

Transforming a Movement

How foundations can support effective Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) capacity building efforts in environmental organizations



A Report by
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Executive Summary

A growing number of environmental organizations and foundations are investing more time, money, and energy in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) capacity building activities than ever before. They are realizing that DEI enhances their mission, creates a higher-performing organization, provides them relevance in a rapidly changing world, and leads to deeper relationships and more successful work with the staunchest supporters of environmental protection—people of color (Fery et al. 2018, Metz and Weigel 2009, and many others). Often these organizations (and the funders who support them) view their launch of DEI capacity building efforts as a success in and of itself, without asking if these efforts are effective.

This report provides a guide to how funders and others can support and advance effective DEI efforts in the environmental movement. It analyzes how seven funders are supporting DEI capacity building and how 43 staff of color and 24 DEI point people (staff who have a core role in coordinating, managing, and leading DEI capacity building efforts) view and experience different DEI capacity building approaches within their organizations. Our research revealed a clear need for long-term investment of effective DEI capacity building practices that especially focus on “the how”; address and remedy root issues (such as white dominant culture and institutional racism); create an inclusive culture; and center the experiences of staff of color.

For this report, we defined DEI capacity building as: “Any effort, initiative, or activity adopted for the purpose of effectively advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion at the organization. These could be internal or foundational elements. Examples of DEI capacity building activities include (but are not limited to), DEI focused trainings, leadership development programs, plans/strategies, assessments, organizational statements, visioning, coaching, and committees.”

Funders are critical players in the DEI space not only because they provide needed resources, but also because they influence the direction of the environmental movement. This report draws on lessons learned and wisdom gained from staff who lead current DEI capacity building grantmaking programs in environmental philanthropy. It also shares the experiences of and insights from staff of color, those who often feel the impact of DEI efforts—positive or negative—first and most. The report explores if DEI capacity building is improving, maintaining, or worsening the experience of staff of color, and what specifically contributes to that outcome. Staff of color experiences can serve as valuable barometers for determining the effectiveness of internal racial and ethnic DEI capacity building activities. Lastly, this research includes the perspective from DEI point people—staff who are uniquely positioned to recognize the nuances of DEI challenges and opportunities since they work at the hub of DEI capacity building efforts.

Funders

The Funder section is organized around grantmaking practices of established DEI capacity building grantmaking programs—how the program is structured and designed and how these funders are supporting DEI efforts in environmental organizations. The research provides insights into how to establish effective DEI capacity building grantmaking programs; how to improve current programs; and what, whom, and how to fund. Grantmaking practices discussed include focusing on long-term change, hiring an external thought partner, building internal DEI capacity at the foundation, growing and partnering with grantees, assessing readiness for DEI work, and providing additional funding for people-of-color-led groups and justice-focused organizations working on environmental issues.

Staff of Color and DEI Point People

The research in the Staff of Color and DEI Point People sections is organized differently than the Funder section. We identify metathemes and themes—topics or issues that multiple people mentioned—that emerged through the survey responses to questions about what is and is not working well, regarding DEI capacity building efforts within their organizations. The Staff of Color section includes a special focus on their experiences. Names of survey respondents were kept confidential, which allowed for frank, unfiltered, and deeply informative responses. Illustrative quotes and other qualitative data are provided. Each section concludes with insights for funders to consider.

Metathemes and themes of significance from these sections include:

- **The Staff of Color Experience - Inconsistent Inclusion and Enduring Exclusion:** Our research reveals that DEI capacity building activities do not guarantee consistent positive impact for staff of color. Approximately 86% of staff of color reported experiences of being valued and supported, while at the same time—and in the same setting—experiencing marginalization and exclusion in various ways, both subtle and overt. While moments of inclusion occur, the exposure to exclusion remains. This is a serious issue, as these traumatic experiences engender deep wounds and may be root causes for staff of color leaving environmental organizations. Shifting to consistent inclusion will require DEI growth, culture change, and transformation.
- **Transformation, White Dominant Culture, and Culture Change:** The metatheme (Transformation) and themes (White Dominant Culture and Culture Change) are discussed together because of their interconnectedness. Staff of color and DEI point people desire deep, high-impact change work that addresses root issues (such as white dominant culture, institutional racism, and white privilege) and actively shifts to an inclusive culture of trust, support, openness, acceptance, respect, authenticity, kindness, curiosity, and vulnerability. Culture change is the essence of transformation, and addressing white dominant culture requires deep soul-searching work (both

individually and organizationally). Organizations need to adopt a change management process to support this shift. In order to evolve through culture change, an organization cannot just be committed to the idea of change. It must understand *how* to shift from white dominant culture to an inclusive culture.

- **The How:** Staff of color and DEI point people reported that the quality of the staff of color experience and the effectiveness of the DEI effort are more important than the actual DEI activity. “The how” focuses on quality rather than quantity and is the essence of DEI transformation. *How* an organization does the work is more important than *what* they do. For example, DEI Point people ranked, in order, trainings, hiring, and ongoing learning activities as the most effective and, also in the same ranked order, the least effective DEI capacity building activities. The difference was in how the activities were executed. For instance, all staff trainings are effective, and trainings that do not provide tools to apply learning to action are ineffective. Staff of color addressed the importance of “the how” when they shared the ways in which successful (and not-so-successful) approaches to DEI affected their experiences and the organization’s overall DEI capacity building efforts.
- **DEI Beginners:** Many of the environmental organizations and foundations featured in this report are in the early stages of DEI growth (although some may not recognize this). DEI Beginners are organizations at the early stages of DEI work regardless of the length of time they have been engaged in DEI capacity building. These early stages are often the most challenging because of the difficulty of making measurable progress amid a shift to new systems, structures, approaches, practices, and mindsets. Survey respondents describe several early-stage characteristics: resistance or defensiveness from staff and leaders; not prioritizing DEI; the need to collectively raise awareness; centering on “the what” rather than “the how”; and a workplace culture that has not yet integrated DEI behaviors and approaches. While this report features several examples of organizational growth, these DEI Beginners still struggle to have dependable resources and sufficient capacity, systems, culture, and approaches to maintain the work and consistently achieve positive DEI outcomes. The beginner stage is a necessary phase because it is during this time when organizations establish a foundation and path forward, adjust the organizational mindset, and prepare for the journey ahead. It is also a critical time to invest resources, and a critical time to ensure resources are being invested well.

The metathemes and themes led to more than 15 major insights for funders, which can be found at the end of the Staff of Color and DEI Point People sections. Noteworthy insights for funders to consider in their DEI capacity building grantmaking include:

- Support people of color networks since they are critical for staff of color to survive and thrive and foundational for all DEI work.

- Build relationships directly with staff of color and create communication pathways to receive unfiltered feedback since staff of color experiences serve as “DEI barometers.”
- Support DEI capacity building that focuses on “the how,” transformation, and culture change.
- Invest in transformational racial equity trainings for all staff and board.
- Provide opportunities for organizational leaders to develop and grow their DEI knowledge, skills, and competency that is needed to effectively lead an organization committed to DEI.
- Provide adequate and consistent resources to environmental organizations over a long time period to support the DEI change process.
- Support readiness for organizations embarking or advancing on their DEI journeys since many are in the DEI Beginner phase.

Overall Recommendations for Funders

Below we provide guidelines to funders on how to set up a DEI capacity building grantmaking program at their foundation and recommend what to fund to support effective DEI capacity building efforts in individual organizations and across the environmental movement. (We also include recommendations specifically for staff of color, DEI point people, and staff leaders in Section VII of the report.)

Grantmaking Guidelines

Recommendation 1: Wisely invest significant funds and for the long term.

DEI change work does not occur in one-year grant cycles and requires sustained, wise investments in effective, high impact, and transformative DEI work over many years.

Recommendation 2: Develop a guiding vision/goal and a “why” statement to guide your DEI capacity building investments.

The statement will clarify why DEI is important to your foundation’s overall vision and mission, and the vision/goal will support your grantmaking approach.

Recommendation 3: Hire an external thought partner.

The thought partner can provide crucial support and wisdom for the effective development, implementation, and troubleshooting of the program.

Recommendation 4: Be patient and commit to a growth mindset (for yourselves and your grantees).

Consider developing a long-term strategy (5-10 years) that includes a vision, a change process, time for reflection (to assess lessons learned and adjust as needed), and deliberate funding strategies at varying growth stages.

Recommendation 5: Partner with staff of color and grantees.

Co-create a DEI capacity building grantmaking program with grantees (and other environmental organizations within the region served) and staff of color from these organizations. Gather information to gauge interest in and build support for DEI capacity building and to shape a program relevant to its users. Intentionally build relationships based on trust and safety, especially with staff of color, to create an atmosphere that encourages frank feedback.

Recommendation 6: Support organizations that are authentically committed to transformation.

Funding the approaches and efforts recommended in this report will support transformation: follow “the how”; shift from a white dominant culture to an inclusive culture; listen to and follow the advice of staff of color; learn about and address institutional and systemic racism; leaders grow their DEI competency; and all of the staff and board members do this work and grow together.

Recommendation 7: Add support for people-of-color-led/justice-focused groups working on environmental issues.

All funders interviewed also provided funds to groups that are led by people of color or that focus on justice, which was a top funder recommendation. These groups are currently the most effective at achieving both racial equity and environmental outcomes, whereas many mainstream environmental groups will not achieve consistent and high-impact racial equity outcomes until they reach a more advanced DEI stage. Building DEI capacity to reach this advanced stage takes time.

Recommendation 8: Build DEI capacity at your foundation.

To reap the same benefits for doing DEI work as your grantees, you and your colleagues at your foundation must be deeply introspective about your own DEI journey—humbly understanding your own current state of DEI competency and being honest with yourselves about how much work you need to do to achieve your own DEI transformation. A shared experience of learning and growing together with grantees promotes authenticity, integrity, and a mutual appreciation for the importance of DEI capacity building and the need to do it well.

How to Support Individual Organizations

Recommendation 9: Support effective, ongoing trainings for all staff and board members, especially leaders.

Focus on personal development, deep transformation, and racial equity that addresses white dominant culture and institutional and systemic racism.

Recommendation 10: Support the hiring of DEI consultants and staff that can guide and implement report recommendations and insights.

For example, they can facilitate racial equity trainings, guide change management, and co-develop new organizational systems and structures that support the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and that do not reinforce white dominant culture. DEI consultants and dedicated DEI staff can teach, guide, and coach staff and board members and, when used discerningly, can expedite DEI progress.

Recommendation 11: Support readiness work to prepare organizations beginning the DEI journey.

It is important to set organizations and staff up for success and on the right footing from the beginning, focusing on high impact change work that addresses root issues. This readiness work should include all staff and board racial equity trainings and making the case for DEI.

How to Support the Environmental Movement

Recommendation 12: Support people of color networks.

Doing so would support the retention, survival, and success of staff of color and provide a solid foundation for all DEI work in this sector.

Recommendation 13: Support readiness across the environmental movement for organizations embarking on their DEI journeys.

Provide a space for leaders and DEI change agents from several organizations to learn about racial equity and organizational change management together and participate in facilitated discussions about why DEI is important to each of their missions. These activities will help build awareness and commitment and equip change agents and leaders with knowledge, skills, and approaches to more effectively advance DEI at their organization.

Recommendation 14: Support learning cohorts for organizational leaders.

To effectively lead an organization committed to DEI, leaders must continue to increase their DEI aptitude. To support this growth, funders should create sustained learning and support cohorts comprised of leaders from multiple organizations.

Recommendation 15: Support the development of a staff of color cultural assessment.

Since the experiences of staff of color are the barometers for the effectiveness of DEI work, evaluating these experiences over time can provide critical information about effective DEI practices and approaches and the environmental movement's growth.

Recommendation 16: Produce a report (or report series) of case studies about organizations demonstrating how DEI capacity building is adding value to their mission and making them a better organization.

This report could motivate and inspire others to do DEI capacity building and dispel the myth that DEI is mission drift, which commonly blocks DEI progress.

If the environmental movement is to become truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive, we must be “all in.” Committing all that we have now—time, funding, people, brainpower, and heart—will ensure a stable and sustainable foundation for future generations, especially in our future when people of color are a majority of the U.S. population. Transformation calls for fearless commitment, utilizing our collective power to achieve this evolution. It will require the wise investment of an unprecedented amount of resources. If we are focused and fearless in our efforts, we will realize the promise of DEI and, through doing so, achieve an unparalleled level of success in protecting a flourishing, healthy, and sustainable planet.

About the Author

Marcelo Bonta has spent the past 15 years consulting with and coaching environmental leaders, funders, and organizations, catalyzing and facilitating individual, organizational, and systemic DEI change processes. He currently runs his own consulting business, J.E.D.I. Heart, and recently was a Principal at The Raben Group. Bonta is the co-founder of the Center for Diversity and the Environment and the Environmental Professionals of Color and recently launched JEDIHeart.com—a blog about navigating justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion with love.

A previous funder, Bonta co-created a new environmental portfolio with equity at its core and co-developed and led its DEI capacity building grantmaking arm at Meyer Memorial Trust. Over the past decade, Bonta's foundation clients have included the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Environmental Grantmakers Association, The Russell Family Foundation, Marin Community Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, and Kresge Foundation.

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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all the people of color who are no longer working in the environmental space because of culture issues. The environmental movement is much weaker without you. I hope this report serves as a catalyst, helping environmental organizations and foundations transform into places that wholeheartedly embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion. If the movement wants to remain relevant, effective, successful, and humane, we can no longer afford to lose you.

I. Introduction

The environmental movement is undergoing unprecedented changes, experiencing for the first time a broad surge in commitment to, awareness of, and focus on racial diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Many environmental organizations and foundations that had never ventured in the DEI space are recognizing that DEI enhances their mission, and they are taking action: providing organization-wide DEI trainings, changing hiring practices, shifting to a more inclusive organizational culture, restructuring how they prioritize work, and investing more time, money, and energy in DEI capacity building activities than ever before. As more organizations prioritize DEI, environmental leaders, organizations, and funders must embrace effective practices for becoming truly equitable and inclusive organizations—and, just as important, learn what does not work.

This report provides a guide on how to support and advance effective DEI efforts. It starts with the recognition that the majority of environmental organizations committed to DEI and the funders who support them are in the early stages of this work (although some may not recognize this) and that these early stages of DEI capacity building are often the most difficult. It is hard to make measurable progress amid a shift to new systems, structures, approaches, practices, and mindsets. However, these changes, if done well, build a strong foundation for DEI capacity that allows organizations to move beyond the beginner phase. It is a critical time to invest resources, and a critical time to ensure resources are being invested well.

