted of the collective voices of scientists, professors, or academic staff members with common interests related to the topic of scientific workforce diversity. Finally, organizational respondents included non-profit organizations, NIH offices, professional societies, and corporate entities that operate within the scientific workforce.

RFI Response Themes

Overall, RFI responses indicated that many respondents had a positive perception of the core elements of the COSWD Strategic Plan. Respondents often applauded the COSWD for taking steps to create a plan that prioritized diversity in the scientific workforce and expressed support for specific goals outlined in the plan. However, almost all respondents also noted areas for improvement or consideration that could help to strengthen the plan. These areas for further consideration (described in more detail below) included expanding sections relating to strategic objectives and terminology, incorporating missing perspectives, and providing concrete steps for achieving the objectives presented in the plan.

Positive Affirmation

Respondents most often indicated that the COSWD Strategic Plan draft was clearly presented, thoughtful, and the product of considerable effort from the COSWD. Many respondents presented statements of support for the overall plan, its specific objectives, and/or the COSWD's role in developing standards for improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in the scientific workforce.

- **Theme 1: Clear Presentation.** Respondents expressed their appreciation for the clarity of the plan. Most respondents noted that the plan was well articulated and provided clear objectives. Notably, RFI respondents described that the three key goals (i.e., build, disseminate, and act) and the cross-cutting strategies (i.e., collaborations, accountability, and evaluation) were well outlined and covered a wide range of important considerations for enhancing DEIA in the scientific workforce.
- **Theme 2: Exemplification of Effort.** Many respondents noted that the plan was a representation of the thoughtfulness put forth by the COSWD on the topic of DEIA within the scientific workforce. Specifically, respondents indicated that the COSWD did well at communicating and exemplifying the need for a multifaceted approach to encourage change. Respondents also highlighted the COSWD's transparency on various topics throughout the plan. They appreciated that the COSWD plan included details about how communication would play a vital role in improving DEIA and the need to address barriers to create equitable processes.
- **Theme 3: Statements of Support.** Many respondents made explicit statements of support for the plan and its specific objectives. Perhaps most notable was respondents' support for the evidence-based approaches presented in the strategic plan. Many respondents indicated that they plan to continue partnerships with the COSWD in the effort to build and implement evidence-based approaches. Other respondents indicated that they support strategies within the strategic plan, such as strategies related to collaborating with key community members and evaluating programs to determine effectiveness.

Areas for Further Consideration

Although many respondents provided positive feedback, most also indicated that there were necessary areas for improvement before publishing the final version of the COSWD Strategic Plan for FYs 2022–2026. The most salient themes included providing actionable insights for how the plan would be operationalized, expanding on and including certain underrepresented groups to maximize inclusion, incorporating evaluation processes related to diversity in the scientific workforce, and providing COSWD or NIH perspectives on DEIA throughout the plan.

- **Theme 1: Operationalizing Objectives.** Respondents most often noted that the plan lacked the details needed for community members to understand how to reach the objectives. They noted that the COSWD should incorporate concrete strategies, timelines, and expectations related to each objective. Respondents suggested providing information about programs, resources, and specific milestones to help organizations create and maintain an inclusive environment. Respondents also noted that showing how the COSWD and NIH plan to build, disseminate, and act could be a helpful guide for other organizations working to improve diversity in the scientific workforce. Most salient topics were related to addressing leadership pathway issues, communicating plans for reaching collaborators who are underrepresented in the scientific workforce, and discussing how the COSWD plans to showcase and incentivize models of excellence (e.g., institutions/organizations creating or maintaining positive outcomes).
- **Theme 2: Maximizing Inclusion of All Underrepresented Groups.** Another common issue noted by respondents was the omission of (or lack of emphasis on) certain underrepresented groups. People with disabilities; people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer and questioning (LGBTQ+); and people with intersecting identities were the most notable groups that were underrepresented or not represented in the original draft of the plan. Although less often, respondents noted additional groups to be more explicitly acknowledged, including people who have experienced sexual harassment, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander individuals, and people with mental health lived experiences, including those with disabilities due to serious mental illness. Respondents also indicated a need to incorporate research about the experiences of broader and varied group members to holistically inform the COSWD Strategic Plan’s efforts to maximize inclusion. Finally, some respondents noted that the “accessibility” aspect of DEIA often seemed less developed than the other three aspects and urged the COSWD to consider ways to incorporate accessibility as an equal pillar of the plan.
- **Theme 3: Incorporating Evaluation Processes.** Respondents noted a need for plans to evaluate processes. One recommendation consistently mentioned was tracking and communicating metrics relating to DEIA efforts. Respondents indicated that the COSWD was the organization that should set the standards for how and what to evaluate to determine growth within the scientific workforce regarding DEIA. In addition to providing resources and guidance, respondents noted that the Strategic Plan should outline efforts for how the COSWD and NIH intend to evaluate processes that lead to inequities within the scientific workforce, such as the peer-review process, the career pathway, or RFI procedures.
- **Theme 4: COSWD and NIH Perspectives on DEIA.** Respondents indicated that the COSWD should consider showcasing how it is leading by example (e.g., highlighting its own evidence-based programs to improve DEIA, showing evaluation processes). In addition, many noted that the COSWD could expand and clarify the scope of its goals by clearly stating definitions and using terms that are inclusive of the entirety of its efforts (e.g., using DEIA when talking about diversity, defining terms related to diversity, defining the occupations that fit within the scientific workforce).

Strategic Plan Modifications in Response to RFI Feedback

The COSWD addressed the four main themes that emerged from the public feedback throughout the next iteration of its Strategic Plan, now live on the [COSWD website](#). As represented in “Theme 2: Maximizing Inclusion of All Underrepresented Groups,” respondents perceived an underrepresentation of certain groups from the actions outlined in the plan—in particular, people with disabilities and people who identify as LGBTQ+. In both cases, the COSWD added language to the plan acknowledging the specific experiences and needs of those groups. Additionally, the updated plan links additional resources such as the NIH Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office Strategic Plan. Another point of feedback that came up as a part of “Theme 4: COSWD and NIH Perspectives on DEIA” was replacing the term *diversity* with *DEIA* in an effort to expand and clarify the scope of the COSWD’s intended actions. This change was made throughout the plan in many cases.

Other points of feedback pertaining to “Theme 1: Operationalizing Objectives” and “Theme 3: Incorporating Evaluation Processes” included a potentially vague approach to accountability and metrics and the need to add specificity to the use of rewards to enhance DEIA. The updated plan addressed these points of feedback by expanding the Accountability section and adding detail on incentive structures and administrative supplements to Objective 3.2. More detail was also added to the plan to account for the intersection of gender and work climate issues, as well as external collaborations in which the COSWD intends to partake.

Although these modifications were made in the final iteration of the COSWD Strategic Plan, the COSWD will continue to refine its evaluation processes as the COSWD team and collaborators work to implement the plan.



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