



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

**Welcome to the November Edition
of the 2024
M&R Seminar Series**

NOTES FOR SEMINAR ATTENDEES

- Remote attendees' audio lines have been muted to minimize background noise.
For attendees in the auditorium, please silence your phones.
- A question and answer (Q/A) session will follow the presentation.
- For remote attendees, please use “**Chat**” only to type questions for the presenter. For other issues, please email Pam to SlabyP@mwrdd.org.
For attendees in the auditorium, please raise your hand and wait for the microphone to ask a verbal question.
- The presentation slides will be posted on the MWRD website after the seminar.
- This seminar is pending approval by the IEPA for one TCH; however, the ISPE did not approve this seminar.

Lolita Thompson, P.E., Principal Civil Engineer Environmental Justice Section, MWRDGC



Lolita Thompson is the Principal Civil Engineer for the Environmental Justice Section. Lolita is a licensed professional engineer whose 11-year wastewater career at MWRD includes working as a Treatment Plant Operator in Maintenance & Operations, an Environmental Specialist in Monitoring & Research, and a Senior Civil Engineer in the Engineering Department.

Prior to MWRD, Lolita's engineering career included over 20 years of experience working in various areas including the refining, conduit, and battery industries. Lolita received both a Bachelor of Science and Master's degree in Chemical Engineering from Illinois Institute of Technology. Lolita is an Illinois EPA Certified Class 4 Wastewater Treatment Works Operator. She has a Construction Supervision & Management Certificate and an Equity Training Certificate for the Conservation Community. In 2021 she was an honoree during MWRD's Women's History Month celebration, she was featured as one of the Faces of Diversity in the January/February 2023 issue of Diversity in Action Magazine and she was an MWRD Black History Month Honoree in February 2023.

Edward D. Coleman, Human Resources Manager Environmental Justice Section, MWRDGC



Edward Coleman is the Human Resources Manager of the Environmental Justice Section at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. He has spent most of his life dedicated to public service. He has over 30 years of experience in Human Resources and Human Services. He began his career in public service, while still a student at Bradley University, in Peoria, Illinois with the Illinois Department of Human Services' Community Integrated Living Arrangement (CILA) program, where he worked providing support services for individuals with developmental disabilities. Prior to joining the MWRD, he also worked for the City of St. Louis' Department of Human Services – Youth & Family Services Division as a Community Program Specialist administering a wide range of programs through partnerships with community-based agencies and institutions. Upon moving to Chicago, he worked in the Human Resources Department for South Shore Community Hospital on the South Side of Chicago. He remains committed to serving overlooked and underrepresented communities through public service.



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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN ACTION AT MWRD

Edward Coleman
Human Resources Manager

Jennie Harrell
Senior Administrative Assistant

Lolita Thompson
Principal Civil Engineer



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WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

means *EVERYONE* deserves:

- access to green spaces
- clean water
- clean air

Climate Action
100% Renewable Energy
#Electric Not Gas

Public Lands
Parks
Trees
Wildlife

Clean Air
Saves Lives
#StopAirPollution
#Divest #TurnItOff

Protect Water Is Life
Pipelines Leak Oil Spills
No Drilling No Fracking

STOP Toxic Chemicals
& Pesticides

Skip Plastics
Zero Waste

Racial Justice

Social Justice

CleanEarth4Kids.org
Environmental Justice



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How does that EJ definition translate to our MWRD work?

To encourage fair treatment, we look for ways to:

- Expand access to MWRD resources through municipality outreach
 - Mailed all Cook County municipalities introducing EJ Section
 - Call communities to notify them of partnership opportunities



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How does that EJ definition translate to our MWRD work?

Look for ways to:

- Help communities avoid adverse effects on minority and/or low-income populations
- Community outreach



WATER ALTg. QUALITY

Project by: 😊
Tajam, Italy,
Amyan, Arab

Concerning? Why?

People are dying from cancerous diseases and they are leading young people to having health issues.

SAVE THE PARK TEAM 5

- Project Goals
 - Replace Equipment
 - Continue Maintenance
 - Plant Trees + Plants
 - Install Concrete Sidewalks

This image shows a hole covered in paint and broken.

This image shows a broken slide.

This image shows a cracked fence.

This image shows a hole in the fence.



TOXIC SOIL

What is Toxic Soil?
Toxic soil is soil contaminated with a high level of toxic substances or pollutants. Being a part of land degradation, it can be caused by the presence of toxic substances from urban and industrial activities. Being so, it can be naturally produced and spread out to surrounding areas in the presence of wind or air currents. Being so, it can cover large areas of the soil in the presence of much higher concentrations of toxic substances or any other substances in the natural soil environment. It is typically caused by various industrial activities, agricultural chemicals or improper disposal of waste.

There are many health risks associated with toxic soil, especially for children. Being so, it can be a major concern for the public. It is a major concern for the public because it can be a major concern for the public. It is a major concern for the public because it can be a major concern for the public.

Soil Contamination



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How does that EJ definition translate to our MWRD work?

To encourage meaningful involvement, we look for ways to:

- Meaningfully engage potentially affected individuals, organizations, and minority and low-income populations EARLY in proposed project development and programs.
- Address community concerns by providing feedback indicating why the MWRD plans to undertake a certain course of action after considering all relevant information.



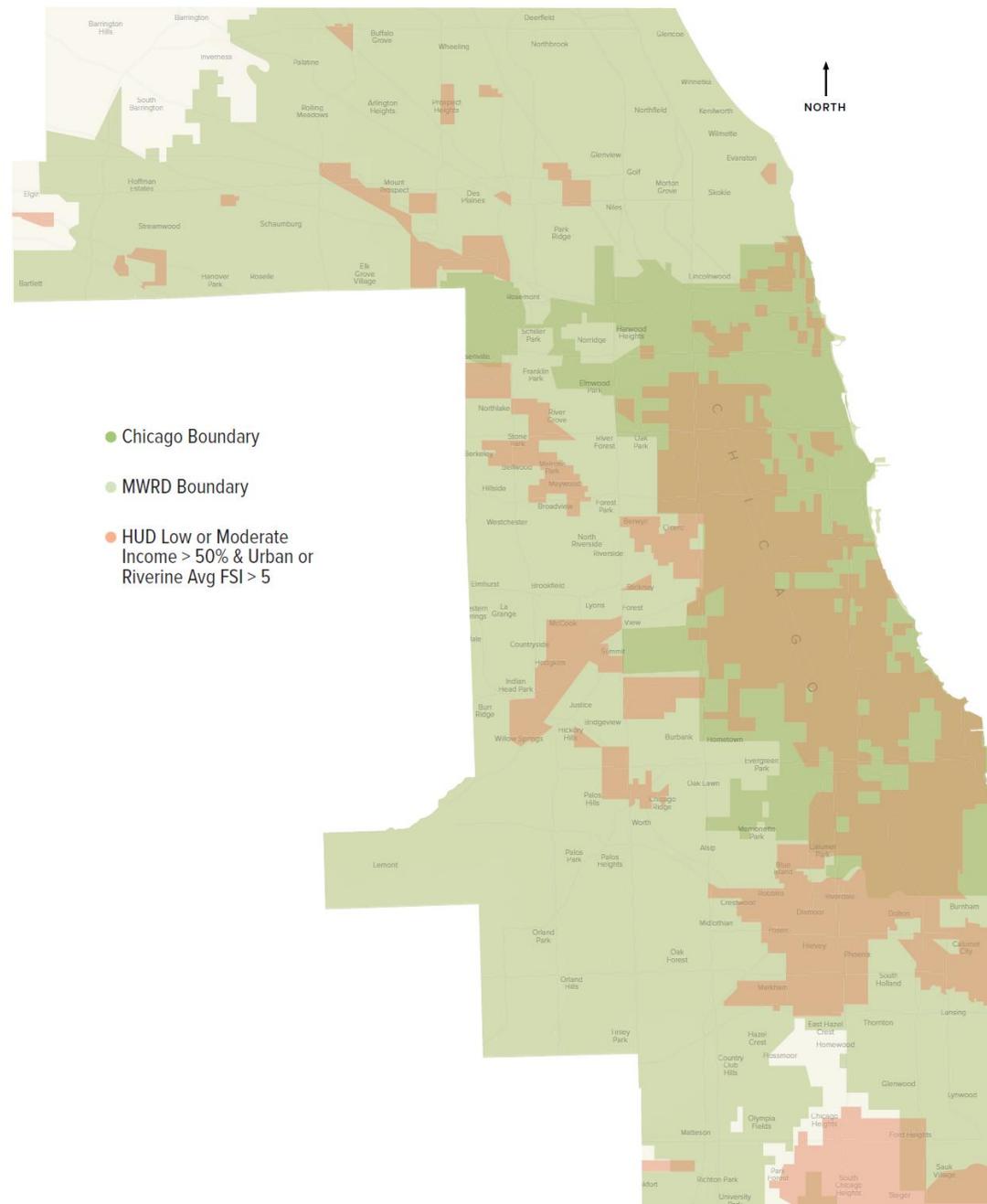
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What are *EJ* *communities*?

In our Strategic Plan they are referred to as Disproportionately Impacted Areas, or DIA Communities.

Disproportionately impacted area (DIA): An area that has a Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) Urban or Riverine Flood Susceptibility Index (FSI) mean value of 5-10, as of July 24, 2018, and is within a Low to Moderate Income Area as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Disproportionately Impacted Areas (DIAs) in Cook County





Environmental Data Mapping Tools

The Council on Environmental Quality, in partnership with the U.S. Digital Service and in collaboration with other Federal agencies and departments, developed the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) pursuant to Executive Order 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. Other Federal agencies have also used publicly available climate, environmental and health data to create geospatial mapping tools. The table below shows the similarities and key differences between these tools.

	Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) + U.S. Digital Service Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) EJScreen	Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Environmental Justice Index (EJI)	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Mapping for Resilience and Adaptation (CMRA)	Department of Energy (DOE) Energy Justice Mapping Tool - Disadvantaged Communities Reporter	Department of Transportation (DOT) Transportation Disadvantaged Census Tracts
Purpose	As required by EO 14008, help Federal agencies guide the benefits of certain programs, including those in the Justice40 Initiative, by identifying disadvantaged communities that are overburdened by pollution and underserved.	Highlight vulnerable communities facing higher environmental burdens using nationally available and consistent datasets.	Help public health officials and communities identify and map areas most at risk for the health impacts of environmental burden by measuring the cumulative impacts through the lens of human health and health equity.	Help community members learn about their climate hazard exposure, develop climate resilience plans, and get directed to grants. Integrates information from some of these other tools and links to them.	Give DOE and community members the ability to explore and produce reports on census tracts the DOE has identified as disadvantaged pursuant to the Justice40 Interim Guidance.	Help DOT Justice40 program applicants in identifying whether a project is located in a census tract that meets the definition of disadvantaged community set forth in the Justice40 Interim Guidance.
Intended audience/s	Federal agencies and community members	EPA, government partners, and community members	HHS, public health officials, scientists, researchers, and community members	Community members and leaders at all levels of government	DOE and community members	DOT Justice40 program applicants
Developed by	CEQ + USDS	EPA	HHS/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (CDC/ATSDR)	Partnership led by NOAA; developed by Esri	DOE	DOT
Type of methodology/ how is it calculated	Threshold methodology that looks across multiple categories of indicators	Full analytical tool with multiple methods of calculation. EJScreen creates indexes by combining a single environmental burden indicator with socioeconomic factors, including threshold maps for a cumulative outlook across multiple burdens, provides various reports, and allows overlays of multiple datasets.	Cumulative impacts score calculated using 36 indicators across categories of social vulnerability, environmental burden, and health vulnerability	Displays real-time hazard exposure data and future climate projections. Also integrates info from the CEJST and FEMA's National Risk Index and National Building Code Adoption Tracker	Cumulative burden score derived from 36 equally weighted indicators, selected from top 20% of tracts in each state, and further selected by income	Threshold methodology that looks across multiple categories of indicators



Identifying EJ Communities

Nationally there are several tools to identify criteria that define Environmental Justice Communities. We focus on two:

Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)

- Created by Council on Environmental Quality
- Based on 2010 census data
- Community must be in a Census Tract (population 1,200-8,000 people) that meet threshold for at least 1 category of burden
- Census Tracts that are overburdened/underserved are considered disadvantaged and/or
- On land within boundaries of Federally Recognized Tribes



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CJEST Categories of Burden

Climate Change

Energy

Health

Housing

Legacy Pollution

Transportation

Water and Wastewater

Workforce Development



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CJEST Category of Burden-Climate Change

Climate Change-Disadvantaged Communities must be at or above the 90th percentile for any one of the following:

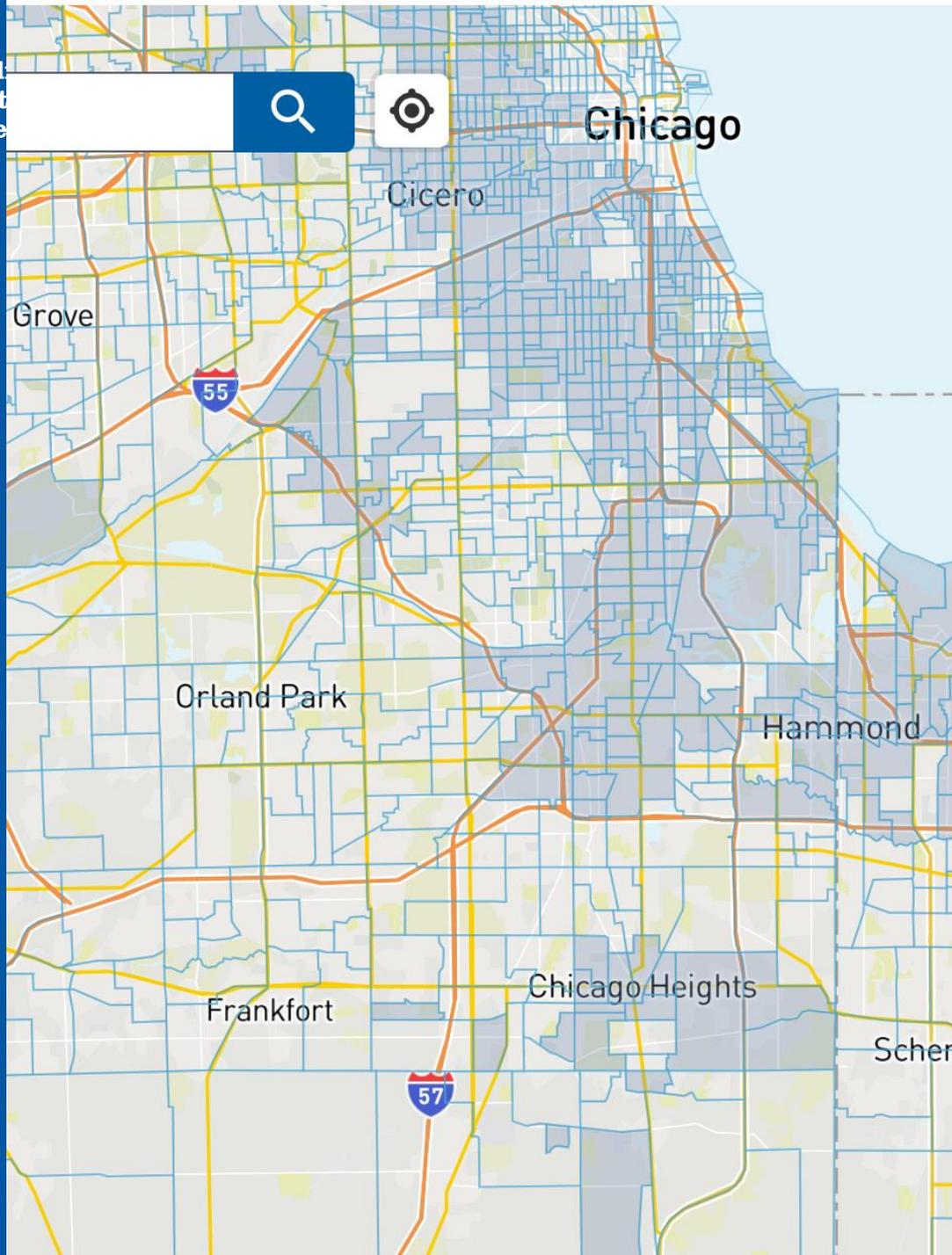
- **Projected flood risk**
- **Projected wildfire risk**
- **Expected agricultural loss rate**
- **Expected building loss rate**
- **Expected population loss rate**

AND

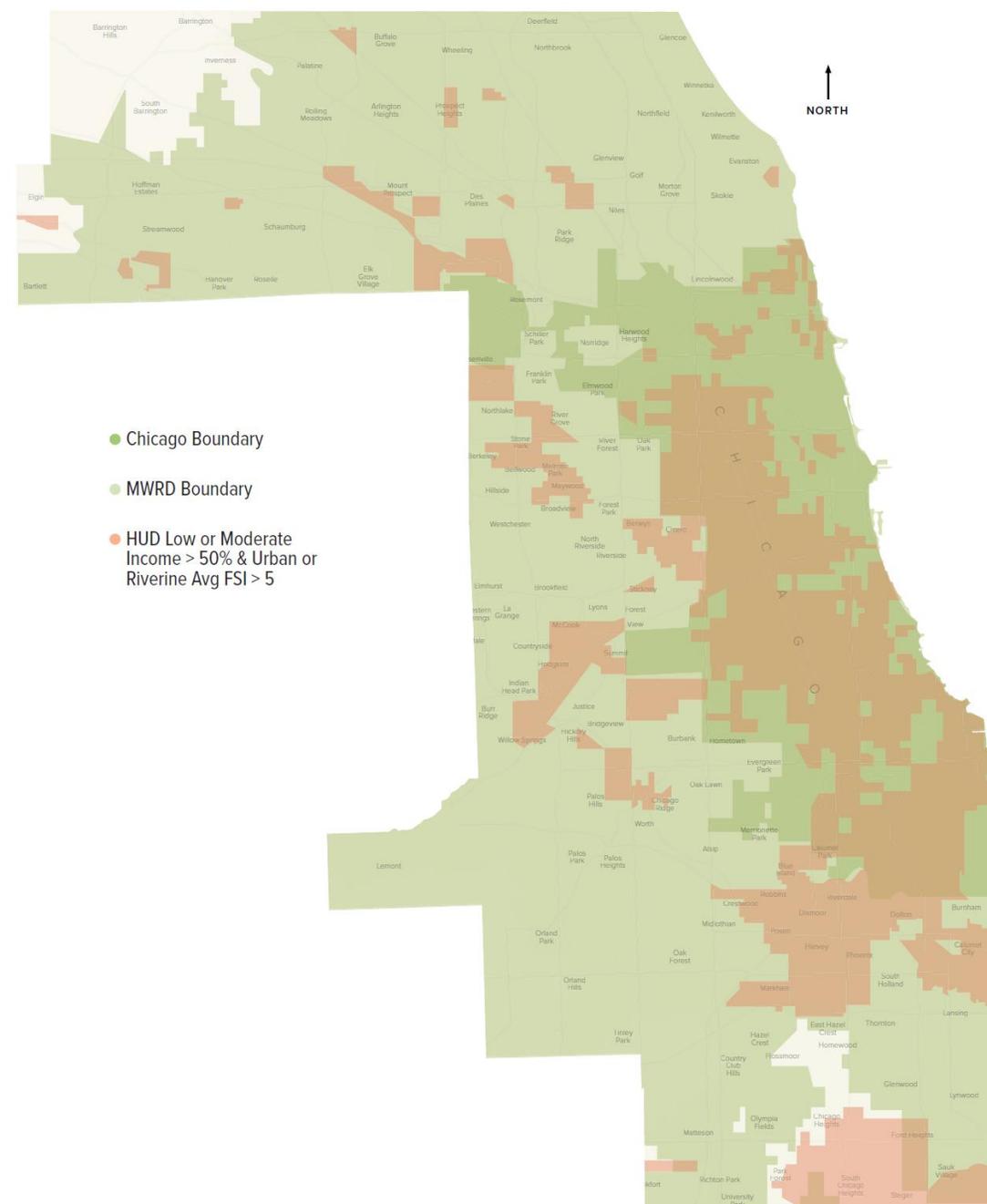
**At or above the 65th percentile for Low Income-
(at or below 200% of federal poverty level)**



