



American Rivers
RIVERS CONNECT US®



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan 2020–2024

AMERICAN RIVERS

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan

2020–2024

For nearly 50 years, the mission of American Rivers has been to protect wild rivers, restore damaged rivers and conserve clean water for people and nature. Today, this mission is more vital than ever, and we envision a future of clean water and healthy rivers for everyone, everywhere. To achieve our mission and vision, we must cultivate diversity, promote equity and foster inclusion in all aspects of our work.

The beauty of rivers is that they connect people and nature everywhere. That is why “Rivers Connect Us” is more than just a tagline — it is the conviction on which we base everything we do. It is why we seek to address and correct the underlying, systemic inequities around water that affect people and communities. We must develop an internal culture that honors differences and reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. The lived experiences, perspectives, knowledge, innovation and talent that each individual and community brings to our work are critical to our effectiveness ensuring that every community in the country has clean water and a healthy river.

We cannot be complacent about our role or satisfied with business as usual in river conservation. Rather, we must see social change as an imperative. Only then will we begin to address our country’s long history of marginalization of people based on the color of their skin, how much money they have, or where they grew up. Only then will we begin to dismantle the ways in which

conservation has fed and perpetuated these inequities. It is important that we at American Rivers thoughtfully and honestly examine our operations, culture and conservation work to address these issues and that we establish a common understanding of and language for these concepts.

DIVERSITY means recognizing the many differences between people. We acknowledge and embrace these differences as we build a culture and workforce that reflects the places we serve.

EQUITY is the fair treatment of all people based on the particular needs, preferences, challenges and histories of various groups. It requires that we expand our objectives, remove barriers to participation, and redistribute resources and rights for marginalized groups so that everyone can have access to opportunities needed to reach their goals.

INCLUSION refers to creating space and opportunity for traditionally excluded groups to participate in processes, activities and decision-making. We respect the power, authority and leadership of marginalized and oppressed communities. We ensure authentic participation by sharing power, recognition, resources, and by amplifying the voices of people who are most vulnerable to the impacts of environmental threats and related policies.

COVER PHOTO: GILA RIVER, NEW MEXICO,
MASON CUMMINGS, THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

We are compelled to engage in diversity, equity and inclusion efforts for the following reasons:

Everyone deserves to be heard and valued:

- People connect with rivers in myriad ways depending on their culture and history, and therefore, should have the opportunity to care for and advocate for rivers in ways that are meaningful and culturally relevant to them. All communities — particularly those that have been historically marginalized — have the right to advocate for and participate in decision-making around access to clean water and healthy watersheds with outcomes that incorporate their values and needs.
- American Rivers must question the limitations of the cultural perspectives that are manifest in our mission, structure, interpersonal relationships and the conservation work in which we engage.
- If the organization better reflects the contributions and interests of diverse cultural and societal groups, and commits to an inclusive organizational culture, staff, board and stakeholders of all identities will feel valued and be more innovative in creating solutions to the most pressing threats to rivers and the communities that depend on them.

Diversity is a strength:

- Incorporating the knowledge and perspectives of people of differing races, ethnicities, genders, and socioeconomic levels contributes to a more robust and powerful movement to protect and restore rivers.
- Engaging and working with Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other communities of color creates a movement of river advocates and supporters that more closely reflects the diversity of our nation.
- Equitably engaging Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other communities of color will increase the strength and longevity of American Rivers by building our membership base, increasing influence across our policy and program areas, and improving the health of rivers throughout the nation.



Inequities should be addressed head on, including:

- Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other people of color are disproportionately affected by lack of access to clean water and healthy rivers, due to historic and ongoing housing and investment discriminatory practices that are ingrained in national institutions, exposing these communities disproportionately to risks associated with a variety of water-related problems including lead contamination in drinking water, combined sewer overflows, flash flooding, and failing or inadequate infrastructure.
- Rivers connect all people and communities, and each of us deserves clean water and healthy rivers, both in cities and rural areas.