Funders' conversations about "best practices" are often insular. They too frequently overlook core voices from the field and the communities that they are trying to support. This report includes these core voices. In addition to funders, it shares insights from staff of color—those who are the most impacted by (but contribute the least to) institutional racism and other DEI challenges. If current DEI capacity building approaches do not improve the experiences of environmental organizations' staff of color, are they truly "best practices"? We also provide the perspectives of staff who have a core role in coordinating, managing, and leading DEI capacity building efforts ("DEI point people"). They are uniquely positioned to describe the nuances of DEI challenges and opportunities.

We asked these three groups—funders, staff of color, and DEI point people—the following core questions (full sets of questions are located in the appendix):

- What DEI capacity building activities and approaches are working well?
- What DEI capacity building activities and approaches are not working well?
- How can funders best support effective DEI capacity building activities?
- What DEI capacity building efforts should funders support?
- How do funders effectively set up a new or improve an existing DEI capacity building program?

Our research revealed a clear need to support effective DEI capacity building practices by assessing approaches and capturing lessons learned from each of the three stakeholder groups. The following sections analyze how seven funders are supporting DEI capacity building and how 43 staff of color and 24 DEI point people view and experience different DEI capacity building approaches within organizations and the environmental movement. All interviewees and survey respondents are confidential except for a few foundations that permitted us to use their names.

We end the report with recommendations to environmental funders, staff of color, and DEI point people regarding effective approaches to support and implement DEI capacity building. As our research highlighted the leaders' crucial role in the success of DEI capacity building activities, we also offer recommendations for organizational leadership.

Methodology

This report is intended to be exploratory and to map the DEI capacity building landscape—what is occurring, what is working well, and what is not working well. The report reflects the findings from (1) interviews of staff at seven DEI capacity building grantmaking programs that fund environmental organizations, (2) electronic surveys of 43 staff of color at environmental organizations, and (3) electronic surveys of 24 DEI point people at environmental organizations. They answered both quantitative and qualitative questions about their experience with DEI capacity building. Even though not all environmental foundations and environmental organizations operate in the ways specified and not all staff of color go through the experiences described, all environmental foundations, organizations, and staff of color can learn from these examples.

[W]e defined DEI capacity building as: 'Any effort, initiative, or activity adopted for the purpose of effectively advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion at the organization. These could be internal or foundational elements.'

In our interviews and surveys, we defined DEI capacity building as: "Any effort, initiative, or activity adopted for the purpose of effectively advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion at the organization. These could be internal or foundational elements. Examples of DEI capacity building activities include (but are not limited to), DEI focused trainings, leadership development programs, plans/strategies, assessments, organizational statements, visioning, coaching, and committees."

The terms "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion" were purposefully not defined in the survey and interviews, because organizational definitions and approaches to these terms often vary.

Providing definitions could potentially confine respondents' answers, especially if their definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion differed. This approach allowed responses to organically emerge as respondents brought their interpretations to these terms.

Terminology in this internal capacity building space is continually evolving. In the 2000s, "diversity" was the term of choice in the environmental movement. Today, DEI is a common acronym, while still others are used in varying orders—JEDI, DEIJ, EDI, EI, and E (only) to name a few. (The "J" is for justice.) There are no wrong combinations. Most importantly, organization-wide discussions regarding the meanings and how these terms lead to changes in behaviors, approaches, practices, and culture are critical for DEI progress.

II. Why is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Important to Environmental Organizations?

The Problem

The mainstream environmental movement has always had a racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) problem. Its overt racist history has led to the institutional, systemic, and cultural challenges around race and ethnicity that permeate the movement today (Purdy 2015, Allen 2013, Wohlforth 2010, Merchant 2003). Even though DEI awareness and commitment have been increasing, this report demonstrates that staff of color continue to experience oppression and exclusion, white dominant culture pervades the movement, the full transformation to an inclusive culture is still a distant reality, and consistent and sufficient funding to build DEI capacity is inadequate. In addition, staff leadership is only 12-19% people of color (Taylor 2014), consistent DEI outcomes from mainstream environmental groups are rare, the contributions of communities of color to environmental protection past and present are not fully recognized, and most partnerships among people-of-color-led groups and mainstream environmental groups remain inequitable (Alvarez et al. 2017). These challenges confront the environmental movement even as society continues to change and a growing amount of research and data repeatedly reinforce the benefits of DEI.

Why DEI is Important to the Environmental Movement

We must transform into a racially and ethnically diverse, equitable, and inclusive environmental movement for several reasons:

People of Color are the Strongest Environmentalists

Polls, surveys, and research conducted over the past two decades continue to show that people of color are concerned about and support a broad set of environmental issues, including conservation and climate change, at higher rates than white people (Elias et al. 2018, Fery et al. 2018, Ramakrishnan and Shah 2017, The New York Times et al. 2015, Latino Decisions 2014, Weigel and Metz 2014, Metz and Weigel 2012, Leiserowitz and Akerlof 2010, Metz and Weigel 2009, Los Angeles Times 2002). At the same time, many mainstream environmental organizations have struggled to work effectively across difference, and sweeping environmental and climate policies have been difficult to advance. This high level of support from people of color is among the most strategically important information that the environmental movement has learned this century, yet we have not capitalized on it. Perhaps one reason is because of a lingering, false narrative that people of color do not care about the environment. A recent study revealed the public's significant underestimation between the actual (high) and perceived (low) level of support that people of color have for environmental issues while the public overestimates the environmental concerns of white people (Pearson et al. 2018).

A Higher Level of Success

DEI creates a more effective organization. An increasing body of research demonstrates that diverse groups do better at problem-solving, make better decisions, provide more innovation, are more accurate, and find solutions more often than homogeneous groups (Levine et al. 2014, Nathan and Lee 2013, Phillips et al. 2008, Sommers 2006, Antonio et al. 2004). Overall, diverse groups outperform homogenous groups (Page 2007, Ingersoll et al. 2017) and improve workplace performance, especially when operated inclusively (Sabharwal 2014, Hoever et al. 2012). Yet only 2.4% of staff of color agree, and 0% strongly agree that “the environmental movement’s culture is inclusive” (Figure 15). Given the environmental movement’s poor inclusivity scores, building DEI capacity is low-hanging fruit to improve overall effectiveness.

Mission Enhancement

Just as DEI creates a higher-performing organization, it enhances the missions of environmental groups and the overall goal of protecting our planet. Our research demonstrates that organizations committed to DEI capacity building are motivated by and are experiencing DEI to be integral to achieving their mission (see the “Mission Enhancement” theme in the DEI Point People section). We have found that when organizations and leaders understand the power and promise of DEI—that it helps them achieve their mission at a higher level of success—they are more likely to commit to DEI capacity building.

The Right Thing to Do

DEI is not only the wise thing to do; it is the right thing to do. Just as we believe in a moral imperative to protect the planet, many of us also hold a moral obligation to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Unfortunately, the current state of DEI in environmental organizations does not accurately represent these beliefs and values, and we must do more to align with them.

Relevance: The Increasing Racial & Ethnic Diversity in the U.S.

The racial and ethnic demographics in the U.S. are rapidly shifting. Today, more than half of all children in the U.S. under age 15 are people of color. A handful of states, including California, Texas, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Nevada, are majority people of color. U.S. urban counties average over 50% of people of color, and more than one of every five rural residents are people of color. Currently, the U.S. population is 40% people of color and is estimated to grow to 50% by 2045 (Frey 2018, 2017, Parker et al. 2018, U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Meanwhile, the environmental movement is only 12-16% staff of color and 5-13% board members of color (Taylor 2014), a far cry from the rapidly changing U.S. demographics. The active and increased involvement of people of color in all facets of environmentalism, especially through an inclusive culture, will enhance the environmental movement’s relevance and influence in a changing world.

Conclusion

From our current DEI crisis to the numerous reasons why DEI is important to the environmental movement, it is clear that environmental organizations need the knowledge, skills, tools, and overall capacity to effectively advance racial and ethnic DEI. This report addresses this need by assessing lessons learned and providing recommendations to environmental foundations regarding effective DEI capacity building efforts and how to best support them.

III. Environmental Funders with DEI Capacity Building Grantmaking Programs

Introduction

Funders are critical players in the DEI space, not only because they provide needed resources, but also because they influence the direction of the environmental movement. Many are increasingly prioritizing DEI, in large part because of the need voiced by environmental organizations and people of color working within and in partnership with these organizations. While this recent progress is positive, DEI funding and efforts as a whole remain inadequate to fulfill the overall need and desire for change. In recent years, a growing number of funders have recognized this gap between intent and impact and shifted significant resources to build DEI capacity in environmental groups, many of which have no, or short, DEI track records.

While some environmental funders have provided occasional grants for internal DEI efforts, few funders operate established grantmaking programs exclusively or primarily designated for DEI capacity building. This section focuses on these rare programs, specifically drawing lessons learned and recommendations from seven DEI capacity building grantmaking programs. These seven efforts have only existed for a few years and comprise almost all of the current DEI capacity building grantmaking programs in environmental philanthropy. These interviews provide insights into how to establish effective DEI capacity building grantmaking programs and how to improve current programs.

Funder Demographics

The seven grantmaking programs—most of which spoke on condition of confidentiality—are housed in private foundations except for one that is at a government agency. Among the six foundations, four had a DEI capacity building giving practice within a specific environmental program, while two had a stand-alone DEI capacity building giving practice that supported all focus areas (i.e., environmental and non-environmental programs had access to these funds). The government agency included an equity mandate within its environmental grantmaking program. The grantmaking programs had varied geographic scopes: nationally and regionally in the Pacific Northwest, the Western U.S., Oregon, and a metropolitan area.

Of the seven grantmaking programs, eight staff members were interviewed (two representing a single program). Half of the staff interviewed identified as people of color, and the majority identified as women and heterosexual. All were “mid-level” staff members.

Funder DEI Capacity Building Grantmaking Practices

Funding Amounts and Organizations Supported:

Each foundation's total annual funding awarded for DEI capacity building ranged from \$15,000 to \$700,000, with a median of \$215,659 and an average of \$325,775. Across the four funders who shared average grant size (or amount spent on services per grantee), the range included \$13,000 to \$45,000, with a median of \$20,434 and an average of \$24,717. The number of organizations supported annually ranged from 11 to 49, with a median of 18 groups and an average of 22 groups. Five of the seven funders supported existing grantees only. Two funders supported organizations through open calls.

Taking the DEI Journey Together: Six of the seven funders are also working on DEI capacity building internally. (The seventh funder mentioned the importance of developing DEI competence on an individual and/or small team level, especially if the overall foundation is not proactively building DEI capacity.) One funder mentioned that going through a similar process as grantees was important for empathizing with them and learning and growing together on the journey. A shared experience also promotes authenticity and a mutual appreciation for the importance of DEI capacity building and the need to do it well. There is also a mirror effect: a particular foundation's internal "soul searching" may offer an example (and permission) to grantees.

Kresge Foundation's Environmental Program

Vision: Cities build resilience in the face of climate change

Goal: Cities implement comprehensive climate-resilience approaches grounded in equity

- *Strategy [1 of 3]: Build capacity and commitment of urban leaders across sectors to advance equitable climate resilience*
- *Tactic: Build competence in and commitment to equity among governmental, nonprofit, and philanthropic leaders active on climate resilience*

Meyer Memorial Trust's Healthy Environment portfolio, Statewide Program

Vision: Nurturing a resilient natural environment, while supporting the well-being of Oregon's diverse cultures and communities

Goal [1 of 4]: Support a movement for a healthy environment that is effective and relevant for all of Oregon's diverse communities

Meyer Memorial Trust's Healthy Environment portfolio, Willamette River Initiative

Goal [1 of 4]: Diversity, equity, and inclusion. We strive to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within Willamette River restoration efforts. To that end, we fund projects that aim to increase representation of diverse voices within the conservation field and ensure the benefits and impacts of river health are shared equitably.

A Guiding Vision, Purpose, “Why Statement,” and/or Goal: Four of the five funders that have DEI capacity building grantmaking activities housed within their foundation’s environmental program articulated a vision, goal, or purpose to guide their efforts. Examples provided above.

The importance of this step was underscored in our other surveys. One staff of color respondent recommended, “I would first suggest that the foundation asks itself why it wants to [start a DEI capacity building program]... I would [then] suggest that they define a vision, values, policies, principles and practices; engage in continuous assessment; and make it a part of organizational culture and daily life.”

An External Thought Partner: Three of the seven funders endorsed using external thought partners to inform and guide their work and strongly emphasized the importance of this recommendation. Two of the three hired a consultant or consultants with extensive DEI experience. Funders mentioned that thought partners provided advice, coaching, and wisdom, often at crucial points in program development, implementation, and management, and they felt this led them to a higher level of success.

Managing the Program: Only one funder hired a consultant to manage the entire program. Two other funders hired a consultant to manage grantee cohorts and develop their trainings. Finally, the two funders that had a separate DEI capacity building program to support all foundation program areas have dedicated staff to manage the DEI capacity building program.

A Focus on Long-term Change: Many interviewees mentioned the need for realistic time frames (5-10 years) and patience for building DEI capacity, and many support multi-year investments, either as one large grant or annual re-application. Many grantees are at the beginning stages of DEI capacity building. In addition to new resources, change will require new ways of thinking and behaving and new systems and structures. Low-hanging fruit may lead to early “wins,” but true transformation of these groups—and the of the movement—will take time. DEI is complex, and organizations must take the time to build knowledge, skills, and tools; develop foundational goals, tactics, and strategy; and then implement and execute internally and externally. One funder said “Don’t underestimate the time and resources to do it right.”

Don’t underestimate the time and resources to do [DEI] right.
Environmental Funder

A Growth Mindset and Partnering with Grantees: Another common theme was the importance of continually improving the process and approach of the program, learning from mistakes, and focusing on “the how” to be more effective and impactful over time. For most environmental funders, supporting DEI capacity building is a new endeavor, and it will take partnership with, listening to, and learning from grantees as well as periodically assessing the program in order to grow into higher levels of impact. In addition, four funders mentioned eliciting feedback from grantees or the field—in the form of surveys, focus groups, and discussions with grantees and community partners—to inform program development and identify emerging DEI needs.

Assessing Readiness: All funders favored organizations that self-select or opt-in to the work, which they viewed as reflecting a desire to advance DEI within their organization. One funder added that leadership support is crucial, and that leadership transitions often signify lack of readiness. Funders identified a growth mindset, emotional intelligence, strong DEI change agents, and a commitment of additional resources as other signs that pointed to readiness.