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Disproportionately Impacted Areas (DIAs) in Cook County





EJ Community Screening

Environmental Justice Screening & Mapping Tool (EJSCREEN)

- ***DOES NOT*** identify communities as disadvantaged
- Created by USEPA to Identify Communities through environmental and socioeconomic indicators
- Used as a screening tool to enhance outreach and engagement practices
- Uses Census block group for analysis. A block group has about 600-3,000 people living in it. US is divided into more than 242,000 block groups
- The socioeconomic data source is US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 5-Year Estimates (ACS 2022)



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EJSCREEN Indicators

ENVIRONMENTAL BURDEN

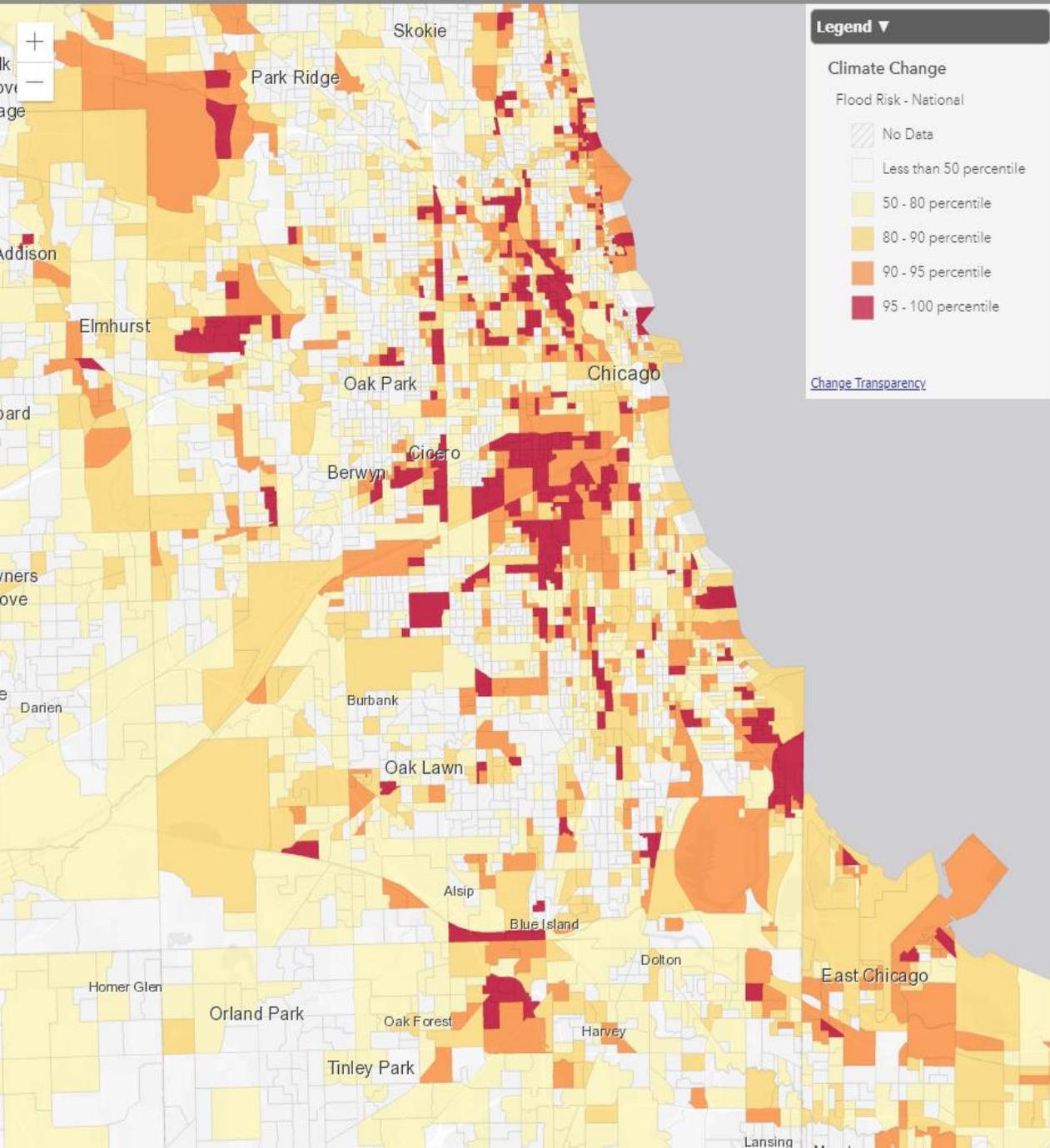
Particulate Matter 2.5
Ozone
Nitrogen Dioxide
Diesel Particulate Matter
Toxic Releases to Air
Traffic, Superfund
Risk Management Program
Hazardous Waste Proximity
Underground Storage Tanks
Wastewater Discharge
Drinking Water Non-Compliance
Lead Paint

SOCIOECONOMIC

Percent people of color
Percent low income
Unemployment
Percent in limited English speaking
Percent less than high school education
Percent under age 5 and over age 64
Demographic Index(ave PC & LI)
Supplemental Demographic Index

CLIMATE CHANGE

Sea Level Rise
Wildfire Risk
Flood Risk
Extreme Heat
100 Year Floodplain



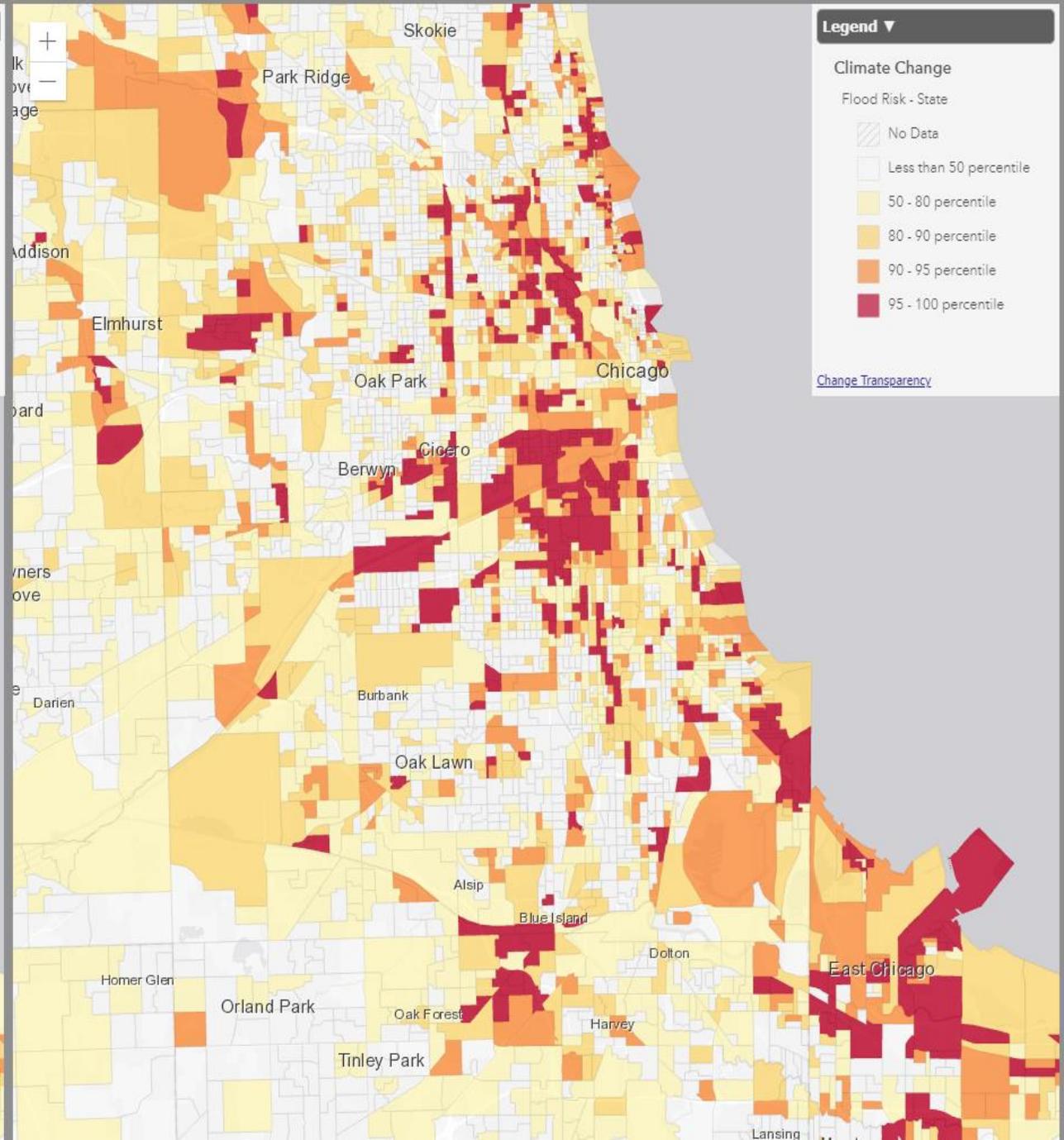
Legend ▾

Climate Change

Flood Risk - National

- No Data
- Less than 50 percentile
- 50 - 80 percentile
- 80 - 90 percentile
- 90 - 95 percentile
- 95 - 100 percentile