To that end, diversity, equity and inclusion are central to our [2020-2024 Strategic Plan](#) and these values will inform all aspects of our work, internally and externally. This diversity, equity and inclusion plan is intended to serve as a guide rather than a static document, and it will inevitably and necessarily evolve as our staff, board and organization continue to learn and grow in this space.

American Rivers Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Plan Fiscal Years 2020-2024

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

CONSERVATION PRACTICE

American Rivers (AR) will improve the health of the nation’s rivers and address the impacts of climate change by protecting and restoring flows, connectivity, water quality and habitats.

Tactics	Benchmarks	Actions	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24
Develop and implement conservation practice and field work that equitably engages Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other people of color, promoting their participation in decision-making, equal access to clean water and healthy watersheds, and outcomes that incorporate and prioritize their values and needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation practices that engage, benefit, and prioritize the values and needs of marginalized communities. Practices are planned and executed with equity and justice explicitly in mind. Conservation practices that mitigate harm to marginalized communities and when possible rectify harms inflicted by past conservation practices. Conservation practices that encourage active and equitable engagement with partners to create joint visions for river conservation projects and programs at basin and national scales. Partnerships center the needs and expertise of marginalized communities and create opportunities for them to lead or co-lead. Conservation practices that ensure all programs (e.g., Clean Water Supply) engage a broader audience and adapt to include the diversity of ways people connect to rivers. Conservation practices that expand partnerships, power-sharing and access for marginalized communities, initially focusing on Indigenous, Black, and Latinx communities and other communities of color. This does not preclude partnerships with other community-based organizations who share our DEI values. 	Integrate DEI into Conservation Strategies Group (CSG) Program and Basin budgets, funding proposals and workplans.	X	X	X	X	X
		Identify Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other communities of color that could/should be integral to Basin and CSG Program work; incorporate community knowledge and ground truth to build on-the-ground understanding of the history of the community and the issues at hand, as well as the power dynamics between the community, local orgs, and AR.	X	X	X	X	X
		Ensure mechanisms for engagement and feedback are accessible and culturally relevant.		X	X	X	X
		Identify how river conservation supports community values and explore synergies based on AR’s priorities.	X	X	X		
		Address community engagement in relevant staff job descriptions/work plans with the goal of building relationships, understanding and trust that serve as the basis for collaborative work.			X	X	
		Create rubrics for decision-making in Basin and CSG Program work that include questions ranging from opportunities to engage marginalized communities on existing projects to evaluating those impacted by the issue being addressed and who will benefit from/be harmed by the proposed solution.				X	X
		Ensure mechanisms exist for Basin and CSG Program staff to build transparency into intentions, expectations and practices surrounding our conservation work.				X	X
		Identify avenues to share resources, funding, access, and power with marginalized communities.			X	X	X
		Define AR’s work broadly and flexibly enough to support engagement with community needs and priorities.				X	X
		Work to mitigate harm to marginalized communities even if AR can’t partner with them.					X

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.

CONSERVATION PRACTICE CONTINUED

Tactics	Benchmarks	Actions	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24
Implement systems that increase collaboration, communication and coordination of DEI goals among locations, programs and basins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement systems to build communications, collaboration and cohesion for DEI priorities among those working from different locations and on different teams ■ Work holistically to address DEI issues impacting a given geography ■ Identify and collaborate on national-level DEI strategies that transcend geography. ■ Develop comprehensive fundraising efforts that support DEI goals at watershed, regional and national level 	Collaborate with Advancement to fund comprehensive initiatives that support short- and long-term DEI goals at watershed, regional and national levels.	X	X	X	X	X
		Integrate cross programmatic approaches for achieving DEI priorities into CSG Program and Basin workplans		X	X	X	X
		Create communications systems (e.g., newsletters, Slack, etc.) between locations and teams that enhances AR-wide understanding of what teams are working on and encourages cross-functional collaborations.		X			

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.

