

Pursuant to Executive Order 13985 (January 20, 2021) on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

Equity Action Plan Summary

U.S. Department of the Interior

The Department of the Interior (DOI) protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its trust and treaty responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and affiliated Island Communities.

Delivering equity through DOI

DOI protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage, and provides scientific and other information about those resources. DOI also plays a central role in how the United States stewards its public lands, increases environmental protections, pursues environmental justice, and ensures that underserved communities can access and benefit from outdoor space and recreation. DOI is also the primary federal agency charged with honoring the United States' trust responsibility to American Indian and Alaska Native people and special commitments to Native Hawaiians. DOI plays a critical role in maintaining nation-to-nation relationships with federally recognized Indian Tribes, and promoting and supporting Tribal self-determination. The Department is leaning into its moral and legal responsibilities to Tribes by honoring sovereignty and reckoning with DOI's role in the history of injustice and marginalization of indigenous people. Leaders are learning from past mistakes through nation-to-nation consultation, listening for understanding, using evidence and data for decision-making, and employing analytic tools to advance and promote equity and justice in all that we do for Tribes, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and the American public.

New strategies to advance equity

- **Build a foundation for equitable policymaking by improving the collection and quality of equity-related data**

DOI recognizes that to address mission-related equity barriers, it must improve the data it collects and uses. DOI currently lacks the data needed to truly identify the barriers that underserved communities may face in accessing key DOI programs and services. Improved equity data, including demographic data, would allow DOI to answer equity-related questions such as whether underserved communities have equitable access to recreation activities and whether underserved businesses have equitable access to contracting opportunities. To address this barrier, DOI will strengthen its overarching data strategy to improve the collection and quality of equity-related data.

- **Heighten awareness of opportunities and address structural barriers within DOI processes that hinder participation by underserved communities in DOI procurements**

DOI has met and exceeded its annual goal for contracting with small disadvantaged businesses (SDBs) for the past 14 years, but DOI will further maximize opportunities for underserved communities and address barriers that SDBs continue to face, including limited communication between DOI and vendors and complex processes that are particularly challenging for new or less experienced businesses to navigate. To address these barriers, DOI will modernize its small business counseling and support services to expand access to opportunities, increase opportunities for Indian-owned economic enterprises, create a new innovation team to drive equitable contracting strategies, and strengthen communication about contracting opportunities for underserved communities.

- **Advance equity for Native communities by improving access to grants for Tribes**

Tribal Nations face significant barriers and administrative burdens in accessing funding available through DOI's Tribal discretionary grants program. Many Tribes are either unaware of the range of grant

New strategies to advance equity

opportunities (at DOI and other federal agencies) available to them, may lack the technical capacity required to apply for grant opportunities, or are constrained by the complex and redundant forms required to apply for grants. DOI has also found that the demand for grant resources for Tribes nearly always exceeds the funding available. To address these barriers, DOI will improve transparency in the grantmaking process and will expand technical assistance for Tribes. DOI will also partner with Tribal Colleges and Universities to build capacity for Tribes to access federal funding and will streamline the application process.

● **Increase opportunities for underserved communities to access public lands and expand access to recreation services in urban communities**

Public land visitation data suggests that certain underserved communities are underrepresented as public land visitors relative to their presence in the U.S. population at large. Members of economically disadvantaged urban communities, especially families who do not own vehicles, may face challenges accessing public lands and recreation services in their vicinity due to limited transportation options and cost prohibitions. Addressing barriers to recreation on public lands will enable more Americans to enjoy these sites and reap the physical and mental health benefits associated with green space and outdoor recreation. DOI will strengthen its partnership with the Department of Transportation to expand bus routes and other transportation supports to access public lands and National Parks. DOI will also expand work with a wide range of non-profits (including cooperative associations, youth programs, and partners that promote diversity in outdoor access) to provide free or low-expense facilitated experience programs that introduce people to recreation. DOI will also advance equity through its programs that provide technical or financial assistance to communities, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Building on DOI's progress

This equity action plan builds on DOI's progress delivering on equity and racial justice in the first year of the Biden-Harris Administration.