[Change Transparency](#)



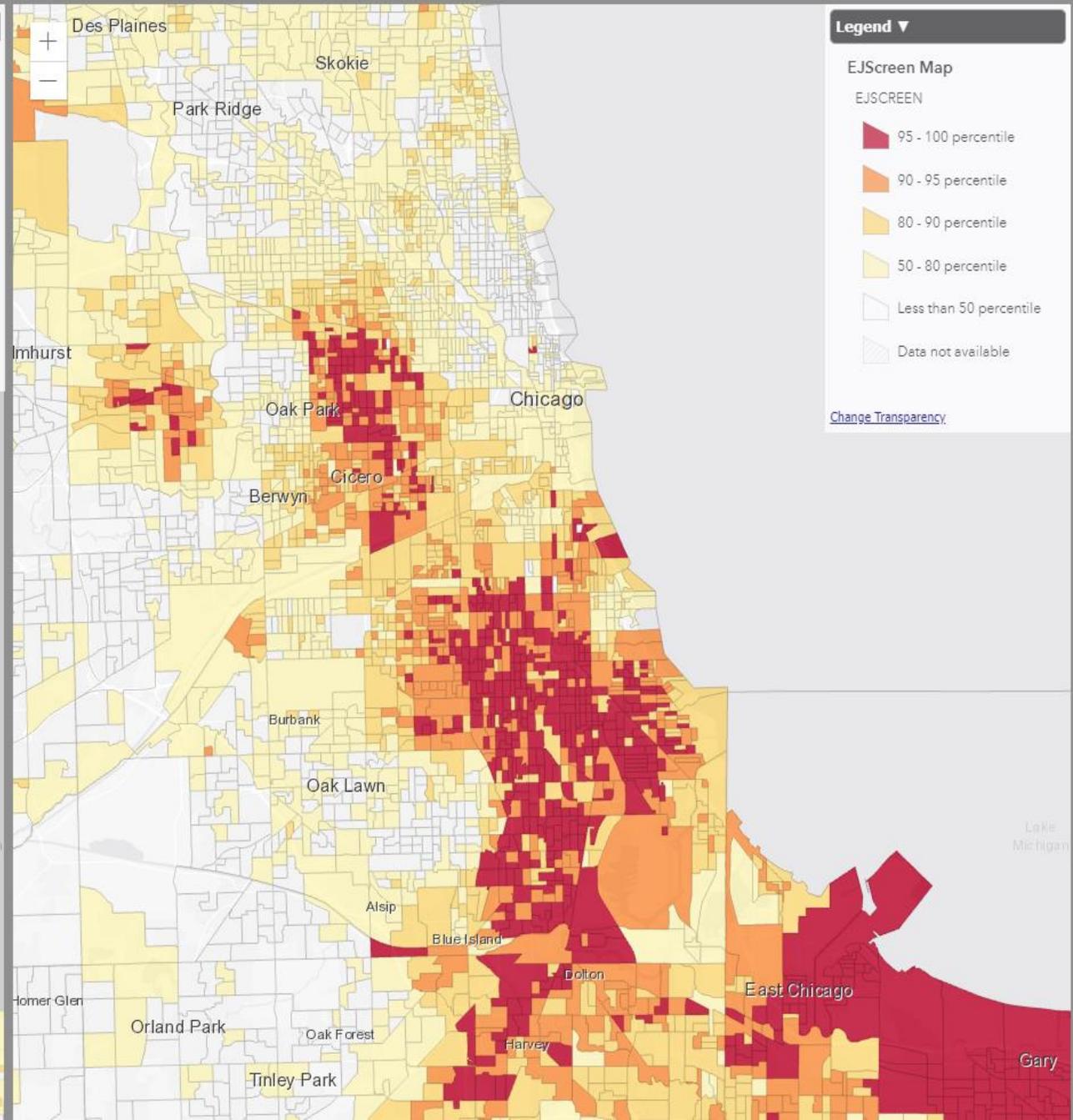
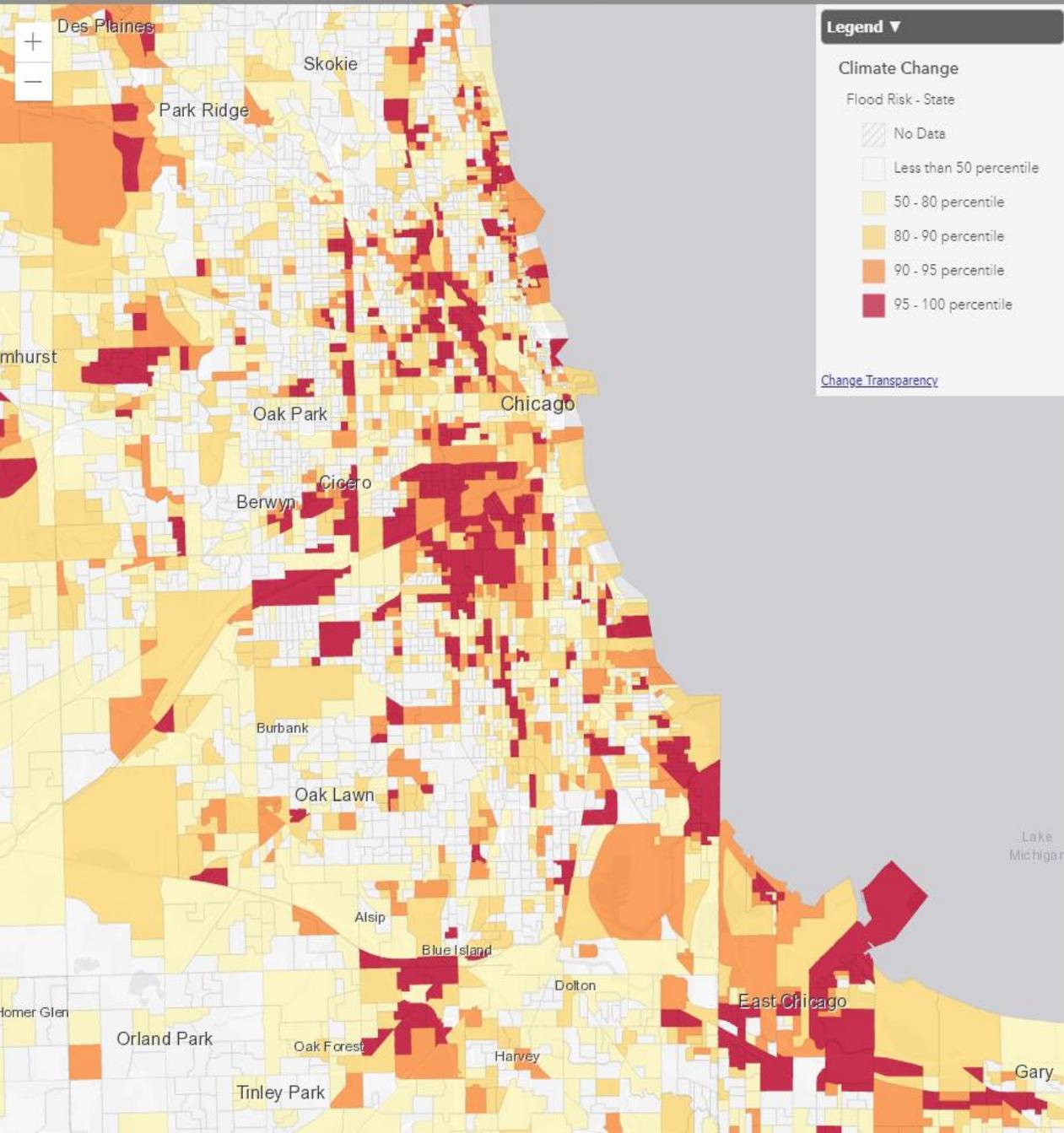
Legend ▾