Metrics:

- Conservation staff have clear, definable objectives within their individual workplans that intentionally imbed equity and inclusion in the work.
- All conservation staff have rubrics for decision-making in Basin and CSG Program work that include questions ranging from opportunities to engage on existing projects to evaluating those impacted by the issue being addressed and who will benefit from/be harmed by the proposed solution.
- Program and Basin-level partnerships and collaborations are representative of the broader community, specifically Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other people of color.
- Conservation staff are able to articulate on-the-ground understanding of the community and the issues at hand, as well as the power dynamics between the community, local orgs, and AR for any given project or initiative in which they are engaged.
- Conduct periodic interviews or surveys of marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous, Black, and Latinx partners on their relationship with American Rivers.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

CONSERVATION POLICY

American Rivers will be the nation’s voice for rivers, using our policy and communications expertise to advocate for a strong framework of laws, regulations, and policies that protect and restore rivers and conserve clean water.

Tactics	Benchmarks	Actions	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	
Build a strong and diverse base of public support for healthy rivers and key policy initiatives that support the needs of all communities, including marginalized communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See strategies for Strategic Priority 1 (same actions here). Support conservation policy initiatives that engage, benefit, and prioritize the values and needs of marginalized communities. Ensure policy analysis and prioritization consistently accounts for the historic and present impact on marginalized communities and, where necessary, includes <i>equitable</i> investments in conservation and infrastructure spending. Communications and advocacy efforts engage and reflect the voices of diverse audiences and constituents. Framing of environmental issues include justice, equity and disproportionate impacts. Support conservation policy that mitigates harm to marginalized communities, specifically Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other people of color. 	Create guidance on inclusive language for internal and external communication, avoiding paternalistic language, jargon, and possessive language when referring to lands and waters.	X	X				
		Integrate DEI into storytelling so it isn’t separate from “regular AR stories.”	X	X	X	X	X	
		Institutionalize a process that creates opportunities for those most impacted by environmental problems to be the direct source of the story without tokenizing the story or person.	X	X	X	X	X	
		Establish photo, and film protocols that showcase a full range of people and their experience with rivers. In addition to communities of color, consider images with non-traditional families, a variety of body types and levels of ability, etc. Guidance should consider power dynamics, avoiding exoticizing, etc.	X	X	X			
		Ensure appropriate credit and acknowledgement, including, whenever possible, an acknowledgement of Indigenous tribal land on image captions, video credits, and the convening of meetings.		X	X	X	X	
		Establish hate speech policy for managing comments and other public interaction on the organization’s social media channels.		X				
		Create rubrics for policy work that include questions ranging from what positions will AR take on directly to what positions align with our values but aren’t directly in our wheelhouse.		X	X			
		Intentionally choose media channels and language translation with specific constituencies in mind.			X	X	X	
		Give Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other marginalized communities opportunities to engage in planning, selection, and implementation of America’s Most Endangered Rivers® report.			X	X	X	
		Establish an internal system between Conservation and Advancement/Marketing and Communications that allows for more direct cataloging and sharing of stories and outcomes related to AR’s work with and within communities.					X	X
		Integrate community engagement into communications and media strategies whenever applicable.						X

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.

CONSERVATION POLICY CONTINUED

Metrics:

- AR's stories and imagery reflect a broader racial and socioeconomic diversity, as well as a greater diversity of connections to rivers and watersheds. Stories related to partnerships between American Rivers and communities should authentically represent AR's work with partners and allies, giving due credit to them.
- Event speakers and invitees (at events where AR is leading and/or participating in planning efforts) reflect gender parity, people of color and represent a broad range of socio-economic diversity.
- Annual America's Most Endangered Rivers® report and campaign reflects the stories and values of marginalized communities.
- Federal, state and local policy priorities are developed through intentional processes that engage voices representing marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous, Black, Latinx and other people of color. This is clearly reflected in Government Relations staff workplans.



PHOTO: ORSANCO

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

American Rivers will continue to be a financially sound, well-managed organization, with an equitable and inclusive culture and a diverse staff and board.