Common Activities Supported: The most common DEI capacity building activities funded were trainings (described further below). Other common activities were the development of DEI strategies/plans and DEI assessments, which have had varied results depending on the organization’s level of DEI readiness. Commonly, funding was either granted to an environmental organization that used most of the money to pay a consultant, or the funder directly paid a consultant(s) to provide DEI capacity building services to grantees.

Trainings: Interviewees viewed trainings as a critical first step in the DEI process. All funders supported cohort trainings, in which individuals from multiple organizations participate, and three of six funders additionally supported single organization trainings, in which staff (and sometimes board members) from a single organization participate. Change starts when a participant “looks in the mirror,” and so trainings to develop the skills and knowledge to effectively advance DEI should first focus on individual learning and agency. Also, for peak effectiveness interviewees recommended that trainings be continuous, in line with a broader strategy, and tailored to the organization’s stage of growth. They also noted that it is human nature not to grasp complex concepts at first exposure. Repeated reinforcement and engagement of “DEI muscles” help individuals incorporate these concepts into everyday behavior.

Success Measures: Because most of the funders were within the first three years of program implementation and desired to successfully support organizations that are just beginning to address a complex new topic, a common success metric was simply supporting learning and growth. One funder also had some qualitative learning measures. Another developed a DEI assessment tool to support organizational growth. A third funder measured success based on achieving its own five-year equity goal. This last funder developed a five-year strategy that began with capacity, relationship, and trust building and ended with equitable partnerships across difference. It made larger investments in DEI capacity building in the beginning years and shifted investments to equitable partnerships and conservation programming in latter years.

Adding Support for People-of-Color-Led/Justice-Focused Groups Working on Environmental Issues: Every funder that supported DEI capacity building also supported groups that are led by people of color and/or that focus on justice. This support was a top funder recommendation. Many of these funders understood (either initially or at a later stage) that supporting DEI capacity building in mainstream environmental organizations means supporting both equity and environmental outcomes. They realized that if racial equity outcomes in environmental programming are an ultimate goal, then they must fund the groups (i.e., people-of-color-led/justice-focused groups) that are most effective at achieving both racial equity and environmental outcomes. Most mainstream environmental groups are at the beginning stages of DEI work, which means that they will not achieve consistent and high-impact racial equity outcomes until they reach a more advanced stage.

Conclusion

While these practices and approaches provide a strong programmatic blueprint, they reflect the funder perspective solely. The following sections add to the mix other key voices that should inform program design and implementation: staff of color and DEI point people. Impressively, four of the funders interviewed listened to and partnered with environmental organizations on DEI initiatives, but often funder-grantee power dynamics—particularly the pressure grantees feel to appear “perfect”—obscure detailed, frank discussions about DEI challenges. (This is one reason names of DEI point people and staff of color were kept confidential in this report.) Furthermore, even engaged funders may only hear from designated representatives, such as the executive director, development director, and/or the DEI point person. Staff of color rarely have the opportunity to share their perspectives with funders.

The following sections provide grantmakers insights into the current state of DEI capacity building in environmental organizations and help them identify the hallmarks of promising DEI initiatives.

“This work is the hardest work I've ever faced - both because there is so much on the line and because it is painful. It is also the most intimate because it goes to the core of who I am...” *Staff of Color Respondent*

IV. Staff of Color at Organizations Building DEI Capacity

Introduction

This section assesses the experiences of staff of color in organizations that are actively building DEI capacity. Has DEI capacity building improved, maintained, or worsened the experience of staff of color, and what specifically contributed to that outcome? Answers to these questions could guide funders' resource allocation decisions and guide organizations on what to do and how to do it effectively.

Often organizations view their launch of DEI capacity building efforts as a success in and of itself, without asking if these efforts are effective. The experiences of staff of color can serve as valuable barometers for determining the effectiveness of internal racial and ethnic DEI capacity building activities. One respondent emphasized this point: “Most programs instituted fail to get input or be developed by the most vulnerable or impacted in an organization.”

Metathemes

- **DEI Beginners:** Growing pains & foundation building
- **The How:** Quality of experience & effectiveness
- **Transformation:** High impact change work that addresses root issues

Themes

1. **White Dominant Culture:** Acknowledge, address, & actively shift from a culture shaped by “the norms, preferences and fears of white European descended people” (in NC Nonprofits 2015).
2. **Culture Change:** From exclusion to inclusion
3. **Expand:** A need for more transformational work
 - i. **Ignorant resistance & lack of priority:** obstacles to expanding DEI work
 - ii. **Raised awareness:** A building block for expanding DEI work
4. **The Importance of Doing DEI and Doing It Effectively:** The mere presence of DEI capacity building work is a strong start but does not guarantee efficacy
5. **Trainings:** All staff trainings that focus on racial equity and personal development have a high impact
6. **The Staff of Color Experience:** Inconsistent inclusion and enduring exclusion
7. **People of Color Support:** A critical element for helping staff of color survive and thrive in their organization and the environmental movement
8. **The Leaders' Influence:** Leadership style, DEI commitment, and race/ethnicity

Most programs instituted fail to get input or be developed by the most vulnerable or impacted in an organization.

Staff Member of Color

People of color often feel the impact of DEI efforts—positive or negative—first and most. Within their organization, they often have the least to contribute to DEI challenges and are most impacted by institutional racism, white dominant culture, and other DEI issues. They are in a unique position to identify problematic behaviors and root causes that DEI programming should address.

It is worth noting that a number of staff of color who were asked to participate in this research declined because they did not want to relive the trauma and pain of their experience at an environmental organization building DEI capacity.

Many of those who did respond spoke frankly and

vulnerably only because they understood that their name would remain confidential. Not all people of color have challenging experiences at environmental organizations, but our data show that it is far from uncommon. Readers should be thoughtful about how to address report insights and recommendations and especially mindful of how to approach and build strong relationships with staff of color.

Staff of Color Demographics

We surveyed 43 staff of color working at environmental organizations building DEI capacity. Approximately 33% of the respondents identified as “Asian/Asian-American,” 30% as “African-American/Black,” 30% as “Latino/Latina/Hispanic,” 16% as “Biracial/Multiracial,” 12% as “Native American/Native Hawaiian,” and 9% as “White.” Respondents were asked to select all races/ethnicities that apply, which resulted in multiple responses from some individuals (Figure 1). Overall, 65% of respondents were women, and the remaining 35% were men (Figure 2). Regarding sexual orientation, 79% of respondents identified as “Heterosexual,” 7% as “Bisexual,” 5% as “Gay/Lesbian/Same-Gender Loving,” 2% as “Queer,” and the remaining 7% of respondents declined to answer (Figure 3).

Staff of color represented a wide array of tenure and levels of leadership within their organizations. About 37% of respondents worked for their current organization for 0-2 years, 30% for 3-5 years, 16% for 6-8 years, and 16% for 9 years or more (Figure 4). About 40% identified as “Leadership,” 49% were “Mid-Level” staff, and 12% were “Entry-Level” staff (Figure 5). In terms of organization type, 84.6% of staff of color worked for a non-governmental organization, 7.7% for a government agency, and 7.7% for a foundation.

About half of the respondents worked at organizations above the environmental-movement-wide average of 12-16% staff of color (Taylor 2014), while about one-third worked at organizations below the average. Five survey respondents work at organizations above 40% staff of color (Figure 7).

Staff of Color Metathemes

Three metathemes are interlaced throughout the staff of color responses: DEI Beginners (organizations in the early stages of DEI growth), The How (effectiveness), and Transformation (high impact change work that addresses root issues). These metathemes are also interconnected. As organizations begin to focus on DEI capacity building, they strive to be effective. Effective DEI efforts (in part measured by staff of colors' experience) means focusing on the *how*—not merely the *what*—which then may lead to transformation through deep change work.

DEI Beginners: Growing Pains & Foundation Building

It is heartening to see more organizations commit to DEI capacity building. These initiatives face growing pains as they build a strong foundation. Many of the surveyed staff of color experienced the effects of these growing pains, including resistance or defensiveness from staff and leaders, not prioritizing DEI, low initial buy-in and support, centering on “the what” rather than “the how,” a workplace culture that has not yet integrated DEI behaviors and approaches, and a sense that DEI is something separate from overall work. DEI Beginners also struggle to have sufficient organizational capacity and systems to consistently achieve DEI outcomes. The beginner stage is a necessary phase to adjust the organizational mindset and build a DEI foundation.

A “DEI Beginner” describes an organization at the early stages of DEI work regardless of the length of time it has been engaged in DEI capacity building. Some staff of color shared their perspective on this early stage of work:

Even though we have been doing this for three years, we are still in the beginning phase.

I think it's a soft-start and am concerned that the organization will feel hiring interns of color is sufficient, without actually promoting people of color into leadership roles.

One way an organization can advance beyond the DEI Beginner phase is to shift focus on solely *what* to do towards *how* it can integrate inclusive and equitable approaches into their work.

The How: Quality of Experience & Effectiveness

Staff of color addressed the importance of “the how” when they shared the ways in which successful (and not-so-successful) approaches to DEI affected their experiences and the organization’s overall DEI capacity building efforts. “The how” focuses on quality rather than quantity and gets to the essence of DEI: *how* an organization does the work is more important than *what* they do. For example, trainings (the what) were generally viewed as positive, but sometimes they had a negative impact. The distinguishing factor was “the how,” specifically how well the trainers facilitated discussions and created a safe space for people of color. (“The how” is also a theme in the DEI Point People section, where trainings, hiring, and ongoing learning activities were identified as both the most effective and the least effective DEI capacity building activities). One staff of color explained:

Learn where to start, how to succeed, and how to view success. [DEI work] has to be broader and more meaningful than numbers... [We] make Inclusion the first and most important target of our efforts. Too often, numbers amount to window dressing, or even worse, “tokenism.”

Transformation: High Impact Change Work that Addresses Root Issues

The desire for deep, high-impact transformation that addresses root issues is a metatheme that ran throughout staff of color responses, especially when discussing white dominant culture, culture change, and expanding the DEI capacity building work. The concern is not with the DEI capacity building work itself, but rather that much of the work is too “surface level.” In fact, staff of color identified this as the most common DEI challenge. Staff of color want DEI work to be more effective and of higher quality:

DEI organizational development is a years-long process, take it one strategic step at a time. It should shake the very foundation of your organization's approach; otherwise, you're probably holding back.

DEI efforts with roots begin with individual, internal work, acknowledging and disrupting processes that inhibit an equitable and inclusive culture. Don't get distracted by the icing on the cake of including it on websites, or statements, or with graphics that contain people of all different skin tones.

[T]here should be a strong focus on how white people should educate each other on power dynamics and the exploitation of people of color within the environmental field... if they supposedly support DEI but don't support the professional development and growth of their people of color employees, then they aren't doing the deeper work.

Staff of Color Themes

Theme 1 • White Dominant Culture

Acknowledging, addressing, and actively shifting from a white dominant culture was the strongest theme expressed throughout the staff of color responses. White dominant culture is also part of the culture change theme (where it is discussed in the DEI Point People section); however, the topic was so common and strongly shared that it deserves its own theme here.

White dominant culture is defined by racial equity trainer Tema Okun (in NC Nonprofits 2015) as “the explicit to subtle ways that the norms, preferences and fears of white European descended people overwhelmingly shape how we organize our work and institutions, see ourselves and others, interact with one another and with time, and make decisions.” As they shared their perspectives on white dominant culture, staff of color spoke strongly to “the how” of the work and the need for transformation: the deep change work they want to see is rooted in learning about and finding solutions to white dominant culture with openness, humility, and vulnerability. DEI Beginner organizations often display resistance, avoidance, defensiveness, fear, hesitancy, and white fragility (all white dominant culture characteristics) when confronted with the idea of addressing white dominant culture. (Robin DiAngelo [2011] defines white fragility as a “state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.”)

Staff of color surfaced the idea of white dominant culture and its related concepts in a variety of ways when describing their organizational experiences: “white fragility,” “white fragility office construct,” “white dominated spaces,” “white dominant culture,” white “power and privilege,” “an organization with a ‘legacy’ of white male leaders,” “racism,” “institutional racism,” “white work culture,” “the oppressor’s system,” and “white supremacy culture.”

I am skeptical of the ability of this organization to change their everyday administrative practices and procedures that continue to lift up white staff members and marginalize staff of color. I see it everywhere, but I don't think others really understand how insidious it is in our institutional culture.

Staff Member of Color

Some staff of color directly named and described the need to address white dominant culture:

I am skeptical of the ability of this organization to change their everyday administrative practices and procedures that continue to lift up white staff members and marginalize staff of color. I see it everywhere, but I don't think others really understand how insidious it is in our institutional culture.

The organization allows those that conform to its traditional culture to succeed. From a cultural standpoint, this tends to be a white male dominated and led organization.

[White] people have little awareness of what it means to be a person of color walking through the world. [White] people feel little need to change a system that materially and socially benefits them.

It's the challenge of using the oppressor's tools and working within the oppressor's system vs. creating something new that works to realize DEI from its core.

I do not enjoy the white fragility dominated office construct that I must take on, but I make it work.

[My organization should] accept that they have a racism problem... [and] realize that the answer is to empower people of color and not use them as tokens.

Other staff of color shared incidents or examples directly abutting white dominant culture:

As a staff person of color, I believe it may be more difficult to thrive in such an environment. This is primarily because rather than leadership taking the time to properly train, onboard and mentor me, they assume that because I am a person of color, I am somehow less competent in the first place. Their approach is to instead communicate with one another—cutting me out from discussions about strategy and implementation—in order to work around my perceived incompetence.

I wish I could find a way to share how the many small microaggressions have affected me. I'd love to have a facilitator or mediator of some sort help staff of color share in a way that will not result in retaliation. I think some of my experiences can really shine a light on what institutional racism looks like every day and how those little things that we should 'just let go of' add up to real harm.

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Staff Member of Color

One staff of color shared what is needed for their organization to successfully shift from a white dominant culture to a racially equitable culture:

[I am] proud that [my] workplace understands the importance of undoing racism... [My] workplace can do better by actually holding itself accountable to doing the work with intention and by backing it up with consistent, significant staffing and funding.

Since white dominant culture is such a prevailing and strongly shared root cause of staff of color's negative workplace experiences, organizations need to invest resources in approaches that lead to culture change.

