



WEFMAX 2025 in Palm Springs, CA | June 4 – 6, 2025 Riviera Resort & Spa Palm Springs 1600
North Indian Canyon Drive | Palm Springs, CA 92262

VIBE: Creating Member Value, Inclusivity, Belonging, and Equity in your Member Association

THURSDAY NOTES:

9:05 – 10:30 am VIBE IN CALIFORNIA Salon A

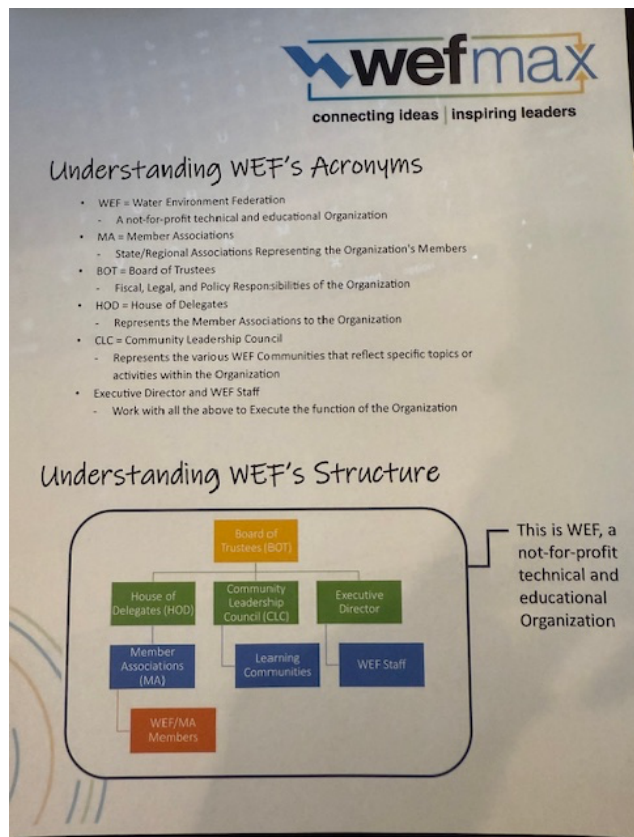
9:10 VALUE

Garry Parker, California Water Environment Assn.

Gave opening comments about the theme VIBE and how it relates to our time together and how we embody it by being together to share ideas and learn from each other.

Jenn Jones gave a reminder about housekeeping.

Lucas Billesback gave a presentation about WEF structure:



Paul Schuller, WEF Vice President thanked CWEA for hosting, WEF staff, and volunteers. He reviewed WEF's strategic plan that revolves around amplifying stories of water to grow, strengthen, and diversify the water community.

More information about their strategic plan: <https://www.wef.org/about/Governance/wef-water-future/>

WEF is selling their building, getting a new space, and embracing remote work.
WEF has an AI and Emerging Contaminants community, and they are looking for new members.

Bill Davis gave an update about the House of Delegates. He talked about the workforce shortage and how we need to inspire the next generation to be "water heroes". He made the point that inclusion is essential to make sure everyone feels like they belong.

Gary Parker talked about the tangible and intangible value of membership. Networking benefits are a tangible value, but it takes practice; MAs give their members opportunities to practice, and they build up their network over time. The resources that the MA provides also offer tangible value, as does the career advancement opportunities.

John Killips talked about inclusivity, specifically how their joint conference with Missouri AWWA brings people together. They noticed that first timers did not understand how to get value out of the event, so they created an orientation event and a buddy system, pairing new members with first time attendees. It has been a successful event that continues to grow.

Table activity – each table discussed what they do to engage their members and answered questions via QR code to report out. This activity prompted a discussion of board make-up and whether it reflects the membership. Many MAs reported that although their membership base is majority operations, boards tend to be heavy on engineers and executives.

9:45 INCLUSIVITY

Sushmitha Reddy, California Water Environment Assn.2

Sushmitha Reddy talked about how she was invited to participate in CWEA and that made her feel included and gave her an entry way into leadership in the association. She talked about the power of volunteer leadership, and how it offers powerful leadership development opportunities.

Amy Dammarell shared about their WAVE program, and how it builds a more diverse workforce. It focuses on SYPs, participants attend workshops, and the program culminates in attendance at the annual conference and presenting a session.

Table activity – each table discussed the biggest barrier to fostering inclusivity within MAs and answered questions via QR code to report out. Common themes were challenges faced by rural communities, they live farther away, have less budget for training, and staffing concerns prevent them from being able to send staff to training.

10:30 – 10:45 am BREAK

10:45 BELONGING

Stephanie Douglass, California Water Environment Assn.