Tactics	Benchmarks	Actions	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24
Ensure internal organizational policies, programs and practices are inclusive and equitable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build capacity within American Rivers to support DEI efforts. ■ All staff/departments within AR understand their role in driving organizational progress and have specific annual goals, actions, and measures for assessing their impact integrated throughout their workplans. ■ Policies and practices are regularly evaluated on whether they may or do impact people equitably or differently based on group identity. ■ Continue to identify vendors and service providers with marginalized identities and/or who share AR's DEI values through procurement rubrics. ■ Ensure all benefits and compensation reflect American Rivers DEI values (including but not limited to inclusive benefits and fair compensation). ■ Ensure office life feels welcoming to all by addressing built environment concerns, décor, and event themes. ■ Increase transparency of organizational practices and policies (including but not limited to promotions, feedback, and pay scales). ■ Provide staff with the financial resources, tools and structures to uphold American Rivers DEI values (including but not limited to internal grants for projects, professional development, mitigating bias in evaluations, effective feedback structures). ■ Major donor prospecting is broader and innovative. 	Develop gift acceptance and fundraising policies that include the organization's inclusion, justice and equity values.		X			
		Competencies related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded in all job descriptions and the performance review process.			X	X	X
		Make pay ranges for position levels transparent to all employees.		X			
		Create staff evaluation structures that allow staff to provide feedback across hierarchies and create accountability for integrating feedback received.			X	X	
		Develop a rubric or amend existing procurement policy to include criteria for soliciting, evaluating, and selecting vendors and other contractors with marginalized identities and/or those who share AR's DEI values.		X	X	X	
		Maintain on an ongoing basis a list of vendors that share or exemplify AR's DEI values (i.e. seek out B-Corps, women/people of color owned vendors to solicit services from).			X	X	X
		Increase staffing and budget of HR department to support internal DEI efforts.			X	X	X
		Conduct biennial compensation study that examines pay and benefits equity. Summary results are shared with staff.				X	
		Engage in education to support broadening the donor base, such as education around cultural differences in giving and disrupting the colonial history of philanthropy.			X	X	X
		Develop a plan for a permanent equity and inclusion position to support internal DEI efforts. Position should be vested with an adequate budget and decision-making authority to successfully carry out their role.			X	X	
Periodically audit benefits and workplace policies to ensure they are equitable and inclusive.		X	X	X	X	X	

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE CONTINUED

Tactics	Benchmarks	Actions	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	
Cultivate and sustain an inclusive organizational culture throughout American Rivers where all staff feel valued and a sense of belonging and where there is accountability at all levels for cultivating inclusive environments and integrating feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All staff share a responsibility for consistently exhibiting behaviors that contribute to achieving and experiencing the aspirational culture and positive impacts of AR's values. Aspirational culture is defined within the context of behaviors everyone is expected to practice and for which they will be held accountable. ■ Invest in inclusive leadership training and executive coaching for staff leaders. ■ Structures to support inclusivity during decision-making and delegation when appropriate. ■ Continued knowledge and confidence building about DEI for AR staff (including but not limited to trainings, article sharing, internal sharing about lessons learned) in service of initiating and participating in difficult conversations. ■ Support a variety of single identity affinity groups in service of DEI both for privileged and marginalized identities. ■ Cultivate a culture of feedback and accountability by implementing anonymous bias incident reporting and 360-degree feedback for staff that include feedback regarding upholding American Rivers DEI values. ■ Establish support systems for staff who might face backlash from members/grantors/partners who do not share our DEI values and/or engage in inappropriate behavior. 	Develop a continuing education plan and budget that allows for ongoing learning opportunities for staff tied to inclusion, justice and equity competencies. This can include trainings on topics such as having difficult conversations and managing for equity; establishing a reading/article club; and creating an online resource repository.		X	X	X	X	
		Develop policy and guidance for development of employee resource groups. Continue to support existing employee-led groups, including the Women's Leadership Group, and encourage development of others (e.g. People of Color, White people, Men, LGBTQIA+).		X	X	X		
		Create a professional development pool of funding so more people can have access to training.				X	X	
		Create team and individual coaching pools of funding to support teams and staff with engaging in difficult conversations.				X	X	
		Develop accountability measures for staff around fostering an inclusive organizational culture, including incorporating inclusion, justice and equity into promotions, implementing a bias reporting system to address inappropriate/exclusive staff, donor, partner, or volunteer behaviors.			X	X		
		Provide guidelines for staff around décor to avoid any offensive or culturally appropriative images or posters.						X