- **Strengthening Tribal consultation**

On August 21, 2021, Interior Secretary Haaland issued a detailed plan to improve tribal consultation. The Plan highlights that tribal consultation offers a means for weaving tribal input into the Department's decision-making processes and that integration should be second nature for all Interior officials.

- **Addressing the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People**

On November 15, 2021, President Biden directed DOI to partner with the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services to create a strategy to improve public safety and justice for Native Americans and to address the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous peoples. American Indian and Alaska Native people are at a disproportionate risk of experiencing violence, murder, or going missing and make up a significant portion of the missing and murdered cases. The Administration has established the Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) within the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Justice Services (BIA-OJS) to investigate missing and murdered cases in pursuit of justice for those affected by violence.

- **Addressing the legacy of Indian Boarding Schools**

For more than a century, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was involved in the operation and oversight of Indian boarding schools in the United States. On June 22, 2021, the Secretary of the Interior announced the Boarding School Initiative (BSI) to recover the histories of these institutions as well as learn of the traumas suffered in the boarding school era to better understand impacts on communities today. As the first steps in addressing Indian boarding school policies and their effects, the BSI will develop

Building on DOI's progress

an initial collection and review of DOI documents and records through a compilation of existing data within the Department's jurisdiction. DOI staff will develop a BSI Report due to the Secretary by April 1, 2022, that will highlight strategies for addressing identified next steps.

- **Delivering environmental justice**

DOI plays a crucial role in delivering the Justice40 Initiative, which will ensure that 40 percent of the overall benefits from federal investments in clean energy programs go to disadvantaged communities. As Justice 40 also seeks to develop robust outreach plans for meaningful input from EJ communities, DOI is engaging with individuals and organizations interested in advancing equity in low-income communities and communities of color to identify barriers and better ensure benefits flow to these communities in the future.

- **Hosting equity listening sessions and receiving public comments**

The Department hosted 15 listening sessions in 2021 with senior leadership in the Department and 1,700 diverse participants from across the country. Meeting summaries for all sessions, as well as a recommendations report from the third-party facilitator, have been posted to the DOI's website to enable stakeholders and partner groups to learn more about the conversations had during the listening sessions. DOI also posted notices in the Federal Register inviting public comments on the barriers experienced in accessing DOI programs. Those public comments informed DOI's Equity Action Plan.

- **Advancing equitable access to the outdoors**

Executive Order 14008 created the first-ever national goal for stewardship of nature in America, to conserve at least 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030. In 2021, DOI released an initial America the Beautiful report, which includes a key strategy on addressing inequitable access to the outdoors, creating more parks and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-

Building on DOI's progress

deprived communities. In addition, several of the Department's bureaus are pursuing efforts to improve understanding of who is visiting DOI managed lands and waters and pair that information with public interactions, tastes, preferences, trends, values, behaviors from which we can develop strategic programming related to visitor needs, including the needs of visitors from underserved communities.

- **Implementing the Buy Indian Act**

DOI is proposing revised regulations to better implement the Buy Indian Act, which provides the Department with authority to set aside procurement contracts for Indian-owned and controlled businesses. These revisions would eliminate barriers that inhibit Indian Economic Enterprises (IEEs) from competing on certain construction contracts, expand IEEs' ability to subcontract construction work consistent with other socio-economic set-aside programs, and give greater preference to IEEs when a deviation from the Buy Indian Act is necessary, among other updates.

- **Launching a Law Enforcement Task Force**

In July 2021, DOI established a law enforcement task force to implement the highest standards for protecting the public and provide necessary policy guidance, resources, and training to agency personnel, with a focus on equity and evidence-based decision making. The task force focuses on ways to strengthen public trust and confidence in Interior's law enforcement programs, keep our communities safe, ensure appropriate policy and oversight is implemented, and assure supportive resources are available for officer mental health, wellness, and safety.

- **Embedding equity in land and water conservation programs**

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) supports conservation, recreation, and related projects that enhance the management of and public access to existing public land and resources. Some bureaus have already updated their LWCF project ranking criteria to reflect EO 13985 values and other environmental justice considerations.

Building on DOI's progress

- **Expanding access to the National Park System**

On November 17, 2021, the Department of the Interior and Department of Transportation entered into a memorandum of understanding with the goal of improving transportation within and access to national parks and public lands for underserved communities and people with disabilities.