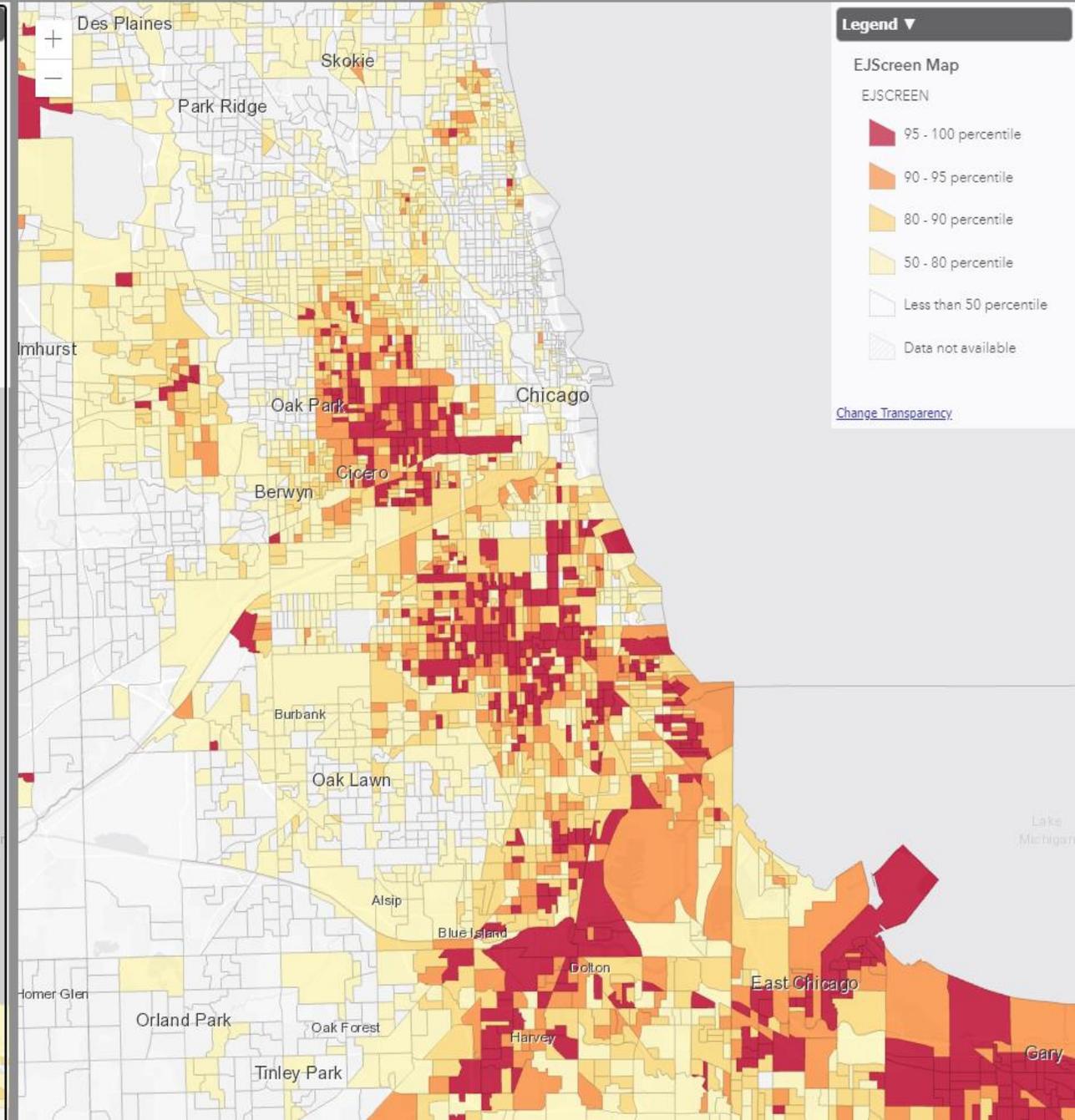
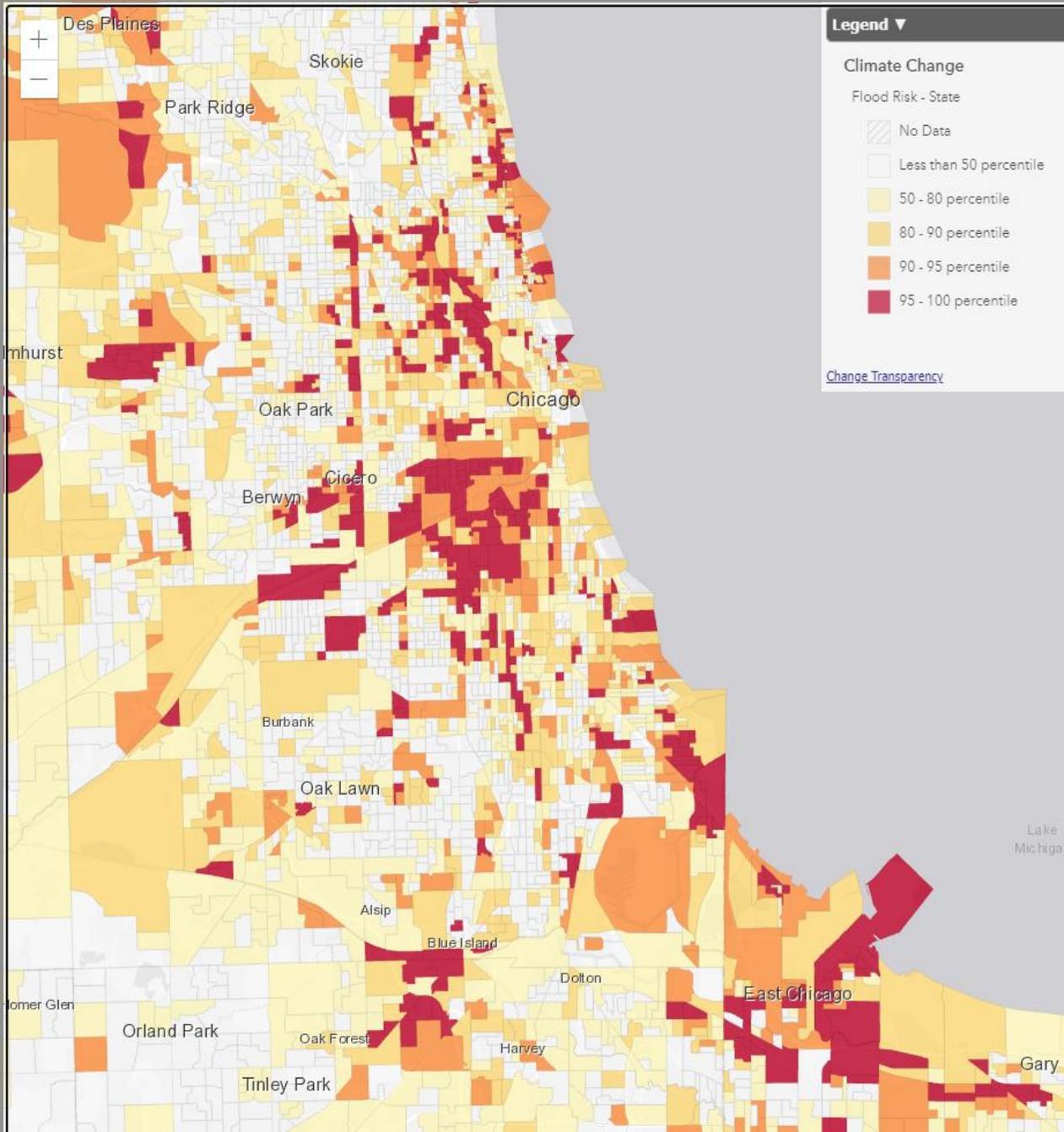
Climate Change

