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## **Soil and Water Conservation Society Releases a New Resource to Integrate DEI in Conservation Efforts**

(ANKENY, IA) — Today, the Soil and Water Conservation Society ([SWCS](https://www.swcs.org)) proudly announces the release of a groundbreaking guidebook titled “A Conservation Professionals’ Guide to Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Conservation Delivery with Historically Underserved Producers and Communities.” This guidebook serves as a resource for conservation professionals and policymakers to understand the barriers historically underserved communities face in implementing conservation practices and how to equitably address these barriers to provide community-led conservation technical assistance that meets the specific needs of historically underserved producers and communities.

"Diversity strengthens conservation; inclusion ensures its reach. Conservation professionals play a vital role in weaving together a future where every voice matters and every ecosystem thrives," says Clare Lindahl, CEO of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. "This guidebook offers a meaningful entry point and actionable guidance towards a more equitable conservation delivery system."

The involvement of historically underserved producers in conservation programming has been very low throughout the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s history. Addressing this issue and advancing conservation requires acknowledging the past injustices and inequities that created barriers for historically underserved communities to access and participate in conservation programs. This guidebook details these barriers and provides actionable recommendations for how conservation professionals can work to address them as they go through the nine-step conservation planning process. Importantly, the guidebook adds a preparatory phase that includes self-education on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues, trust and relationship building, and intentional outreach. This guidebook also provides language recommendations, term and acronym explanations, national policy recommendations, and helpful reading materials and resources.

“The beauty of this project is centering the input of stakeholders representing historically underserved communities and making that input the focus of the guidebook,” said Candace Spencer, project lead and Mediator and Program Manager at [Meridian Institute](#). “The financial recognition of their time and experience is also key. We’re excited to share the final guidebook because it will truly be an equitable engagement tool that benefits historically underserved communities and helps NRCS live out its vision.”

The recommendations outlined in this guidebook were created directly from the results of focus groups with historically underserved producers, nonprofits, and conservation professionals organized and facilitated with project partner [Meridian Institute](#). Several steps were taken to ensure the focus group participants had a safe space to openly and honestly discuss the barriers and needs of historically underserved communities regarding conservation technical assistance.

SWCS views this guidebook as a crucial stepping stone for conservation professionals as we begin the journey toward a more just, diverse, equitable, and inclusive conservation movement. This guidebook is a living document that will evolve and grow as discussions on DEI in conservation progress.

Funding for this project was provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. SWCS and the Meridian Institute will make the guidebook accessible to the conservation community and will seek support and partners to implement its recommendations and expand conservation. The complete guidebook can be found at [insert website link]. (493 words)

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## **About SWCS**

For seventy-nine years, the [Soil and Water Conservation Society](#) has been the premier international organization for professionals who practice and advance the science and art of natural resource conservation. We believe sustainable land and water management is essential to the continued security of the earth and its people. Our goal is to cultivate an organization of informed, dynamic individuals whose contributions create a bright future for agriculture, the environment, and society. The Soil and Water Conservation Society is headquartered in Ankeny, Iowa, with chapters across the United States and Canada.

## **About Meridian Institute**

[Meridian Institute](#) is a mission-driven, nonprofit consultancy. For over 25 years, we have helped our partners improve lives, the environment, and the economy. We produce tangible results and create a shared path forward by convening the right people, asking the right questions, and making the right connections. Across issues, boundaries, and systems, our work is a catalyst for powerful change.