Theme 2 • Culture Change: From Exclusion to Inclusion

For staff of color, cultural change is a core, if not the core, element of DEI work. They value organizations that invest in creating an inclusive culture and adopt inclusive approaches and practices; again, transformation comes from “the how.” Yet DEI Beginners often do not prioritize culture change in their DEI capacity building work and often display exclusive practices. Culture change is the essence of transformation, and addressing white dominant culture requires deep soul-searching work (both individually and organizationally). To support this shift, organizations need to adopt a change management process, which involves recognizing where you are, and identifying where you want to be, growing from exclusion to inclusion. One staff of color shared the effects of exclusion and the importance of inclusion:

... make Inclusion the first and most important target of our efforts. Too often, numbers amount to window dressing, or even worse, tokenism... [People of color] might diversify groups, but they likely are shut out of access to important decisions, and they might not be treated equitably or fairly in the work space. They are virtually invisible and have little positional authority to make a difference in the operation of the group's affairs. If Inclusion is the first goal, it means that the experience of each diverse participant will reflect the full range of possibility open to every other member of the group. They will add diversity, be treated equitably, have consequential decision-making authority and this will be the best embodiment and reflection of Inclusion.

Exclusion: Exclusive Experiences

Mainly because of the prevalent white dominant culture described in the previous section, staff of color feel and face exclusion in several ways. Some of these exclusive practices include:

- Leaders ignoring suggestions of staff of color while often supporting white staff who make the exact same suggestion
- Staff ignoring the expertise of staff members of color
- Lack of investment in leadership development and promotion
- Hollow DEI promises (i.e., all talk and no action)
- No impactful DEI outcomes, especially after a strong verbal DEI commitment
- Diversity-only efforts that lead to tokenization and superficial efforts
- Not practicing the values of inclusion and equity when planning and implementing DEI capacity building activities
- White people not doing the deep work necessary to grow and be effective because of lack of commitment, resistance, defensiveness, power hoarding, and white fragility

In order for me to bring my 'full self,' the organization would need to have a better understanding of what it means to be a woman of color, how that impacts the way that they see me, how in my case 'blackness' is defined and the very narrow definition that it seems they have. Being one's 'full self' is perhaps seen as being too much, too Black.

Staff Member of Color

The following data from staff of color survey responses provide further insight into their experiences with exclusion.

- 56% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that they have to conform to the culture to succeed (Figure 9).
- Only about one of every two staff of color agree or strongly agree that they can bring their full self to workplace every day (Figure 21). One staff of color powerfully shared the challenge of bringing her full self to work: "In order for me to bring my 'full self,' the organization would need to have a better understanding of what it means to be a woman of color, how that impacts the way that they see me, how in my case 'blackness' is defined and the very narrow definition that it seems they have. Being one's 'full self' is perhaps seen as being too much, too Black."
- About one of every three staff of color feel marginalized at their organization (Figure 23).
- About one of every three staff of color feel tokenized at their organization (Figure 12).
- Only 26% of staff of color agree or strongly agree (19% agree, 7% strongly agree) that their organization operates in an inclusive manner (Figure 14).
- Only 2% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that "the environmental movement's culture is inclusive" (Figure 15).
- 61% of staff of color have thought about leaving their organization (Figure 24).

Here are some examples of exclusion shared by staff of color:

My position was downgraded in the organization hierarchy while I was out on short-term disability. During my first week back from leave, I was informed that this decision was made by the person who would be my new supervisor. I was not consulted at all except to be informed, and I was told that it made sense. Perhaps even more consequential was that the budget for the program I ran that worked with people of color was no longer under my control as a result of this shift, and the new supervisor allocated it toward other priorities.

I was subject to all of the business as usual issues... doing the grunt work that others took credit for... not a part of the social cliques that defined support and leadership... was overworked and undermanaged... and was made to use my social capital with other people of color and social justice advocates to build coalitions for the organizations while my work was not taken seriously and at times that capital was squandered. I was also bullied when I spoke up.

Further, diversity is just one piece of the puzzle, and if the organization is not careful it will over-focus on diversity and risk coming across as, or actually being, tokenizing. Even more, the longer that not enough is being done the more likely people (and I) will feel that the DEI work has a negative effect because in saying that there is a commitment on paper, in meetings, etc. while not making demonstrable progress in real life the organization loses credibility. And that is a huge negative impact.

I was booted off the DEI working group when I chaired [a subcommittee]. The executive team didn't want to include [the subcommittee's work], and I stood my ground in defending what our working group had come up with.

There were nine people of color when I started, and now we are down to five with three people listing discrimination as their primary reason for leaving.

Unwritten rules are applied to people of color after they've been broken.

I feel like staff of color continue to be marginalized. I sense that even the managers who are staff of color are working hard to figure out how to not be the [person of color] that is always bringing up equity. They are new to their management positions... and are trying to figure out how to work within a rigid work environment with unspoken rules (which do change for staff of color).

People of color are not as often involved in important decisions that could help us move farther faster toward DEI goals.

We seek to provide opportunities for a diverse staff, but oftentimes there is little to no opportunity for this staff to advance in the organization, or for them to have a real voice in decision making. It hurts at staff meetings to not hear the voices of other staff members of color, or for them to not receive the recognition for their ideas and/or work.

The organization doesn't strive to develop leaders of color into mid-management or upper level management leadership.

The people of color are often sidelined to "special projects" that have little authority over what happens in the mainstream environmental policy spaces.

Staff of color also shared how they grapple with exclusion and suggested improvements:

I want to be seen, heard and supported for the type of leadership I bring to the workplace.

I struggle with most of it. The organization feels like it needs an actual honest conversation and more diverse voices on leadership teams. But the last couple of people of color that pushed for this were put on work improvement plans and pushed out. So I struggle with the discomfort of conforming and feeling bad or speaking out and losing my job.

I would recommend that supervisors/directors genuinely listen to and support their people of color staff, rather than always putting them on the defensive and making them prove themselves time and time again.

I would like to see an improvement in including more diverse voices when making big decisions.

Much of the DEI focus has been on educating those with privilege, rather than training and building the new leaders.

I would like to see people slow down and focus on building relationships with me and understanding my personal experience.

Staff of color also shared examples of inclusion that have been core to the positive elements of their experience. These offer a vision of what can result from transformative culture change.

Inclusion: Creating an Inclusive Culture

If culture change in environmental organizations entails shifting from exclusion to inclusion, what does inclusion look like, feel like, and operate like? Some staff of color provided glimpses.

Staff of color were asked to characterize an atmosphere where they can bring their full selves. An inclusive environment is one where people “trust,” “ask questions, listen,” “respectfully agree [and] disagree,” and “celebrate... differen[ces],” and where they are “supportive,” “open,” “vulnerable,” “open-minded,” “welcoming,” “accepting,” “respectful,” “encouraging,” “kind,” “authentic,” “genuine,” “help[ful],” “car[ing],” and “fun.”

Staff of color shared examples of feeling valued, included, and supported. These were core to their positive experiences and crucial for them to survive and thrive in their organizations:

What has helped me to thrive is that among staff we have a culture that is grounded in equity, supportive, hard-working, willing to learn, disagree and so on. These are conditions I can thrive under. In addition, my director trusts and has confidence in me, she's not looking over my shoulder and yet provides guidance when needed.

My supervisor and colleague, both white women, are very open to learning and hearing about my experience and opinion. Our executive director is also an open and empathetic person who encourages and facilitates “brave conversations.”

Colleagues who are willing to do the work with me so I don't feel so alone [and] an environment where we can freely talk and organize [have helped me survive and thrive at my organization].

A culture that is supportive, hardworking, willing to take risks, make mistakes and learn [has been core to my positive experience].

Staff of color also identified inclusive practices that are improving their organization:

We are actively dismantling the systems of racial oppression in our work, little by little, and thinking of how we can show up as a better ally to our people of color partners and make a more open and welcoming work environment for diverse staff.

People are working together to support DEI, and there's a great deal of self-reflection going on that's making us all more thoughtful, honest, and kind in our interactions.

We have learned so much from the Indigenous people of our region and are changing special use permitting practices, natural resource management practices, [and] our approach to nature education (to stop the cultural appropriation that was happening)...

We... benefit from a culture and work environment that is more open and accepting of innovative and diverse ideas.

Theme 3 • Expand: A Need for More

Staff of color often described the substantial work still to be done to advance DEI at their organization. They characterized this work as transformational, in that it has to address the root issues (such as white dominant culture), and as tactical, in that “the how” influences its effectiveness. Many comments reflected the culture of organizations at the DEI Beginner phase, especially regarding barriers and opportunities to progress.

So Much More to Do

Many staff of color recognized and celebrated the progress (whether small or large) resulting from DEI capacity building activities, while also understanding that the journey is long and that there is much more work to do. Others were not happy with the slow pace of change and half-efforts. While some staff of color are satisfied with their current DEI capacity building work and others are dissatisfied, most agree that there is still much work to do. This perspective of knowing that more transformational work is needed often emerges from staff of color who have a clear view of the current state of the organization and an understanding of how to move forward effectively.

One staff of color shared dissatisfaction with the organization’s current state while sharing the need to do more: “[I have] lots of mixed emotions - ebbs (frustration) and flows (excitement for what could be). So much more work to do and it's all very slow-moving! My organization is large so it has a huge responsibility to lead in this work, but I think it's very behind.”

Another staff of color displayed some satisfaction with the organization’s current state while again sharing the need to do more: “We are headed in the right direction mentally and instituting new procedures, but could do so much more in practice and habits.”

Whether satisfied or dissatisfied with the current state of DEI capacity building, almost all staff of color agreed that a lot of high impact work remains:

We have a long way to go... I know that staff will not give up and will continue to have the community in mind. Staff will continue to navigate through the bumpy roads and will hope to some day have alignment and understanding of DEI into our work.

I think there is a potential to do much more, but the [organization] is happy doing the bare minimum.

[DEI capacity building] needs to continue and dedicated staff need to be hired to move it forward and deeper within the organization.

This organization knows that it needs to do more, but they do not have the staffing to do so at this moment.

While there is hope that we can continue to grow with the DEI capacity building, we have received almost no funding from foundations and are stagnant in our membership numbers. While it feels good to do the work and lay a foundation of DEI, the long-term health and success of the organization have not been well established yet.

Although they have made a commitment to [DEI], a lot of work needs to be done.

Ignorant Resistance & Lack of Priority: Obstacles to Expanding DEI Work

Ignorant resistance and lack of priority were two themes with which staff of color most struggled and that led to no or negative impact on their work experience. They reported that these are immense DEI challenges for organizations, especially for DEI Beginners.

Ignorant resistance refers to pushback, resistance, misunderstandings, or mistakes based on inadequate DEI knowledge and awareness. It is also the behavior, action or decision that does not advance DEI (at all or effectively) because of an insufficient understanding of why DEI is important, what DEI is, and how to do DEI work. Offenders often do not know that they do not know. Ignorant resistance is often revealed through avoidance, denial, and/or defensiveness when looking at one's self or organization through a DEI framework as these staff of color share:

The biggest [DEI] challenge would be resistance as a result of denial and getting people to see this work through another lens as opposed to the one that they currently look through. This resistance could then result in short-term "fixes," which do not subsequently translate into long-term meaningful changes.

They fail to see that they have racism problems.

Defense to critiques on cultural competency and stuck in a narrow perspective that to have diverse workforce there is a need to "lower the bar" [are my organization's biggest DEI challenges].

The leadership team doesn't own up to their shortcomings.

Respondents shared other comments that further demonstrate ignorant resistance:

[H]ow others see this work... sometimes translates into just checking off a box in indicating completion as opposed to looking at long-term sustainable change.

[The DEI strategy development] had a negative impact because several board members were not ready for that level of activity.

[B]elief that being good people is enough [is my organization's biggest DEI challenge].

[White] people have little awareness of what it means to be a person of color walking through the world. [White] people feel little need to change a system that materially and socially benefits them.

Lack of priority was another widely cited challenge. In the context of survey responses, "lack of priority" is insufficient imperative, will, or interest to go beyond superficial preliminary steps and address root issues. Organizations may say they prioritize DEI with good intent, yet this intent may not actually translate into meaningful DEI actions and outcomes that lead to transformation. Organizations spend their time, money, and resources on what they prioritize. If they do not spend their time, money, and resources on an activity or issue, then it not a priority. Staff of color shared how lack of priority had a negative impact on their work experience:

Empty promises from leadership and no action [resulted in no or negative impact for me and my work experience].

Multiple meetings to discuss equity and DEI work that lead to no actions and have no actual effect on our [organization] have resulted in [a] negative experience.

Taking the first steps of identifying our internal culture, then not following up with any support, resources, assessments, or next steps [resulted in no or negative impact for me and my work experience].

Staff of color identified lack of priority as one of the most significant challenges to building DEI capacity in their organizations and an area that causes them considerable struggle. Staff of color described this dynamic in several ways:

The [lack of] will to make the changes that are truly needed [is one of my organization's biggest DEI challenges].

[I struggle with] apathy towards [DEI] work.

There are challenges of staff wanting to change/disrupt certain structures that we've outgrown and staff receiving resistance to making these changes from leadership. (These challenges sometimes manifest in ways that are unproductive.)

Not much interest in moving beyond a basic level of programming [is one of my organization's biggest DEI challenges].

We need to have more transparency from upper management, not just lip service.

The DEI Beginner phase is a time for organizations to set a strong foundation and raise awareness of DEI work. It is also when they should begin to address the potential obstacles of ignorant resistance and lack of priority.

Raised Awareness: A Building Block for Expanding DEI Work

Raised awareness about DEI issues is the area that has most improved as a result of DEI capacity building work. Raising awareness is characteristic of DEI Beginners, as it can be an entry point for building DEI knowledge and DEI skills, developing a DEI lens and DEI behaviors, and growing to the point of consistently and effectively practicing, implementing and applying DEI ("the how"). Staff of color shared examples of how DEI awareness is growing in their organizations:

I think that more people are aware that a lot of work needs to be done which, in turn, has created a hunger within the organization for more opportunities to improve things.

I would say that the improvement has been presented in [staff's] willingness to examine their own programs and look to change.

[W]e are at the stage of recognizing our past and privilege.

[We are] recognizing the ways in which white supremacy shows up within the organization (either through process or individual behavior)...

As staff experience raised awareness, they gain an “equity lens” that can guide positive change for the organization. Lack of priority and ignorant resistance may stifle this aptitude, but staff of color value organizations doing DEI capacity building, especially if they are doing it well.

Theme 4 • The Importance of Doing DEI and Doing It Effectively

Many staff of color value organizations that are doing DEI capacity building, although they note that this work is not always effective. This is where “the how” of DEI work comes in. Executing DEI capacity building well will lead to the deep transformation many staff of color desire.