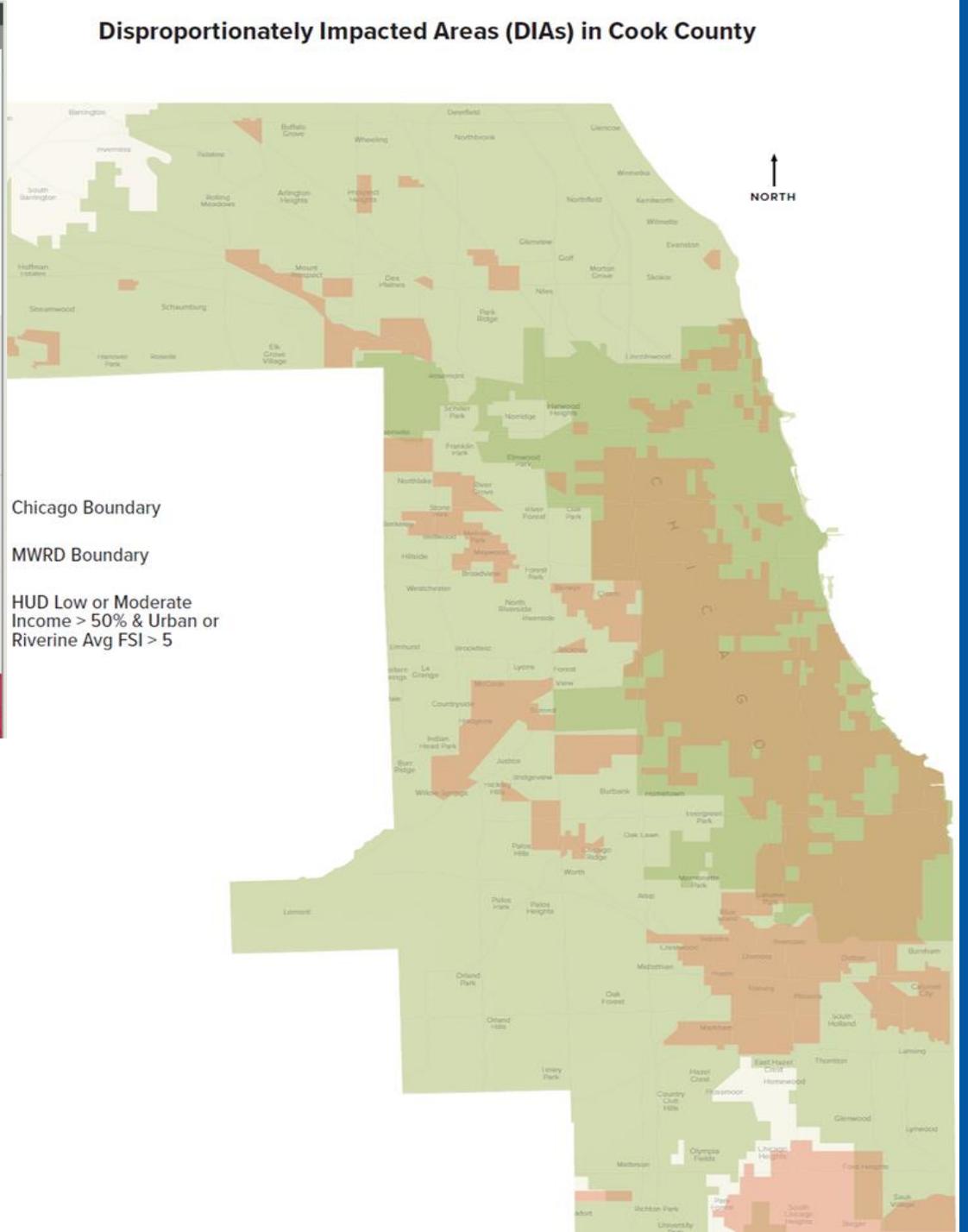
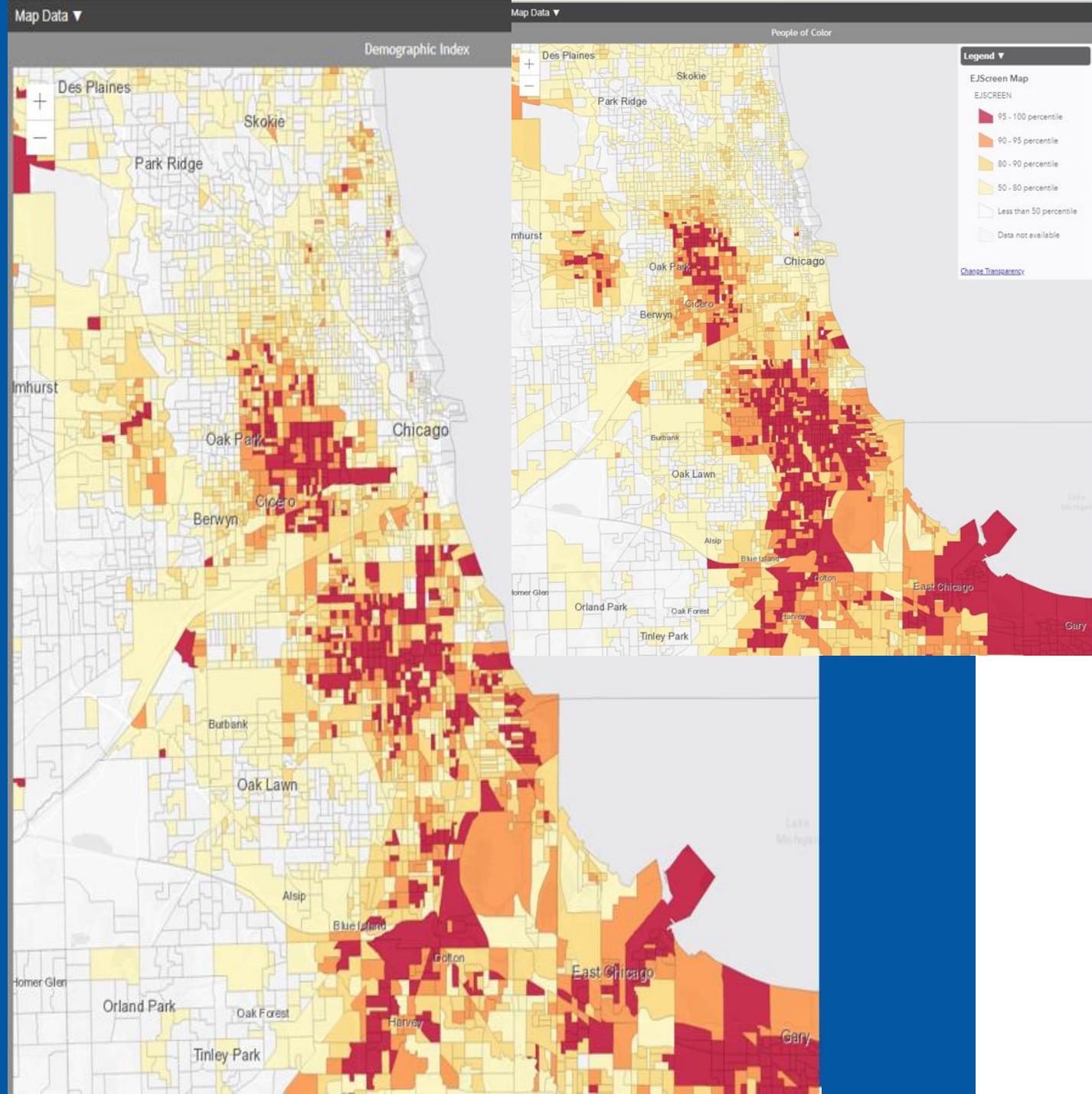
Flood Risk - State

- No Data
- Less than 50 percentile
- 50 - 80 percentile
- 80 - 90 percentile
- 90 - 95 percentile
- 95 - 100 percentile

[Change Transparency](#)









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How does EJ In Action work?

We focus on 3 areas:

- Community Outreach
- Technical Analysis/Policy
- Workforce Development



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- Facilitate and lead
- Speak at various
- saving our enviro
- Participate in con

Government



Partnerships

10th Ward Alderman Peter Chico



9th Ward Alderman Anthony A. Beale



Golden Gate Homeowners Association (GGHA)



US Army Corps of Engineers





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Technical Analysis

- Assist Departments in contacting EJ communities with compliance issues and review forms and documents for user-friendliness
- Identify opportunities to increase EJ community awareness about MWRD and our role with stormwater and wastewater management
- Develop hands-on tools to teach communities about wastewater treatment and stormwater management





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ALLIANCE *for the*
GREAT LAKES

Technical Assistance Project

Building local capacity to equitably implement Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Projects in underserved communities (Emerging Water Equity Program -Alliance for Great Lakes)



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning

The Nature
Conservancy



Stormwater
MANAGEMENT COMMISSION
LAKE COUNTY, IL



ALLIANCE *for the*
GREAT LAKES



Metropolitan
Mayors
Caucus



Sustainable Communities
Attainable Results



openlands
conserving nature for life



TRUST FOR
PUBLIC
LAND™



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UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



FOREST
PRESERVES
of Cook County



ARCADIS



THE WETLANDS
INITIATIVE



OPPORTUNITY
ADVANCEMENT
INNOVATION
in WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

delta
institute





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Water Research Foundation Projects

- Incorporating Equity and Social Dimension into Community Climate Adaptation Planning and Watershed Management (WRF 5180)
- Improved Equity and Environmental Justice in Asset Management (WRF 5181)
- DEI Best Practices - Utility Collaboration Workshop



Policy Groups

GSI Accelerator Program (Center for Regenerative Solutions)

- Collaborative team of professionals from TNC, Friends of the Chicago River, CNT, Illinois Water Justice Council, et al., who are working to advance the use of nature-based solutions and GI to equitably address flooding and climate challenges
- Learn about new policies that can help advance GI and unlock federal funding
- Community driven GI
- Emerging BMPs
- Learn what other cities are doing to leverage federal funding around GI



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Policy Groups

One Water Council Advisory Group (US Water Alliance)

- Explore opportunities by mapping current relationships and efforts
- Identify barriers and elevate state policy needs
- Research successful examples and develop recommendations to share with the broader network
- Envision the future of state policy for water infrastructure and the roles for the Alliance and One Water movement



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Policy Groups

Moving Toward a Strong and Equitable Water Workforce Taskforce (US Water Alliance)

- Understand our local water workforce landscape and opportunities
- Explore effective strategies, programs, policies, and best practices that address both the quantity and equity challenges in the nation's water utility workforce
- Implement strategies that meaningfully address key workforce challenges and barriers locally



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How can EJ impact my job?



**The Environmental Justice Section
was established in the 2022 Budget to:**

**Address justice and equity issues within our
organization and in the communities we serve.**

**Coordinate and strengthen existing
Environmental Justice activities and promote
awareness of EJ concerns in future District
projects as outlined in the Enterprise
Resilience goal in the MWRD's Strategic Plan
in conjunction with the Climate Action Plan.**

**Implement Diversity, Equity, and
Inclusion (DEI) programs internally as
detailed in the MWRD's Workforce
Excellence goal.**

2022 Budget

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Final Budget

Adopted December 9, 2021

Amended December 16, 2021





Variety of Terms and Acronyms Associated with DEI

- **DEI (Diversity Equity and Inclusion)**
- **D&I (Diversity and Inclusion)**
- **DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging)**
- **EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)**
- **JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)**
- **I&D (Inclusion and Diversity)**



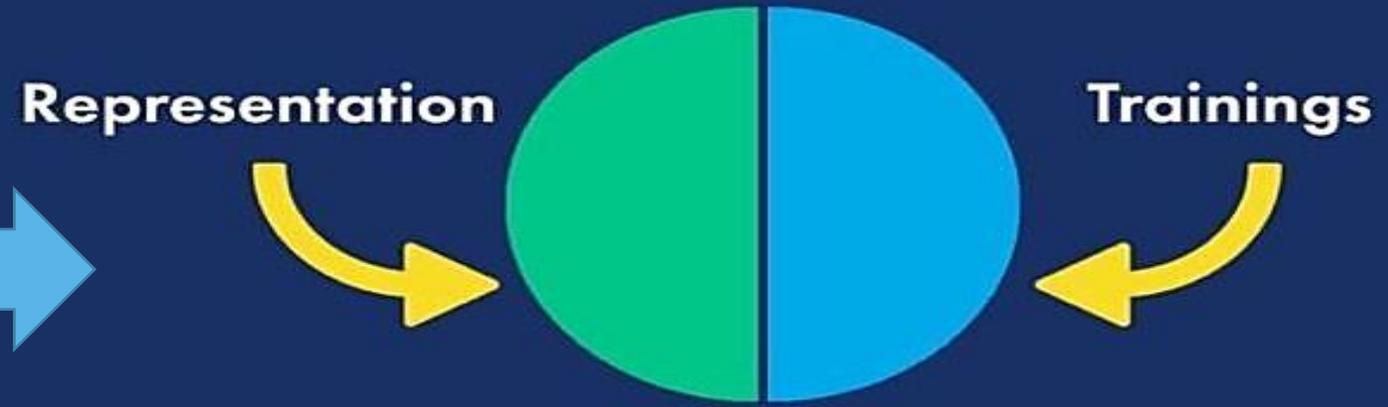
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What is DEI?