Stephanie Douglass talked about belonging; the emotional aspect of feeling comfortable within the MA to share and be themselves. She shared that CWEA hosts a New Member Orientation at the Annual Conference, where new members are shown the different ways they can get involved and find belonging.

Lauren Schmidt shared how her MA fosters belonging through the Ops Challenge. She emphasized that the challenge is for everyone, including people new to the industry or those that have never competed

before. She highlighted that it is a great way to make meaningful connections and find a sense of belonging in the industry, and serves as a source of inspiration.

Table activity – each table discussed how their MA establishes a sense of belonging among new members and answered questions via QR code to report out. Common themes included outreach by board members to new members, new member orientations and “buddy systems” at conferences, as well as mentorship programs.

11:15 EQUITY

Kathryn Gies, California Water Environment Assn.

Kathryn Gies presented on equity, and spoke about CWEA’s struggle with the urban rural divide, and socioeconomic challenges. She spoke about how CWEA holds an annual Leadership Summit for volunteer leaders and staff to come together. A stipend is offered to make sure members with less funding can attend.

Table activity – each table discussed how their MA ensures members have equitable access to resources and answered questions via QR code to report out. There was a discussion about dietary restrictions and accommodations, as well as the challenges of translating materials to other languages.

11:45 am – 1:00 pm LUNCH

1:00 – 2:15 pm TOWER OF POWER ACTIVITY

2:15 – 2:30 pm BREAK

2:30 – 3:00 pm WEF MEMBER ASSOCIATION ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE: Salon A WORKSHOPS IN A BOX

Aimee Kileen presented on WEF’s “Workshop in a Box” program, and its role in helping to advance workshop development and training. MAs were able to ask questions about what the program can offer, and there was some discussion about future funding possibilities.

3:00 – 4:00 pm WEF’S COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING Salon A Steve Hamai, WEF

Steve Hamai talked about recent executive orders regarding DE&I and the impact on organizations receiving funding from the Federal Gov’t. WEF has received legal counsel about how to handle things going forward so WEF can pursue its core values while limiting risk. Legal counsel recommended some small changes to certain programs that will help WEF not run afoul of the Federal Gov’t. but overall do not need to make many changes.

4:15 DAY ONE WRAP UP

Garry Parker, California Water Environment Assn.

6:00 – 9:00 pm EVENING SOCIAL:

BOOZEHOUNDS 2080 N Palm Canyon Dr, Palm Springs, CA 92262

FRIDAY NOTES:

8:30 – 9:30 am HOUSE OF DELEGATES STRATEGIC PLANNING ACTIVITY Salon A

Lucas Billesbach, Nebraska Water Environment Association
Dave Galbraith, Atlantic Canada Water & Wastewater Association

Table Activity – each table answered a series of questions evaluating WEF’s communications and how engaged MAs feel.

9:30 – 10:00 am INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT FOR A MEMBER ASSOCIATION Salon A

Lucas Billesbach, Nebraska Water Environment Association

Steve Hamai, WEF

Lucas Billesbach presented on Nebraska WEA's success implementing DE&I in a red state. He spoke about the importance of taking these terms and giving them practical context for their members. They formed their DE&I committee during the pandemic and have used it to implement change across the organization. One way they did this was by identifying reasons why opportunities were being overlooked and creating a mini strategic plan to systematically address them. The result was increased diversity and member engagement.

10:00 – 10:15 am BREAK

10:15 – 11:15 am OPEN MIC: MEMBER ASSOCIATION BEST PRACTICES Salon A FOR INCLUSION

Facilitator: Steve Hamai, WEF

James Hawthorne spoke about WEF's DE&I committee, and let attendees know that they are looking for more members and if anyone would like to get involved they can reach out to James.

Jayla Berry spoke about her career development and involvement with WEF. She highlighted how her attendance at the Spring Board meeting gave her the opportunities to become more involved and now she is a delegate focusing on representing and bringing in more black women in water.

Jordan Lewis shared her journey into the water industry, which began with internships and a targeted gap year that gave her experience in wastewater that led her to work for a utility. She got involved in WEF and attended the Spring Board meeting and jumped in as a volunteer leader.

Table discussion - each table discussed how their MA is fostering DE&I and what initiatives they are actively working on and then reported out to the group.

11:15 – 11:45 am ATTENDEE ATTRIBUTES REVEALED! Salon A

Stephanie Douglass, California Water Environment Assn.

Gary Parker gave closing remarks, thanking everyone for their participation, and reminding them to take the theme of VIBE to heart and implement their takeaways from the conference to help move the industry forward.