The Existence of DEI Capacity Building Work

Just doing DEI capacity building is not enough, but it is a strong start. About 47% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that their “workplace experience has improved because of [their] organization’s DEI capacity building work” (Figure 17), and 63% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that “DEI capacity building is improving [their] organization” (Figure 18).

A visible DEI effort allows many staff of color to feel seen and included and provides hope. DEI work speaks to the core of their identity. In the words of one respondent, “[DEI capacity building work] is the hardest work I’ve ever faced—both because there is so much on the line and because it is painful. It is also the most intimate because it goes to the core of who I am...”

In addition, many staff of color are attracted to the DEI work at their organizations. About four of five staff of color respondents have a role in their organization’s DEI capacity building work. Of the staff of color that have a DEI role, 75% volunteered for or sought out the position, 67% enjoy the DEI work, and 47% have a leadership role. Two staff of color shared:

I joined the organization and naturally gravitated towards [our DEI capacity building work]. There wasn’t clear leadership from staff or board, and I felt that engaging was critical for me to have an outlet for advocating for organizational change while navigating internal equity issues and white supremacy culture.

I volunteered to take on a leadership role in our DEI capacity building work. This work is sometimes emotionally taxing and whether or not I like my role depends on the day. However, I like the role more as it evolves and value being able to shape meaningful change.

Conversely, about 22% who have a role actually dislike doing the work because the current effort is too superficial, because they feel tokenized, or because it is difficult to continually interact with defensiveness, white fragility, and ignorant resistance. They do the work anyway because they feel they do not have a choice since they are the only ones who can do it effectively. One staff of colored shared:

I was not hired to do the work, and I did not come here to do DEI work, but as a person of color I cannot sit idly and watch people suffer, so I have become an integral part of trying to change our organization's culture. Do I want to do this work? Not really. I wish I was already at a multi-cultural organization that embraced and respected all people and backgrounds. But if I stay then I have to do this work. I must help to remedy some of the harms, disparities, false assumptions and inequities that exist in this organization and the environmental movement.

Another staff of color described grappling with the tension of his DEI role:

Do you want me to [share my opinion of my DEI role when I had] a good night sleep or one when I have been up all night ruminating about the 1000 cuts I've weathered?... I have stepped up and leaned in. Then I've gotten angry and stepped out. And then I just can't help it; I lean back in. I'm considered a leader in this effort at my [organization] (they've gifted me with a little paper certificate in a cheap plastic frame). But playing this role has really taken a toll, and I definitely haven't been financially compensated for the impact this has had on my career. I have made it known that I am not interested in playing a role in the implementation... But truthfully, I worry that people don't see my value in contributing to our mission other than engaging diverse communities and advancing racial equity.

Despite these objections, staff of color identified DEI capacity building work as one of the top aspects of their workplace experience that they loved and would like to continue. Two respondents shared the importance of staff of color self-selecting for a DEI role:

It excites me to help others at my organization lead this work across our programs, to learn from the things we are doing well and to improve the areas we fall short. While I am an advocate against folks of marginalized identities being pushed and siloed into leading DEI work, I am also an advocate for folks of marginalized identities leading this work because it won't work when the dominant culture is. I am embracing both realities within my role as much as I can.

I have loved this role - but only because I negotiated with it in mind. It would have been inappropriate if it had been thrust on me as a person of color.

Doing DEI Capacity Building Work Ineffectively and Effectively

As noted, the mere presence of DEI capacity building work does not guarantee efficacy. While many staff of color felt that the capacity building efforts are not improving their work experience or advancing DEI, others reported that it is improving their work experience. These responses are parsed below.

Not Doing It Well: Ineffective Current Work and No Progress

Our research shows that DEI capacity building is not necessarily improving the work experience for all staff of color:

- About one of every four staff of color disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, “My workplace experience has improved because of my organization’s DEI capacity building work” (Figure 17).
- Almost one of three staff of color responded to the same statement as “neutral” (Figure 17). This data point could mean their experience has remained the same or could refer to a mixed experience, with some areas improving, some remaining the same, and others worsening.
- About one of every four staff of color disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, “My organization is authentically committed to DEI” (Figure 27).

Staff of color shared their dissatisfaction with the lack of progress despite DEI efforts:

[The organization] is happy doing the bare minimum.

Even though we have been doing this for three years, we are still in the beginning phase.

It does not feel like real DEI capacity is happening but saying it is while not actually following through has improved our organization’s reputation temporarily.

My organization is large so it has a huge responsibility to lead in this work, but I think it's very behind.

Some people of color staff... organized a list of acknowledgments and solutions to DEI issues at the organization... so we shared this info with the executive director... it's not really something that's supported by the organization.

I think it's a soft-start and am concerned that the organization will feel hiring interns of color is sufficient, without actually promoting people of color into leadership roles.

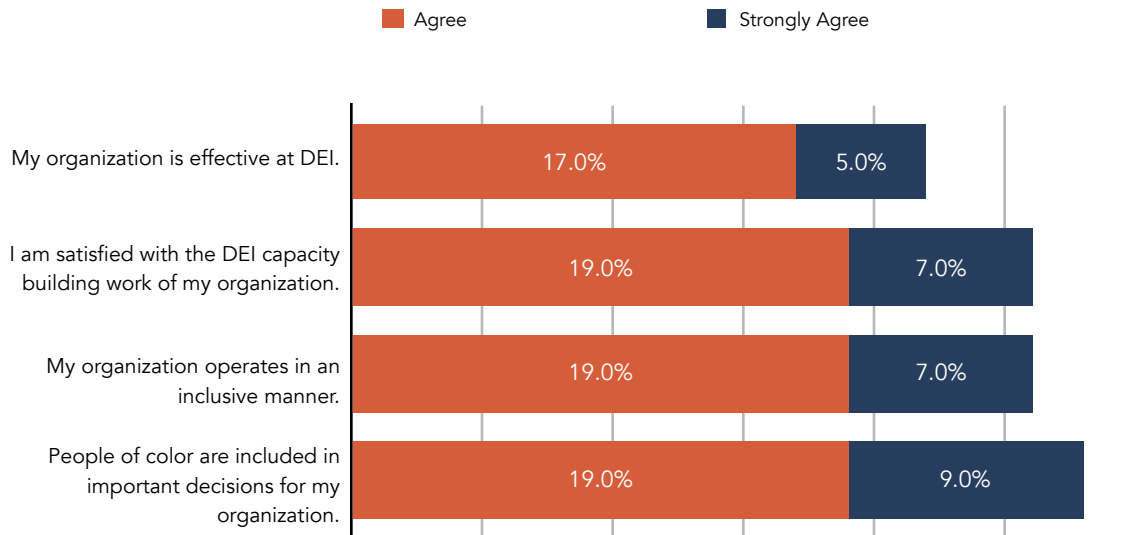
[My organization's DEI capacity building activities are] nominal, exhausting and not resulting in empowered leaders.

Two staff of color suggested that their organizations' DEI capacity building activities are making it worse for people of color:

I think [my organization's DEI capacity building activities are] very poor. Multiple people of color have left citing issues within the organization, and I myself struggle with it often.

It is worse because of... the appearance of improvement without substantive change.

The statistics below capture staff of color's concerns about the capacity, efficacy, and inclusion of current DEI efforts. Only about one of four staff members of color agree or strongly agree with the following statements.



Ineffective DEI work may be the result of insufficient capacity. Only 30% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that their “organization has sufficient capacity to advance DEI effectively” (Figure 20). Two staff of color described their organizations’ shortcomings:

I think that more people are aware that a lot of work needs to be done which, in turn, has created a hunger within the organization for more opportunities to improve things. However, there is a big gap in the desire and capacity to address DEI... And increased capacity needs to be at the top of the list.

They do not have the capacity right now to build capacity.

Doing It Well: Good Solid Start and Some Effective Current Work

Notwithstanding their widespread perceptions of slow starts and insufficient progress, staff of color also shared some positive perspectives on their organizations’ DEI capacity building work. Their responses show that DEI efforts are seen, appreciated, and beginning to show results:

- 63% of staff of color agree (23%) or strongly agree (40%) that DEI capacity building work is improving their organization (Figure 18).
- 46% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that their workplace experience has improved because of their organization’s DEI capacity building work (Figure 17).
- 54% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that their organization is authentically committed to DEI (Figure 27). (But note that commitment does not translate to efficacy: only 23% of staff of color agree or strongly agree that their organization is effective at DEI [Figure 19].)

The ways [DEI] improves the organization are countless...we make better decisions, hire better people, understand the issues better, develop better solutions, connect with decision-makers better, reach new audiences, connect with new audiences at a deeper level, have new partners, raise more money, tell better stories...

Staff Member of Color

Staff of color shared these perspectives about how DEI capacity building work is improving their organization:

The ways [DEI] improves the organization are countless...we make better decisions, hire better people, understand the issues better, develop better solutions, connect with decision-makers better, reach new audiences, connect with new audiences at a deeper level, have new partners, raise more money, tell better stories...

We are questioning the impact of our programs. We could have achieved all our strategic goals without interacting with or serving a single person or organization of color, but our latest strategic goals are now different as a result of DEI work.

People are working together to support DEI, and there's a great deal of self-reflection going on that's making us all more thoughtful, honest, and kind in our interactions.

People appreciate being and feeling seen and heard.

We are actively dismantling the systems of racial oppression in our work, little by little, and thinking of how we can show up as a better ally to our people of color partners and make a more open and welcoming work environment for diverse staff.

Theme 5 • Trainings

Trainings were identified as one of the more common DEI capacity building activities. Trainings, when done well, help DEI Beginners advance to the next stage of development, provide opportunities to learn about and practice “the how” of DEI, and surface root causes of racial inequity. Through trainings, organizations can develop high-impact approaches to creating an inclusive and equitable culture (transformation).

Staff of color named trainings as the top “DEI capacity building [activity that has] resulted in positive impact for [them] and [their] work experience” and, therefore, highly recommend that they continue and be adequately funded. Most frequently recommended were trainings that involve all staff and include both a racial equity focus and a strong personal development component. Trainings that were ongoing, included the board, and “provid[ed] historical context” were also mentioned.

All-staff trainings are essential (1) to increase knowledge and build skills, and (2) to develop a common language and shared experience that allows the organization to grow and advance collectively. One respondent said, “deep training of all staff and board has allowed folks, most of whom are white, to start with a shared language and understanding of racial justice issues.”

Racial equity training provides a deep dive into institutional and systemic racism and addresses staff of color’s strong desire for environmental organizations to recognize and begin to change white dominant culture (another key theme). One staff of color explained, “[t]o me it is crucial to examine the foundation that we stand on... [racial equity training] gives you the opportunity to look directly at the role that race has had in shaping our ways of thinking and doing.”

A focus on personal development is at the core of change and must be central to any training if the ultimate goal is organizational change. If an organization desires to be a ten on a scale of 1-10 (a one being a DEI Beginner and a ten being DEI advanced), then it must be made up of “10” individuals.

Staff of color also shared their views on the types of trainings organizations should *not* do, such as trainings that have “weak facilitators,” ask people of color to be more vulnerable than their white counterparts or are emotionally or professionally “unsafe” for people of color. These types of trainings negatively impacted staff of color.

While poorly-executed trainings can be disastrous for staff of color and the organization, well-executed trainings can be one of the most effective delivery systems to support growth and learning on an individual and organizational level. These transformational opportunities could be exactly what is needed to achieve consistent DEI outcomes and avoid the dissonant experience of exclusion and inclusion that staff of color commonly endure.

Theme 6 • The Staff of Color Experience: Inconsistent Inclusion & Enduring Exclusion

Approximately 86% of staff of color reported feeling valued and supported and experiencing hope and excitement working on issues about which they are deeply passionate, while at the same time—and in the same setting—experiencing microaggressions and feeling excluded, devalued, or invisible. Staff of color shared both thriving and struggling, experiencing both positive and negative workplace moments. This inclusive and exclusive experience is common for staff of color in organizations that are building DEI capacity.

This mixed experience may speak to an organization in transition, where one staff of color's foot is exposed to the exclusive elements of a DEI Beginner and the other foot is living in the inclusive space of a more DEI mature organization. Advancing to the next level requires focusing on the impact of the DEI activities (the "how") and not merely the DEI activities themselves (the "what").

Many staff of color reported experiencing times of feeling valued and other times of feeling tokenized or dismissed within the same organization, a tension captured in the following statements:

... I struggle with the discomfort of conforming and feeling bad or speaking out and losing my job.

I feel valued when the organization: 1) invests in my professional growth, 2) invites me to be a representative of the organization [at] conferences, panels, meetings, etc., and/or 3) incorporates my ideas into a project/initiative. I do not feel valued when the organization seeks insight from all staff and discusses topics to hear all voices (including my own) but then decisions are made by the same people often without the input provided through the discussions. This creates the perception of being valued but not actually being valued.

I feel valued around "diversity-related" issues/input. My skills and what I bring to the table are not fully valued or known. I graduated summa cum laude from my master's program, I am the treasurer of a non-profit board, and I have a unique background and set of experiences that would probably change (for the better) the way the organization does business with people of color.

I did not feel valued during the beginning stages of our DEI work because I did not have the support I needed to affect change. I feel valued and accepted when my colleagues show leadership in their adoption of DEI values and practices—when I don't have to be the diversity cheerleader or nag because someone else has spoken up first.

There's a general feeling of inclusion and being valued, but also moments in which my organization and our leadership fall short.

[I am] valued when asked to help identify most important priorities for staff for the upcoming year. [I am] not valued when leadership doesn't follow up and execute the work outside of creating a logic model. Also, [I am] not valued when [my DEI work] doesn't show up in my performance evaluation (going above and beyond to engage in DEI outside of my job responsibilities) and pay.

Some staff of color reported that even as they did not feel valued by their whole organization, they did feel valued in teams within the organization and, in one case, by other organizations.

I feel valued within my team. In respect to the total organization, I feel like I am dismissed because I am not a permanent employee. Even if I were, I don't think the current culture is accepting of one individual employee's perspective.

Within my own team, I feel my values are taken seriously. But outside of the team, it is very opposite. I discuss how to communicate with tribes with my team, and I feel I can be honest. When discussing it with other teams, I am dismissed and ignored.

Again, I feel valued when working... with outside organizations. I could look at something that occurred today, which is too often the norm. I am presenting my thoughts at a meeting of [staff leadership], and I am the only [leader] of color, but my voice is not heard until someone else says the exact same thing that I have said over and over again. I feel valued when I am asked to be a part of the team for several funding opportunities, so I know through that that I am valued, or when I am asked to join senior leadership in expressing these points directly to the funder. This shows me that someone is listening since I am then turned to for advice or support.