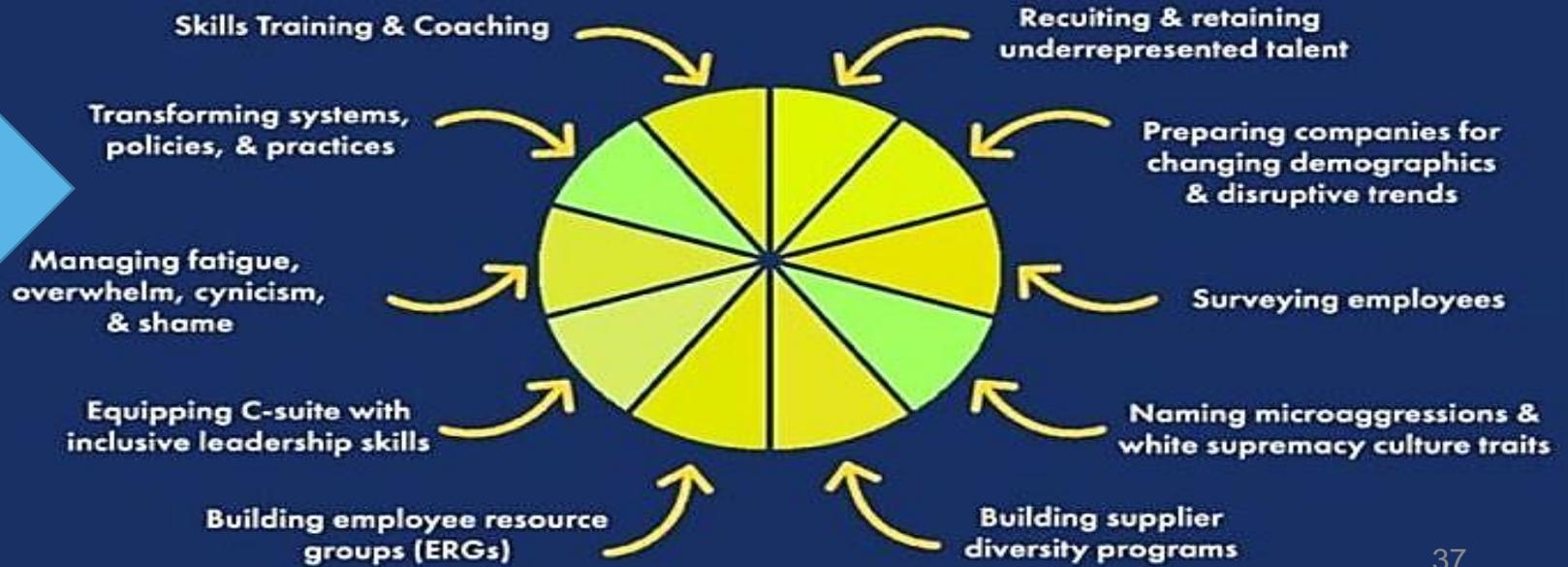


DEI is the umbrella term for the programs, policies, strategies, and practices that implement a company's mission to create and sustain a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment that respects and accommodates every employee's needs.

What people think DEI issues are:



What DEI issues actually are:



Perception →

VS

Reality →

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity: The representation of different and unique identities, backgrounds, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives.

Equity: Ensuring that everyone is treated fairly and justly and has equal access to resources and opportunities.

Inclusion: Creating environments where people feel welcomed, respected, and valued, and can fully participate.

Diversity is less about what makes people different and more about understanding and valuing those differences.





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Why are DEI principles essential to the broader EJ movement?





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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is critically important to Environmental Justice (EJ) efforts because it ensures that the voices, experiences, and needs of historically marginalized communities are centered in the fight for environmental sustainability and social equity.



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DEIJ is where DEI and EJ meet



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are closely related to Environmental Justice (EJ) because both areas focus on ensuring that ALL people are treated fairly and have meaningful involvement in decision-making processes.





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How do we implement DEIJ?



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Addressing Systemic Inequalities

Environmental Justice seeks to address the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by low-income communities, people of color, and Indigenous groups. These communities are more likely to suffer the negative impacts of flooding, live near hazardous waste sites, experience higher levels of pollution, and have less access to clean air, water, and green spaces.

Without DEI, environmental policies and actions may continue to overlook or exclude these communities, perpetuating systemic inequalities.



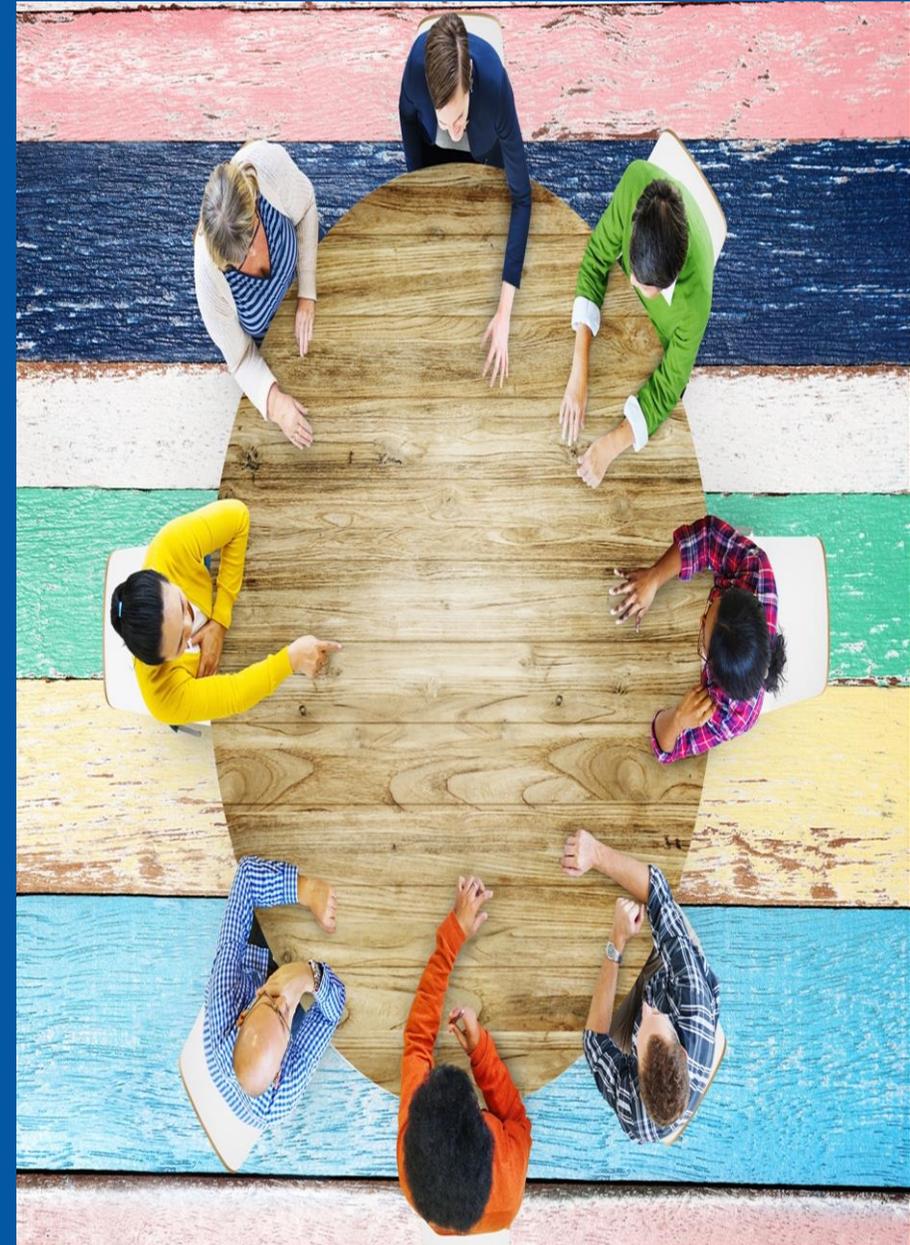


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Promoting Inclusive Decision-Making

Environmental policies and solutions should reflect the needs and concerns of all stakeholders, especially those who are directly impacted by environmental issues.

DEI frameworks ensure that marginalized groups have a seat at the table, allowing them to participate in decision-making processes that affect their communities. This helps to create policies that are more effective, just, and sustainable.





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Recognizing Intersectionality

DEI highlights the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of various social factors, such as race, class, income, gender, and geography. Environmental issues are not isolated—they intersect with other social injustices.

For example, women of color may face unique challenges in accessing clean water or safe housing, and people with disabilities may be disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards. By considering these intersections, DEI approaches can address the full scope of injustices that marginalized communities face.





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Building Trust & Coalition-Building

In many communities, there is a historical mistrust of government institutions, corporations, and even environmental organizations, often due to past exploitation or exclusion.

DEI efforts help rebuild trust by creating spaces for dialogue, empowering local leaders, and fostering collaboration between diverse groups. Effective environmental justice efforts depend on strong, diverse coalitions that work together to advocate for policy changes and community resilience.