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE CONTINUED

Tactics	Benchmarks	Actions	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24
Recruit and hire staff that represent the diversity of the communities AR engages and seeks to engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Continue work to cast a wider net in recruitment (e.g., HBCUs, Diversityjobs, Black Association of Accounting, Doris Duke Conservation alumni, RAY Fellowship for conservation jobs, Green Leadership Trust for board positions) ■ Work with staff to prioritize engaging with groups representing marginalized and low-income communities and then sharing job postings with their more diverse networks. ■ Ensure candidates can see themselves and their connections to rivers reflected in American Rivers conservation work, communications products and AR's employment branding. ■ Train hiring managers to mitigate bias in the hiring process ■ Implement an AR-wide paid internship program with a focus on people with marginalized identities and find additional ways to establish bridge programs supporting employment at AR (e.g. K-12 engagement). 	Create consistency across AR in equitable and inclusive recruitment and hiring practices by updating our hiring and recruitment policy.		X	X		
		Edit job descriptions and posted hiring opportunities to mitigate bias.		X	X		
		Establish accountability measures and metrics for hiring managers based on adherence to hiring policy and equity and justice goals		X	X		

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.

Metrics:

- Marked improvement in culture/climate audit responses when administered every 18 months-2 years, both overall and as it relates to staff holding marginalized identities.
- All staff, including Advancement and Finance and Administration, have clear, definable objectives within their individual workplans that intentionally imbed equity and inclusion in the work.
- All staff can articulate why diversity, equity and inclusion is imperative to our work and specifically what they are doing to embed this in their work.
- Pay equity (across gender and race) confirmed by regular compensation/pay equity studies. To the extent possible, results are shared with staff and board of directors.
- Organization is positioned to set numerical goals for both vendors and contractors whose values align with our DEI core value, as well as a donor pool comprised of women and people of color.
- Staff across AR locations better represent the racial and ethnic diversity both nationally and of the communities engaged.

A Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Board

“The American Rivers board of directors recognizes that diversity, equity and inclusion are intrinsic and vital to our mission **to protect wild rivers, restore damaged rivers, and conserve clean water for humans and nature**. As with any ecosystem, diversity is essential to our success and sustainability. As a board, we will actively cultivate diversity, promote equity and foster inclusion in all aspects of our work. We recognize that, to be successful in our mission, we must remain relevant and connected to the communities we serve. We seek board members and board leaders who reflect the communities in which we work so that we can better understand constituent needs, cultivate community connections, enhance our credibility, and successfully carry out our river conservation mission. By developing a diverse and heterogeneous board — composed of individuals with a variety of skills, perspectives, backgrounds and resources — we promote creativity and innovation in our problem-solving, strategic leadership, and governance. In so doing, we will reach a broader range of people eager to support, engage in and benefit from our work.”

— American Rivers Board of Directors, June 2020

To cultivate diversity, inclusion and equity, we will identify, recruit and engage board members and leaders who reflect the diversity of the communities we serve; we will cultivate and sustain an inclusive board culture; and we will monitor and share our progress.

Tactics	Benchmarks	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24
Identify, cultivate and recruit board members with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise* * In addition to the board recruitment priorities identified in the benchmarks, we will continue to consider geographic diversity, cumulative board giving capacity, LGBTQ+ representation, inclusion of persons with disabilities, diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, and diverse points of view (political and other).	Create a board matrix to identify gaps on the board related to race, ethnicity, age, gender, geographic regions, urban communities and other criteria required to build an exceptional board for the future of American Rivers. Update and revise matrix annually.	X	X	X	X	X
	Use available data on race, ethnicity and gender in our priority river basins, together with the board matrix, to inform board recruitment priorities, strategy and outreach.	X	X	X	X	X
	Increase racial and ethnic diversity of the board by ensuring 40% or more of directors identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color.	X	X	X	X	X
	Increase age diversity on the board by ensuring that at least 10% of board members are under age 45.	X	X	X	X	X
	Share our organizational DEI priorities, goals and progress with our regional river councils and encourage them to increase racial and ethnic diversity in their membership.	X	X	X	X	X
	Increase gender diversity of directors to 50% women, nonbinary, or gender minority identities.	X	X	X	X	X
Engage, cultivate and empower board leaders with diverse perspectives and experiences.	Ensure transparency in processes and opportunities for diverse representation in board leadership.	X	X	X	X	X
	Expand representation in board leadership (committee chairs and board officers) from communities of color.	X	X	X	X	X
	Maintain or increase representation of women in board leadership positions.	X	X	X	X	X