This dualistic experience could reflect a workplace in which some individuals, teams, or pockets of the organization are operating inclusively, while others are not and slow to change. These pockets of inclusion are reflected in the different ways people of color are supported.

Theme 7 • People of Color Support

Staff of color identified support from others as “the most crucial effort that has helped [them] survive and/or thrive in the organization” and “the environmental movement.” Respondents most frequently mentioned support from other people of color (co-workers and external colleagues) and direct supervisors. These support networks provide comfort, camaraderie, fortification, rejuvenation, hope, and empowerment—the consistent quality experience (“the how”) many staff of color yearn for, especially in work environments where they may feel devalued, excluded, or tokenized. Replicating these types of support is essential for transformation.

Some DEI Beginners neither fully understand the value of nor dedicate resources to support networks for staff of color. One staff of color mentioned that “[my organization should] allow for a people of color support group which has been blocked.”

Whether officially sanctioned by the organization or not, staff of color shared the variety of ways they have found support:

It has been so important to find other people of color to bond and build support for each other.

I like having a cohort of people of color and allies within the organization that is on the same page with me. This helps in situations where we need mental/emotional support and when we want to speak out on issues. It helps us know we're not alone.

I found connecting with women of color in the... movement inspiring and energizing.

Mentors (especially people of color)... who validate my gut feelings of inequity and tell me I am not alone [have been crucial to helping me survive and thrive in the environmental movement].

[S]upervisors that have supported my growth and leadership, both as a woman and a person of color, and have helped me step into new roles, providing training opportunities and mentorship [have been crucial to helping me survive and thrive in my organization].

[M]y director trusts and has confidence in me...

Intentional spaces that facilitate people of color meeting each other were crucial conduits for connection. These spaces included organizational affinity groups, networks (such as the Environmental Professionals of Color), conferences (such as Naturally Latinos conference, Taking Nature Black conference, and PGM One Summit), and trainings (such as the Center for Diversity & the Environment’s programs).

[T]hank you Environmental Professionals of Color for a network of friends/colleagues that catch me when I fall, support me when I'm weak and give back 2x what I put in. It's like a reality check.

[T]he Taking Nature Black conference... put me in touch with dozens of talented, intelligent, and trail-blazing people of color from around this region and allowed me to develop partnerships that can help the environmental movement strengthen its impact in this region and across the country.

Staff of color recommended that organizations focus on retaining people of color and on investing in the development of leadership and DEI skills. Other recommendations included:

Invest more in the retention and development of staff that are people of color.

Executives should give space and resources for people of color to develop DEI capacity.

[We need] mentoring and professional development in order to retain diverse staff.

If an organization wants to retain staff of color, then it is necessary to invest in these support networks. Leadership plays a strong role in making this decision.

Theme 8 • The Leaders' Influence

The leadership style, DEI commitment, and racial/ethnic make-up of organizational leaders strongly influence the experience of staff of color. Leaders set the tone for DEI capacity building work: whether it is a little or a lot, or transformational or superficial. Staff of color keenly observe how leaders model (or do not model) DEI behaviors (“the how”). One respondent noted that “[l]eadership needs to model [a] DEI approach—this would really help create a culture of humility and vulnerability.”

Leadership Style

Leaders set an example that affects the whole organization, especially staff of color. From the survey data, staff of color prefer leaders who are inclusive and transparent, have clear decision-making processes, display humility, are invested in the DEI work, and committed to growth. Leaders with strong DEI competencies understand how their power, privilege, and actions may reinforce inequity and exclusion and that they have the power to shift their behavior.

When asked to share experiences of exclusion, staff of color commonly shared examples of leaders devaluing, ignoring, or marginalizing them.

I was booted off the [DEI] working group when I chaired [a DEI activity.] The executive team didn't want to include important [contributions], and I stood my ground in defending what our working group had come up with.

I could look at something that occurred today, which is too often the norm. I am presenting my thoughts at a meeting of [staff leadership], and I am the only [leader] of color, but my voice is not heard until someone else says the exact same thing that I have said over and over again.

... rather than leadership taking the time to properly train, onboard and mentor me, they assume that because I am a person of color I am somehow less competent in the first place. Their approach is to instead communicate with one another—cutting me out from discussions about strategy and implementation—in order to work around my perceived incompetence....

We have a junior/senior leadership structure where leadership is kept informed about organizational priorities and performance, while the junior staff is actively excluded from meetings and emails.

There are challenges of staff wanting to change/disrupt certain structures that we've outgrown and staff receiving resistance to making these changes from leadership. (These challenges sometimes manifest in ways that are unproductive.)

Staff of color shared the exclusive leadership behaviors they would like eliminated and inclusive leadership behaviors they would prefer:

My direct manager is as open and encouraging as possible, but everything above them is not. Following through on what they say would help and hiring more people of color instead of pushing them out.

I would recommend directors that genuinely listen to and support their people of color staff, rather than always putting them on the defensive and making them prove themselves time and time again.

Leadership showing vulnerability would go a long way in making me feel more comfortable being myself around my colleagues.

We need to have more transparency from upper management, not just lip service.

Staff of color shared examples of leaders modeling inclusion in positive, productive ways:

[The executive director] brings her full self and makes it feel like it's okay to be ourselves. She has done a great job of welcoming new staff and also making long-serving staff feel comfortable. She's a great model of inclusivity makes it okay for me to feel like I can be myself at work.

Our executive director is also an open and empathetic person who encourages and facilitates "brave conversations".

The executive director is super supportive, open, engaging, hard-working and a straight shooter. How she shows up inspires us all to show up in similar ways.

DEI Commitment

Staff of color recognized that leaders who are committed to DEI capacity building and support the work had a significant effect on their experience. One staff of color identified "[t]he leadership commitment and attention to the importance of DEI work" as core to their positive experience.

Others shared below how leadership commitment to DEI has been crucial to their surviving and thriving in the organization:

The support of the executive director for every initiative I have undertaken [has helped me survive and thrive at my organization]. She's the leader. She's respected. If she weren't serious about DEI and willing to support my efforts on behalf of DEI, then I'm sure I'd leave the organization.

The active efforts from the leadership to engage with DEI work [have helped me survive and thrive at my organization].

Leadership being open to provide space and time to discuss these issues [has helped me survive and thrive at my organization].

Our Executive Director being a champion and supporting our move towards an organization with DEI values at its core [has helped me survive and thrive at my organization].

On the other hand, leaders that engage in all talk and no meaningful actions for the organization have had a neutral-to-negative impact on staff of color's work experience:

Empty promises from leadership and no action [have resulted in no or negative impact for my work experience.]

Multiple meetings to discuss equity and DEI work that lead to no actions and have no actual effect on our organization have resulted in a negative experience.

Race/Ethnicity

People of color in leadership positions are often seen as role models just by their very presence and inspire other people of color. Unfortunately, not many people of color work at the leadership levels (5% of boards and 12% of staff leadership) of environmental nonprofit organizations (Taylor 2014). Staff of color shared many observations below about the dearth of people of color in leadership positions, which was one of the most common responses when asked to share examples of exclusion:

Top management is still very homogeneous.

We need more people of color in senior management. I'm the only one.

Our senior leadership is mostly white.

An example of exclusion is the lack of diversity in our board.

Only 2 of 13 board members are people of color, no black folks.

[A]s you move up the leadership ladder there are fewer and fewer people of color, including on our board of directors.

Some staff of color cited a lack of investment in developing leaders of color and their organization's exclusive culture as contributing to low leadership representation:

We seek to provide opportunities for [staff of color], but oftentimes there is little to no opportunity for this staff to advance in the organization, or for them to have a real voice in decision making.

The organization doesn't strive to develop people of color leaders into mid-management or upper-level management leadership.

Leadership is core to successful DEI progress. The racial make-up, commitment, and behaviors of leaders—how they show up and how they lead the organization through transformation—can positively or negatively impact the staff of color experience and make or break DEI capacity building efforts.

Insights for Funders (Based on Staff of Color Themes)

While there is a need for more DEI funding, these investments should be wise investments that support effective, high impact, and transformative DEI work. Below are insights for funders based on staff of color findings and themes:

Support people of color networks. These under-resourced networks (such as the Environmental Professionals of Color [EPOC], Green Leadership Trust, and the PGM One Summit) play a significant role in retaining people of color in the environmental movement. As evidenced by survey responses, these networks are critical for staff of color to survive and thrive. They are foundational for all DEI work and provide relevancy to the environmental movement in a rapidly changing world. Because many of these networks have relied on the sweat and tears of volunteers, their foundation is shaky. They need intentional investment to stabilize, grow, and become even more effective at serving their crucial role in the environmental movement.

Invest in deep transformational trainings. Staff of color highly recommended that foundations support trainings for all staff members, especially leaders, that focus on racial equity and personal development. Racial equity trainings should address white dominant culture, institutional and systemic racism, and white fragility. The trainings should provide an approach that not only delivers information but also leads to transformation. For DEI Beginners, all-staff trainings help build awareness and develop commitment across the organization. Post-DEI Beginners and DEI change agents within the organization need more advanced trainings that develop DEI skills, agency, and behaviors and includes change management and how to communicate across difference and through conflict.

Hire staff and/or DEI consultants that support “the how,” transformation, and culture change. Staff of color mentioned the need for additional DEI expertise. A funder can hire a staff member or consultant directly to help grantees or provide funding to grantees to hire their own staff member or consultant. Based on staff of color themes, additional help should provide support in the following areas:

- **Change Management.** Successfully evolving from a white dominant culture to an inclusive culture requires an intentional and tactical approach. Marilyn Loden’s (1995) “Diversity Adoption Curve” and John Kotter’s (2012) “Eight Stage Process” for leading change are examples of tools that can support culture change.
- **DEI Growth.** The Multicultural Organizational Development Model (Jackson 2014; Jackson & Holvino 1988) and Meyer Memorial Trust’s (2018) DEI Spectrum are two tools that outline DEI growth stages or areas. This exposure can especially help DEI Beginners grasp how to advance DEI effectively. Providing a common framework for the entire staff to understand the organization’s current DEI state and how to grow can support collective understanding, buy-in, and commitment towards meaningful next steps.

- **Replicate Models of Inclusion.** Identify teams and supervisors within the organization that exemplify inclusion and replicate how they operate.
- **Staff of Color Support Systems.** At the request of and in partnership with staff of color, co-create support systems for staff of color—such as employee resource groups.
- **DEI Operating Procedures.** Collectively identify and implement behaviors, approaches, and processes that support the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and that do not reinforce white dominant culture.
- **Navigating Difficult Conversations.** Teach skills and put systems in place to work and communicate effectively across difference, especially when mistakes or conflicts occur.

Support DEI capacity building in all current and future grantees. Most staff of color want to participate in the DEI work and are attracted to organizations building DEI capacity. This approach will also bolster your commitment to creating a more successful environmental movement.

Support people of color leadership development programs created by and for people of color. People of color are severely underrepresented at leadership levels in the environmental movement. Many staff of color mentioned this as a reason that important organizational decisions primarily reflect the perspectives of white people. The research also demonstrates that the effects of white dominant culture are stifling the full potential, skills, knowledge, and experience staff of color have to offer. Staff of color strongly recommended more people of color at the staff leadership and board levels and environmental organizations to substantially improve efforts to recruit, retain, and promote leaders of color. Additionally, funders could provide movement-wide leadership development programs and support leadership coaching and training for new and emerging leaders of color. These efforts, if developed by or in true partnership with people of color, will help set up leaders of color and organizations for success and strengthen retention at these top levels.

Support Leaders. Since leaders play a critical role in the experience of staff of color, they need to gain DEI knowledge and skills that result in inclusive behaviors and approaches. Funders can support leaders in the following ways:

- Provide racial equity trainings that include learning about white dominant culture and institutional and systemic racism.
- Provide trainings or workshops on inclusive leadership styles and approaches.
- Provide a DEI coach. Leaders need guidance on how to model DEI and how to inclusively and tactfully maneuver through DEI opportunities and challenges.
- Provide executive coaching and training for people of color new to a leadership role to support and set them up for success.

Consider creating learning and support cohorts comprised of leaders from multiple organizations that together participate in the recommended trainings and coaching opportunities described above. The cohort approach often catalyzes DEI change processes.

Support readiness work to prepare organizations beginning the DEI journey. Initial work that raises awareness, invites commitment, and introduces the need to focus on “the how” and transformation will help build a foundation for doing the DEI work effectively. For example, funders can support staff leaders, board members, and DEI change agents in developing reasons why DEI is important to their organization and can support organizational DEI change agents in developing their agency and learning about how to manage change.

Provide more resources. Staff of color’s desire for more transformational work requires more resources and investment.

Support DEI capacity building that centers “the how,” transformation, and culture change. Develop criteria to help assess DEI approaches, transformation, and culture change in the funding application/proposal, during due diligence, and in the reporting process. This will help funders explore the crux of the approach, not merely what activity is being funded. Does the approach advance racial equity, model DEI, involve staff of color (ideally in a self-selected leadership role), and include other elements recommended in this report? Devise questions upfront and focus on an inclusive and equitable approach and process. You may ask questions such as:

- How is the organization engaging all voices in co-creating the process?
- Have people of color played a leadership role in co-creating the approach to the activity?
- How is the organization advancing inclusion and addressing culture change in this proposal?
- How is the organization including staff of color and their experience?
- How is the organization addressing and countering institutional and/or systemic racism in the proposal?

For interim and final grant reports, focus on impact and qualitative measures. Ask staff of color about their experience and invite feedback regarding the effective and ineffective components of the DEI work. If the organization’s DEI work exemplifies “the how,” transformation, and culture change, then continue funding, supporting their growth and improvement. Hire an experienced thought partner to support the development of this approach to provide a wise DEI lens.

Build relationships directly with staff of color and create communication pathways to receive unfiltered feedback about their experience. Funders often communicate directly with the executive director, development director, DEI point person, or another designated staff member. Staff of color are often not consulted although their experiences are the barometers for internal DEI work efficacy. Funders should learn directly what staff of color are experiencing and what is and is not working for them. Many staff of color have more advanced “DEI lenses” relative to other staff. Ask for advice. Build trusting relationships and co-create solutions with them. When grant reports are submitted, you may want to receive separate feedback from staff of color if you can do so in a way that respects their right to remain anonymous.