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Fostering Sustainable and Just Solutions

DEI ensures that solutions to environmental problems don't just focus on technical fixes, but also consider social and economic factors. A truly just environmental policy must address both the environmental degradation and the social injustices that often go hand in hand. This might include improving access to green jobs, addressing housing inequality, or ensuring access to healthcare and education in communities impacted by environmental pollution.



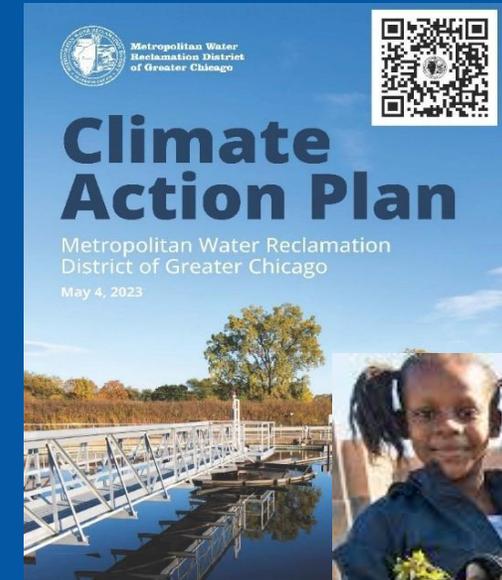


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Long-Term Impact and Sustainability

For environmental justice efforts to be truly sustainable, they must include long-term strategies that promote economic, social, and environmental well-being for all communities.

DEI efforts contribute to these long-term goals by ensuring that policies and practices do not just benefit the privileged but uplift all people, creating resilient and thriving communities.





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What does DEI look like at MWRD?

and

Why the focus on workforce?



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Many utilities face a current workforce quantity and quality crisis. A massive wave of retirements is depleting employee ranks and leaving critical jobs unfilled. Irreplaceable know-how is at risk of being lost rather than transferred to the next generation of utility workers. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, about a third of water utility operators are eligible to retire during the next decade.



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Let's explore a few statistics to provide some context





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The majority of water utilities' 300,000 positions will need to be filled during the next decade.



Many of these jobs pay more on average compared to all occupations, including more pay for utility workers at the lower end of the income scale.



These jobs also require less formal education than jobs in other sectors and tend to involve more extensive work experience and on-the-job training.



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Generation Z: Born
between 1997 and 2012

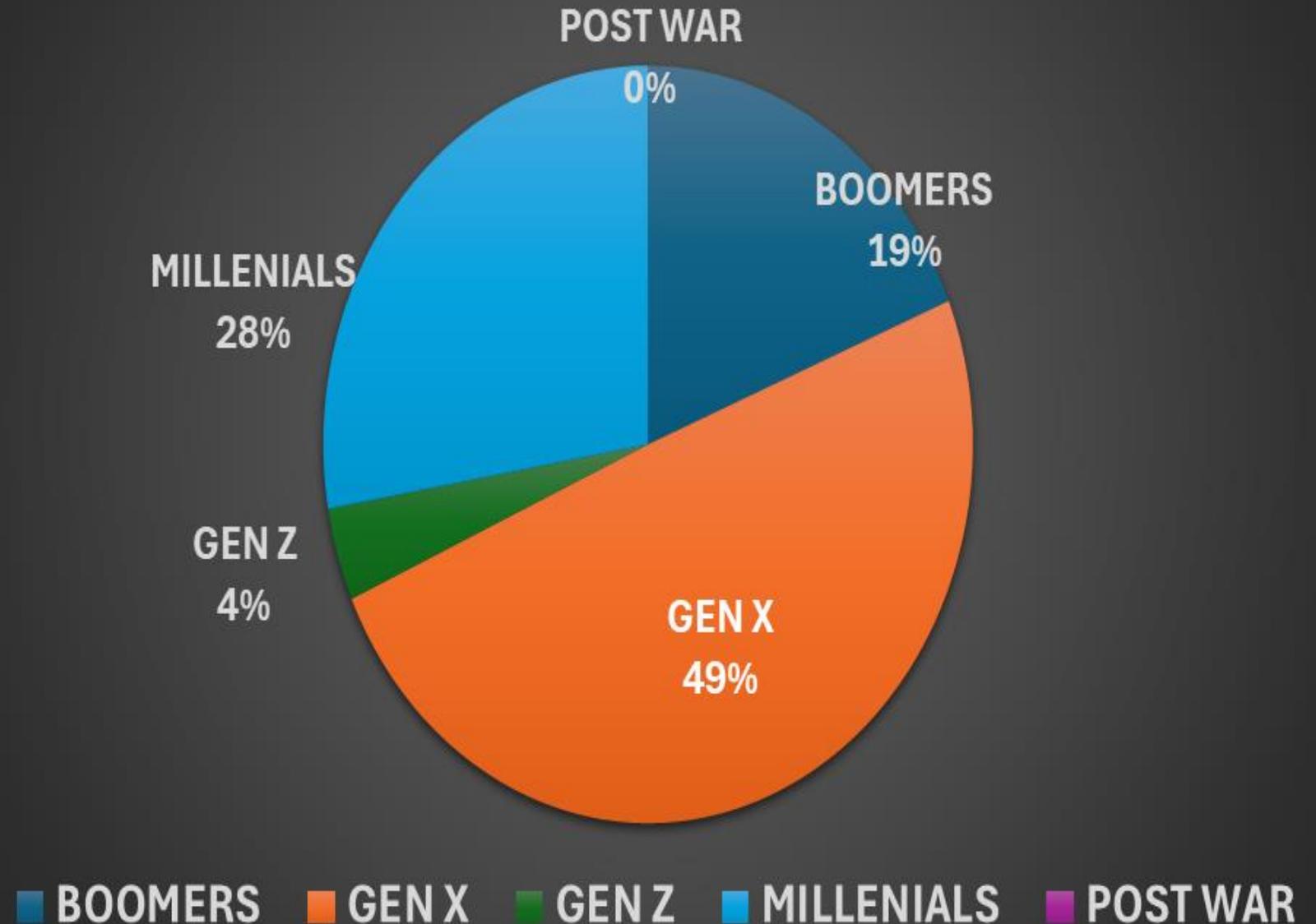
Millennials: Born between
1981 and 1996

Generation X: Born
between 1965 and 1980

Baby Boomers: Born
between 1946 and 1964

Post War: Born between
1928 – 1945

MWRD GENERATIONAL BREAKDOWN



Corporations identified as more diverse and inclusive are 35% more likely to outperform their competitors. *(McKinsey)*

2 out of 3 job candidates seek companies that have diverse workforces. *(Glassdoor)*

74% of millennial employees believe their organization is more innovative when it has a culture of inclusion, and 47% actively look for diversity and inclusion when sizing up potential employers. *(Deloitte)*

Millennials are 83% more likely to be engaged at work at inclusive companies. *(Deloitte)*

DEI initiatives are 2.6 times more likely to increase employee engagement and improve retention *(Josh Bersin Academy -2020)*

41% of Black and LGBTQ job seekers will not even apply to a job when there is a lack of diversity in the company. *(HBR)*

78% of employees who responded to a Harvard Business Review study said they work at organizations that lack diversity in leadership positions. *(HBR)*

Importance of Diverse Recruitment and Workforce Development Strategies

Increased Innovation: Different backgrounds and viewpoints lead to more creative problem-solving and innovative solutions.

Expanded Talent Pool: Accessing a broader range of qualified candidates from underrepresented groups.

Improved Employee Morale and Retention: Employees feeling valued and included are more likely to stay with the company.

Better Stakeholder Understanding: Diverse teams can better cater to the needs of a varied customer base.

Enhanced Employer Brand: A reputation for diversity attracts top talent and improves company image.

Stronger Decision Making: Diverse perspectives lead to more well-rounded decision-making processes.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

ERGs are voluntary, employee-led groups that bring together employees who share common interests, experiences, backgrounds, and/or goals.

ERGs provide a space for employees to connect with others who share similar experiences and to advocate for changes within the organization that support diversity, equity, and inclusion.

These groups help to create a more engaged and empowered workforce.



What is the value of establishing an ERG program?

- Fostering personal and professional development opportunities
- Building relationships and expanding organizational networks
- Improving creativity and innovation
- Contributing to building a more inclusive organizational culture
- Impacting organizational goals and objectives





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Internship Programs

By adopting inclusive recruitment policies and establishing a diverse company culture from the outset, internship programs can appeal to greater numbers of applicants. Furthermore, over time, they can address issues around the sector's lack of diversity.



Partnering with Local Colleges and Universities

Environmental Justice section hosted a visit of representatives from the City Colleges of Chicago to the Stickney WRP. EJ is partnering with the City Colleges with hopes of developing apprentice programs for TPOs and curriculum paths related to Wastewater Treatment.



Engage Future Leaders

MWRD hosted youth from the **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) Future Leaders in Planning (FLIP)** summer program. Through FLIP, high school students from northeastern Illinois explore the field of urban planning and learn about career paths and opportunities to get involved in urban planning, urban design, sustainability, public policy, government, transportation, environmental planning, water supply, community development, and public engagement.



Engage Local Workforce Development and Training Programs

Chicago Women in the Trades (CWIT)

Apprentice tradeswomen from CWIT participate in Job Shadow Day at SWRP.

With only 3% of skilled trades being women, CWIT is dedicated to changing those numbers by providing support, education, advocacy, and leadership development. MWRD is proud to support their efforts.



Youth Outreach





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In Conclusion

Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into Environmental Justice efforts is not just a matter of fairness; it is a strategic approach to creating effective, equitable, and lasting solutions to environmental challenges.

Together
we CAN and
WILL make a
DIFFERENCE!