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE CONTINUED

Tactics	Benchmarks	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24
Regularly assess board member engagement and board culture	Revise Annual Board Assessment to assess board member board culture and perceptions of inclusion and belonging.	X				
	Annually measure board member engagement, culture and inclusion through Annual Board Assessment.	X	X	X	X	X
	Revise Board Meeting Evaluation form to better assess inclusion on the board and opportunities for full participation.	X				
	At the conclusion of each board meeting, distribute the Board Meeting Evaluation to assess inclusion and opportunities for full participation by all board members.	X	X	X	X	X
Adopt inclusive policies, practices and behaviors that support and value different perspectives and experiences	Develop and implement guidelines to actively mentor and orient new board members and seek feedback on mentoring process.	X	X	X	X	X
	On a biennial basis, review and revise (as appropriate) board recruitment processes, materials, orientation, on-boarding, mentoring, etc., to improve diversity and inclusion.	X		X		X
	Allocate resources (e.g., meeting time, money, personnel, etc.) to periodically provide DEI-related education and awareness-raising opportunities for the board.	X	X	X	X	X
	Audit current policies and practices with an equity lens.		X		X	
Ensure leadership and organizational transparency on board diversity, equity, and inclusion and annually monitor our progress to goals.	Assign ongoing responsibility for oversight and advancement of board diversity, inclusion and equity action steps and benchmarks to the board Governance Committee (or a subcommittee thereof).	X				
	Annually assess performance to goals to inform our work and adjust as necessary.	X	X	X	X	X
	Annually share the board’s progress to goals with American Rivers board, staff and regional river councils.	X	X	X	X	X

X denotes actions to be taken in the fiscal year.



PHOTO: NICOLE COREY

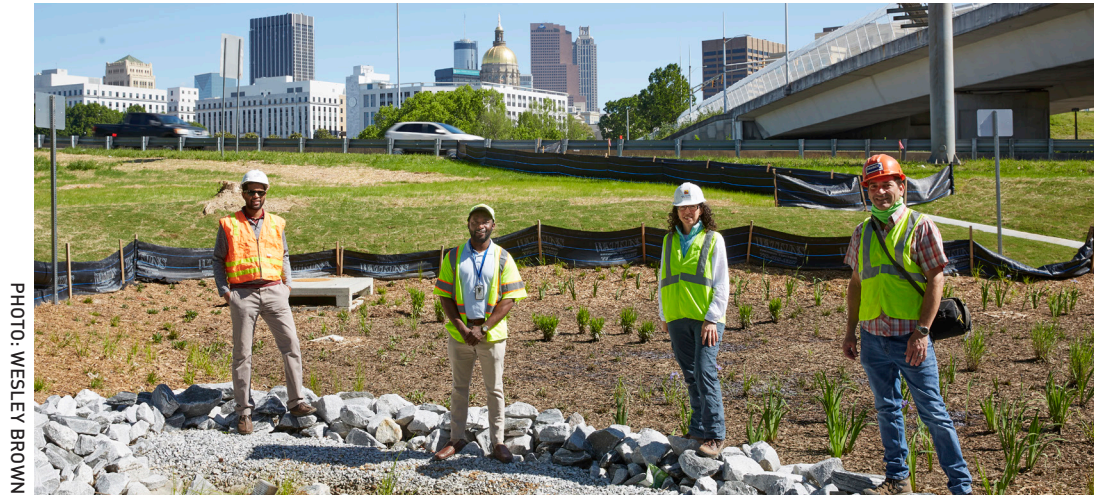


PHOTO: WESLEY BROWN