Support the development and implementation of an ongoing cultural assessment to measure the staff of color experience over time. The assessment can be applied periodically within an organization, among grantees, or across the environmental movement. The assessment will reveal root issues and ways to advance DEI effectively; and, therefore, support improving the staff of color experience and chart overall DEI growth in the organization or across the environmental movement. To ensure effectiveness, create a committee of advisors of color and consultants of color to administer the assessment.

Conclusion

As more organizations embark on DEI capacity building activities, it is more important than ever to understand how to effectively grow and transform into a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.

The research clearly demonstrates that DEI capacity building activities do not guarantee positive impact for staff of color (and in some instances, when approaches are exclusive, make it worse). Staff of color still experience marginalization and exclusion in various ways, both subtle and overt. While many also experience moments of inclusion and feeling valued, the exposure to oppressive treatment remains. This is a serious issue, as these traumatic experiences engender deep wounds and may be root causes for staff of color leaving their organization and, at times, the environmental movement altogether. As staff of color recognized, we must identify and address root issues—such as white dominant culture and institutional racism—if we want an environmental movement that is relevant and successful for all.

Additionally, the data show that most staff of color respondents have an advanced understanding of DEI (i.e., they recognize DEI Beginners and often have ideas for next steps). The data also show that staff of color have a deep commitment to the organization's mission, which could explain why many remain and endure oppressive experiences.

If we want to be successful at DEI work and truly transform environmental organizations and the movement, we should heed the perspectives of those who desire high-impact DEI work, adopt an advanced DEI lens, and evince a deep commitment to the mission. Staff of color point to a clear path forward—focus on the how, address white dominant culture and institutional racism, create an inclusive culture, support people of color networks, educate leadership, and invest in adequate resources to do more transformative, high impact work. Then and only then will environmental organizations achieve the diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization they desire.

“I heard my son's preschool teacher say the other day, that there are many right ways to do something. I'm trying to embrace that. I'm behind the preschoolers...”

DEI Point Person Respondent

V. DEI Point People Leading Organizational DEI Capacity Building Efforts

Introduction

This section presents the experiences and insights of DEI point people—those who are at the center of DEI capacity building work. DEI point people are involved in the day-to-day DEI operations and are ideally positioned to provide insight into what is and is not working well regarding DEI capacity building efforts. In this report, a DEI point person may be an executive director, DEI director/coordinator (or other paid staff member dedicated to DEI full-time), DEI committee co-chair, or another staff member who volunteers or is partially paid to coordinate DEI efforts.

DEI Point People Demographics

We surveyed 24 people leading organizational DEI capacity building efforts. Of these respondents, 16 were white, and 8 were people of color. Since respondents were asked to “select all that apply” in the race/ethnicity category, 5 of 8 people of color made multiple selections,

Metatheme

- **DEI Beginners:** Growing Through the Early Phases of Change

Themes

1. **Raising Awareness & Commitment:** Early growth and foundation building
2. **Culture Change:** Addressing white dominant culture and transforming into an inclusive culture
3. **The How:** The quality of execution is more important than the actual DEI activity
4. **Emotional Intelligence:** Prioritizing emotions and developing effective approaches to communicate across difference and conflict
5. **Growth Mindset:** Being humble, learning from mistakes, and improving
6. **Leadership Support & Commitment:** Leadership’s critical role in supporting DEI capacity building, modeling DEI, and growing DEI aptitude
7. **Ignorant Resistance & Lack of Priority:** Common obstacles to DEI progress that can be addressed through education and inclusion
8. **Mission enhancement:** A main motivation and guiding principle for DEI capacity building in environmental organizations
9. **Trainings:** Racial equity-focused trainings for all staff and board members have a high impact
10. **More People & Funding:** A need for increased funding and staff and consultant support to build sufficient DEI capacity
11. **Increasing Diversity:** Not a main motivating goal, but a complementary role to a broad set of DEI capacity building activities and approaches

resulting in 38% identifying as “Biracial/Multiracial,” 37% “Latino/Latina/Hispanic,” 25% “African-American/Black,” 25% “Asian/Asian-American,” 13% “Native American/Native Hawaiian/Native Alaskan,” and 50% “White.” Approximately 63% of respondents were women, 33% were men, and 4% were gender non-conforming (Figure 30). About 67% identified as “Heterosexual,” 17% as “Bisexual,” 13% as “Gay/Lesbian/Same-Gender Loving,” and the remaining 4% “Declined to Answer” (Figure 31). For organizational tenure, 20.8% worked for their organizations for 0-2 years, 37.5% for 3-5 years, 12.5% for 6-8 years, and 29.2% for 9+ years (Figure 32). About 78% of respondents were staff leaders, 13% were mid-level, and 9% were entry-level staff (Figure 33).

Further data analysis revealed: 10 of 24 DEI point people were white women; about 87% of white DEI point people were in leadership roles, whereas only 63% of DEI point people of color were in leadership roles; about 38% of white DEI point people had worked at their organizations for 9 or more years, while only 13% of DEI point people of color worked at their organization for the same length of time.

Exactly 75% of the organizations had a staff size of 50 people or less. About 8% had 251-500 staff, 8% had 501-800 staff, 4% had 101-250 staff, and 4% had over 800 staff (Figure 34). About 67% of respondents worked at organizations above the environmental-movement-wide average of 12-16% staff of color (Taylor 2014), while only 19% worked at organizations below the average. Three survey respondents worked at organizations that had above 40% staff of color (Figure 35).

The total 2019 DEI budget for 13 of 24 organizations was \$2,074,000; the DEI budget for each organization ranged from \$0 to \$900,000; the average 2019 DEI budget per organization was \$159,569, and the median DEI budget was \$100,000. Ten other organizations allocated funds towards DEI capacity building but did not calculate their annual DEI budget. One organization reported no 2019 DEI budget.

About 29% of the respondents’ organizations had annual operating budgets under \$1 million, 50% were \$1-10 million, and 21% were more than \$20 million (Figure 36). Organizations were primarily regionally focused, with the majority working in the Southeast, Northern Rockies, Great Lakes, Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and New England.

DEI Point People Metatheme

DEI Beginners: Growing Through the Early Phases of Change

While this report features several examples of growth, most organizations remain in the early phases of change. Being a DEI Beginner (a metatheme also found in the Staff of Color section) refers to the early stages of DEI work and does not correlate to the length of time an organization has been doing DEI capacity building. DEI point people mentioned several early-stage characteristics, such as prevalent white dominant culture, leaders displaying resistance or defensiveness, lack of prioritizing, the need to raise awareness collectively, DEI systems not yet integrated into operations, and lack of capacity. Even DEI Beginners that have advanced through early growth phases will still struggle to have dependable resources and sufficient capacity, systems, culture, and approaches to maintain the work and consistently achieve positive DEI outcomes. DEI point people shared their perspectives on this early-stage work:

[T]his process of transformation is in its early stages. I am really excited for where [we] can go in the years ahead with the foundation we've built.

We understand that an organization that has not been diverse in staff nor explicit in its DEI focus has a challenge in raising awareness and building trust and connections with long-time DEI leaders.

[We have] no shared analysis of what DEI means to our organization and what vision to proceed with.

The greatest challenge is being brought in to shine a light on the gaps of the organization, and being confronted with folks who don't really want to see those gaps or feel threatened in their own position and power by being criticized for not having addressed those gaps earlier.

The beginner stage is critical because it is during this time when organizations establish a foundation and path forward and prepare for the journey ahead. The DEI Beginner metatheme runs through many of the 11 themes found in the DEI point people responses, which are described in depth in this section.

DEI Point People Themes

Theme 1 • Raising Awareness & Commitment

DEI awareness and commitment—both DEI Beginner characteristics—are crucial foundational elements. DEI point people identified raised awareness as the DEI area in which their organization has grown the most and the staff and board’s DEI commitment as their organization’s top strength to move DEI forward.

These themes also characterize the early stages of change. Awareness—understanding what DEI is and why it is important—is often the entry point into DEI work. While it is a necessary initial stage, it is not sufficient to achieve transformation. Awareness leads to other crucial areas of staff and board growth, including knowledge and skill-building, agency development, behavior modification, mindset change, and ultimately transformation at the individual and organizational levels.

Raised awareness and increased understanding, especially in the areas of racial equity and institutional racism, were mentioned as the areas where the organization has grown the most.

Core understanding among staff about what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean to our conservation work and mission has grown fast.

We have improved our knowledge of what our institutional barriers to incorporating DEI might be as an organization.

Our organization is much more aware and thoughtful about the places we hold privilege and how we can be an ally and an advocate for communities of color and communities of color-led organizations in our work.

I, personally, have a much better understanding and awareness of structural racism and unconscious bias. I think the same is true of many of the directors and staff who have participated in the initiative to date.

Perceptions of the importance of DEI work... has been the first task we focused on—changing perceptions of staff and empowering them to undertake this work.

Personally and as an organization, we [have] grown in better understanding when to lead and when to support and how to better support groups focused on DEI work.

DEI point people viewed commitment across their staff and board as their organizations' greatest strength in advancing DEI:

Staff and board have a very open mind and are willing to learn and walk new paths, [which] has been instrumental.

A strong Board of Directors and a strong leadership team that supports this work [is our greatest strength in advancing DEI].

A strong commitment and willingness to be out there, take risks and recognize that it is a journey [is our greatest strength in advancing DEI].

We have an incredibly empathetic, aware and conscientious staff that wholeheartedly believe in this work on a personal and professional level and the necessity of it.

Theme 2 • Culture Change: From White Dominant Culture to Inclusion

As learned in the Staff of Color section, cultural change is a core element of DEI work and the essence of DEI transformation. DEI point people shared that many of their organizations, especially those in the DEI Beginner phase, have just begun to explore culture change, which requires a shift in priorities, behaviors, mindsets, systems, and approaches and a commitment to “the how” of DEI work. One DEI point person summarized the holistic approach to this transformation, by first addressing the organization’s current white dominant culture and then intentionally shifting to an inclusive work environment:

[The] big [challenge] is around building an inclusive culture. We have a white dominant culture work environment, and we are starting to tackle how we change that and make our work environment a more welcoming space for all of our staff (and future staff).

Other DEI point people further emphasized the importance of culture change and change management to achieve transformation:

[We] see equity work as a significant change management process and not just “charity work” that’s being done in addition to everything else moving.

Move this work forward if you are clear on what is important. It is not just checking a box thing. Diversifying requires really looking at and changing internal culture, and cultural change is tough.

We have moved beyond doing strictly environmental work to embrace the crosscutting nature of real social change. And this process of transformation is in its early stages. I am really excited for where [we] can go in the years ahead with the foundation we’ve built.

To inspire this change process, two respondents identified an inclusive culture as a motivational force for their DEI work:

[Our motivation] has evolved to focus primarily on the advancement of equity, promotion of justice, and developing an organizational culture that welcomes all who share our values.

A desire to improve the experiences of staff members of color [was my organization’s motivation for engaging in DEI capacity building.]

In the previous “Raising Awareness & Commitment” theme sub-section, many DEI point people described how awareness and understanding of DEI issues emerged at their organizations, which is an essential early DEI stage. Here, respondents shared specifically the increased awareness and knowledge of white dominant culture, white privilege, and institutional and systemic racism, which are setting a foundation to advance culture change:

We have a lot of work to do to evolve our organizational culture—we are a very "white" office, and our leadership, myself very much included, are culturally very "white" in ways that I think make racial equity work harder, and make our workplace less welcoming for people of color. We have begun to acknowledge and grapple with that challenge, but we have a long way to go.

More recently, our thinking has deepened, and our understanding of DEI issues has become more "sophisticated," so that our motivations are now also rooted in an urgent desire to address issues of racial and environmental injustice and understand/address the consequences of the intersection between white privilege and the roots of the conservation movement.

I, personally, have a much better understanding and awareness of structural racism and unconscious bias. I think the same is true of many of the directors and staff who have participated in the initiative to date.

Because we have increased multi-cultural expertise on staff, and because white people are at least trying to understand institutional racism, we bring an equity lens to almost everything we do now. The projects that contain the most overt social justice elements are [the most desirable]... by everyone, not just staff of color.

Our organization is much more aware and thoughtful about the places we hold privilege and how we can be an ally and an advocate for communities of color and communities of color-led organizations in our work.

Despite this progress, DEI point people also identified white dominant culture and white power and privilege as pervasive challenges in advancing their DEI work:

Personally, my biggest challenge to the DEI work (as a middle-class white woman) was being naïve about the breadth and depth of the issues that face people of color.

Some staff have issues with the race first approach, yet when we explore other aspects of diversity, we haven't been successful.

[W]e have also moved too fast in our hiring at times and not created conditions where staff of color can succeed. These have been really painful experiences for the individuals involved and the organization.

In order to evolve through culture change, an organization cannot just be committed to the idea of change. It must understand how to shift from a white dominant culture to an inclusive culture.

Theme 3 • The How: Quality Execution

As discussed in the Staff of Color section, “the how” focuses on quality rather than quantity and is the essence of DEI transformation. How an organization does the work is more important than what they do. As one respondent stated, “[DEI work] is not just checking a box...”

“The how” theme was especially apparent when DEI point people shared examples of successful and less successful approaches to DEI capacity building. For example, trainings, hiring, and ongoing learning activities were named in that order as the most effective DEI capacity building activities. The same activities, trainings, hiring, and ongoing learning activities were also named in the exact same order as the most ineffective DEI capacity building activities. The difference was in how the activities were executed (see Table 1: The Importance of “The How”).

[T]rainings, hiring, and ongoing learning activities were named in that order as the most effective DEI capacity building activities. The same activities, trainings, hiring, and ongoing learning activities were also named in the exact same order as the most ineffective DEI capacity building activities.

One respondent observed: “One of our cultural competency trainings was pretty ineffective. But the other one, with an expert who worked with environmental organizations, was really powerful. So I don't think a conclusion can be drawn across the board about training.”

Effective trainings included all staff and board members and focused on racial equity. Ineffective trainings were “one-off” trainings, trainings that did not provide tools to apply learning to action, and trainings where not all staff attended “because then people are [at] different stages in the DEI process and not bought in.”

Effective hiring practices included an intentional and different approach, such as recruiting through DEI partners; revising hiring policies; and instituting a “Rooney Rule”-type policy of “requiring that there be at least one qualified candidate of color in the finalist pool for any new position.” Ineffective hiring practices included asking hiring managers with no or little DEI competence to be in charge of hiring for diversity. As one respondent stated, “intent does not equal impact. Until we actually fix it, it isn't fixed.”

Ongoing learning opportunities are activities—such as reading articles, staff discussions, and attending community forums—that promote further staff and board learning on specific DEI topics. Effective ongoing learning activities complemented other DEI activities, such as

trainings, and were led by external experts. Ineffective ongoing learning activities were led by staff inexperienced in facilitating DEI discussions.

Table 1: The Importance of “The How” DEI point people identified the same activities, ranked in the exact same order, as the most and least effective DEI capacity building activities. The difference was in how the activities were executed.		
Activity Rank	Most Effective	Least Effective
1. Trainings	All staff trainings Includes board members Focus on race and racial equity	Trainings that do not include all staff Trainings that do not provide tools to apply learning to action “One-off” trainings
2. Hiring	Intentional and different approach, such as recruiting through “DEI partners” Instituting the “Rooney Rule” Creating diverse hiring committees Revising hiring policies with a DEI lens	Designated hiring managers with no or little DEI competence
3. Ongoing Learning Opportunities	Led by external experts Learning that complements other DEI activities, such as trainings	Led by staff inexperienced in facilitating DEI discussions

Respondents also emphasized the importance of culture, behavior, and process—further aspects of “the how” that flow from the quality of work:

We want to begin measuring our progress by the impacts our work is having on the culture and behavior of our efforts - NOT by # of people who attend trainings, NOT by the racial diversity of our organization b/c we believe that can be a false indicator due to things like retention or turnover rates - but by the changes in our culture and behaviors.

Equity is at the core of our work, and it is our imperative to look at every facet of our work through an equity lens. We embrace this as a process and way of work, not as a goal to be achieved. That has impacted how we recruit and engage board and staff members, as well as how we work with communities.

Another aspect of “the how” lies in effectively working across difference and building trust and relationships, or having emotional intelligence.

Theme 4 • Emotional Intelligence: Prioritizing Emotions and Communicating Effectively Across Difference

The Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute defines emotional intelligence in the context of DEI as “the ability to feel, understand, articulate, manage and apply the power of emotions to interactions across lines of difference” (Gardenswartz et al. 2010). Emotional intelligence provides an effective foundation for building relationships and trust, communicating through conflict, and tending to the impact. As the following comments demonstrate, tactfully acknowledging, welcoming, and addressing the weight of emotions involved is a necessary practice to achieve significant DEI progress.

There is an emotional toll that falls more heavily on people of color and their needs to be a plan in place to protect those staff during the process as much as possible.

[T]his work is not for the faint of heart. I don't know how you undo centuries of pain and suffering without experiencing a little yourself.

Build solid relationships between staff and board members. Know where every individual is with doing deep emotional work. Start where everyone can be away from... comfort.

In large part because of the emotional gravity of the work, DEI point people identified emotional intelligence as the top element for DEI readiness. One respondent said, “I wish I had done more personal work to build my own emotional intelligence.” Other DEI point people noted the significance of vulnerability in preparation for the DEI journey:

[I recommend to others embarking on their DEI journey to] open your heart, feel vulnerable, start slow and don't be afraid to have the conversation and build diverse partnerships even though you will fall down.

A personal willingness to do your own work and an organizational willingness to learn "in public" and be vulnerable before others [are important readiness elements for DEI capacity building work].

[It's important] having leaders who can express commitment to the work, even while acknowledging that it's hard and scary and they don't know what they're doing (modeling vulnerability and churn as a part of the process).

Others who recognized the vital role of emotional intelligence in DEI work highlighted the value of humility and empathy:

[Our greatest strength is that] we have an incredibly empathetic, aware and conscientious staff that wholeheartedly believe in this work on a personal and professional level and the necessity of it.

Empathic listening, patience, [and] inviting new voices into the conversation [are our greatest strengths].

[Significant to our DEI development have been] humility and growing awareness of staff, and their ability to change their mindset regarding issues raised by people of color [because of] shared experience of both the feelings of people of color and witnessing the blindness, bias, and insensitivity of ourselves.

[I have grown the most in] raising up others, creating opportunities for others to be recognized, being humble, [and] admitting that I'm wrong.

[My biggest challenge is] learning humility and stepping back for others to lead—powersharing.

[My biggest challenge is] quieting my own ego and need for attention or recognition.

A growth mindset builds from a foundation of emotional intelligence, making space for the learning and improvement necessary to advance an organization towards DEI maturity.

Theme 5 • Growth Mindset: Learning from Mistakes and Improving

The growth mindset is a state of mind that prepares DEI Beginners for the challenging work ahead. DEI work, just like any new venture, is not about if, but when, you will make a mistake. When mistakes occur, does the organization say, “It failed,” and abandon the effort, or does it tend to any negative impact (of which people of color often carry the brunt) and repair trust, learn, and improve?

Mistakes are critical moments in an organization’s DEI journey. They may lead to a breakdown—or a breakthrough. Organizations with a growth mindset more often achieve the breakthrough moment. Organizations that display a fixed, binary mindset—either they are good or bad at DEI—often accept failure, mistakenly identifying a roadblock when it was actually just a speed bump that they needed to learn to navigate. Eventually, their DEI effort breaks down, either permanently or for a lengthy time period.

Some DEI point people identified the messiness and mistakes as a crucial part of the journey because they provide (often painful) learning moments:

Honestly, even our missteps are ones that needed to happen for us to grow... [W]e've managed to be open, transparent, and honest with... [the] community about our mistakes and our blind spots, and in the end have gained more trust and credibility as a result.

[G]iven where we have been able to get to to-date, I think the early, messy work was necessary to tease out and define the path forward.

I don't think we could have gotten to where we are without the ups and downs that have happened.

I certainly would have been more thoughtful about some of our early diverse hires. At first, we didn't understand the toll taken on pioneers in a white dominated organization. The human toll of those mistakes was real. But this work is not for the faint of heart. I don't know how you undo centuries of pain and suffering with experiencing a little yourself.

Other DEI point people reflected on the crucial roles of humility and perseverance when learning from setbacks:

Humility and growing awareness of staff, and their ability to change their mindset regarding issues raised by people of color [are the areas in which my organization have improved and grown the most. Listening to] the feelings of people of color and witnessing the blindness, bias, and insensitivity of ourselves... have been a shared experience by our group.

It was very helpful to have a cadre of young leaders of color that independently came to us with suggestions for making the event more inclusive. We dedicated staff time to soliciting more feedback and following through on it, and that has made a huge difference. And it's not been easy!

Being humble, admitting that I'm wrong, sharing my mistakes with others, and making it ok for others to make mistakes [are the areas in which I have grown the most].

A personal willingness to do your own work and an organizational willingness to learn "in public" and be vulnerable before others [are important elements of DEI readiness.]

A core group that DEI point people identified as needing to have a growth mindset was organizational leadership.

Theme 6 • Leadership Support & Commitment

DEI point people recognized the critical role that leaders (i.e., the executive director and board of directors) play in successfully advancing DEI at their organization. From signaling readiness from the outset to continually moving DEI forward, leadership support, commitment, and investment are essential to DEI transformation.

Leadership commitment and support set the foundation for future DEI work and, therefore, must be established in the DEI Beginner stage. Strong DEI leaders possess a growth mentality that helps them build awareness, knowledge, and competency that lead to stronger commitment and investment in DEI capacity building work. As one respondent stated, “Executive director leadership is crucial but not sufficient—the executive director has to also be a visible learner.”

DEI point people discussed the critical roles that leadership’s commitment, DEI modeling, and growth mindset play in DEI transformation:

Having organizational leaders undergo individual training on undoing institutional racism can be very helpful in creating receptive ground, and having leaders who can express commitment to the work, even while acknowledging that it's hard and scary and they don't know what they're doing (modeling vulnerability... as a part of the process).

To get leadership involved in DEI awareness trainings/workshops is most effective because it helps provide direction for the entire organization. So getting leadership and the Executive Director to trainings and workshops is a good idea from the start about how they can support their staff in doing this work.

Readiness comes from... having top leadership unambiguous about the mission-critical nature of the work and willing to themselves learn, take risks and make mistakes they can talk about.

Staff and board have a very open mind and are willing to learn and walk new paths; this has been instrumental [in advancing DEI].

From the board and CEO level, we have a real commitment to DEI... this communicates to the staff and... partners that this work is meaningful and mission-critical for us.

Just as leadership support and commitment are important to DEI success, resistance or indifference may impede progress.

Theme 7 • Ignorant Resistance and Lack of Priority: Obstacles to DEI Progress

DEI point people emphasized two significant challenges—ignorant resistance and lack of priority, common characteristics of DEI Beginners as they attempt to build collective support and awareness to advance the DEI effort.

As defined and discussed in the Staff of Color’s “Expand: A Need for More” theme subsection, ignorant resistance is pushback, resistance, misunderstandings, and/or mistakes based on inadequate DEI knowledge and awareness. It is also the behavior, action or decision that does not advance DEI (at all or effectively) because of an insufficient understanding of why DEI is important, what DEI is, and/or how to do DEI work well. Offenders often do not know that they do not know. Ignorant resistance is often revealed through avoidance, denial, and/or defensiveness when looking at one’s self or organization through a DEI framework.

DEI point people reported encountering ignorant resistance:

There is frustration and can be a tendency for people to take sides and be divisive instead of having shared focus and desire to move ahead. Overcoming fragility and defensiveness [is a significant challenge].

The greatest challenge is being brought in to shine a light on the gaps of the organization, but being confronted with folks who don't really want to see those gaps or feel threatened in their own position and power by being criticized for not addressed those gaps earlier.

More specifically, we have also moved too fast in our hiring at times and not created conditions where staff of color can succeed. These have been really painful experiences for the individuals involved and the organization.

Some of our [leaders] and staff (very few actually) were offended by the notion that the field needed to work on DEI.

The other issue is how to have critical conversations—white people are very uncomfortable having direct conversations, and so we tend to dance around hard issues, which creates frustrations, misunderstandings and further complicates relationships with community of color partner organizations. White leaders need to get more comfortable with having uncomfortable conversations.

Lack of priority was another challenge found in DEI point people responses. Also defined and discussed in the Staff of Color's "Expand: A Need for More" theme sub-section, "Lack of priority" is insufficient imperative, will, or interest to go beyond superficial preliminary steps and address root issues. Organizations may say they prioritize DEI with good intent, yet this intent may not actually translate into meaningful DEI actions and outcomes that lead to transformation. For example, one DEI point person shared her organization's inadequate attention to racial equity, which is key for transformation: "Some staff have issues with the race first approach yet when we explore other aspects of diversity we haven't been successful."

In addition, organizations spend their time, money, and resources on what they prioritize. If they do not spend their time, money, and resources on an activity or issue, then it is not a priority, or lacks priority. For example, if a leader says that DEI is important but plans few DEI activities and does not free staff time or funding for DEI efforts, DEI work is not a priority. DEI point people communicated to us that this is not a rare example:

[We] need action by leadership to seek and secure [DEI] funding.

[Our most significant challenge is] finding the time to do this important work, when everyone already has a full plate of work.

I could do so much more to implement best practices around [DEI] if this was a core part of my job.

Some DEI point people addressed these obstacles directly. Common approaches included temporarily pausing to educate individuals by sharing why DEI is important to the organization, dispelling misconceptions, and answering specific questions. In a few cases, some people not aligned with the new direction chose to leave.

The pushback is to prioritize efficiency over taking the time out of regular programming to implement DEI work. The pushback is... addressed by recognizing the importance of DEI work and how some things will need to happen at the same time until we get the hang of incorporating DEI into everything together.

I think the organization might say it is ready, but until they actually get into the work, they really find out how ready they are. It is certainly a learning process for all involved, and as the one trying the lead the charge it is important to have thick skin and not be deterred by expressions of defensiveness, fragility, or ego as they emerge along the way--this is hard, but necessary in order to make any progress at all.

[We addressed this pushback with] a combination of caring feedback to explain motivations and realities, and to remove defensiveness—to be inclusive and gain buy-in for those who are defensive and/or whose journey has just started. Later on, [we addressed this pushback with] a recognition that some people may not be worth the effort for potentially changing their mindset and support, and recognition that they may be better off in a new organization.

[We] have had strong pushback from a few board members. There is the belief that if we don't just jump forward with what we already have done, we won't get "the work" done. It has most often been expressed by older white men who feel their contributions are not worthwhile or that their expertise is not being well utilized by not doing the same things over again. We had two board members resign, one who was asked to step away earlier than he had planned and another who chose to resign when we asked how we could support him in maintaining a physically safe space.

One key approach to address ignorant resistance and lack of priority is to share how DEI is critical to achieving the mission.

[DEI capacity building work] has made us more powerful, and more relevant. It has brought us new supporters (even while we've lost others). It has made our work richer and smarter, as we work with others who have different perspectives. It has helped us draw on broader pool of qualified applicants, and made us a more attractive place to work. It has energized staff and board, and made us feel more satisfied in our work.

DEI Point Person

Theme 8 • Mission Enhancement

Mission enhancement is one of the main motivators for embarking on DEI capacity building. Conversely, the misunderstanding that DEI is mission drift often blocks organizations from doing the work. When organizations and leaders understand the power and promise of DEI—that it will help them achieve their mission at a higher level of success—they are more likely to commit to DEI capacity building. While some organizations have grown to the point of experiencing the value DEI adds to their mission, many remain DEI Beginners.

These observations were borne out by the survey responses:

[T]he most fundamental [motivation] that drives me and our organization, as articulated in our... racial equity plan, is that we must do this work in order to fully achieve our mission.

[Our motivation] was an understanding that only a diverse and inclusive movement could ever be strong enough to do the work needed to protect and restore our nation's waters.

[Our motivation was the] acknowledgment that we cannot achieve our mission or be effective in our work in communities until we have examined our own institutional and individual biases and privilege.

[W]e believe that if we do not address the intersecting issues of social justice, environmental justice and other issues as part of our mission, we will be less effective.

I made it a strategic imperative for us to make DEI capacity building a priority. Happily, that work has moved way past me as a leader, but that was the impetus. I told the Board... if [we] remained a white dominated [organization working with] only the white dominated environmental community, we would become irrelevant.

DEI is understood to be mission critical for us to operate successfully... and for us to achieve the conservation outcomes we aspire to achieve because we have to partner widely and work with a wide diversity of communities and people.

In organizations advancing through the DEI Beginner stage, DEI point people observed that their DEI capacity building work has made their organizations more successful and has added value to the mission and overall work.

[DEI capacity building work] has made us more powerful, and more relevant. It has brought us new supporters (even while we've lost others). It has made our work richer and smarter, as we work with others who have different perspectives. It has helped us draw on broader pool of qualified applicants, and made us a more attractive place to work. It has energized staff and board, and made us feel more satisfied in our work.

In engaging in a DEI frame, we are seeing the world more accurately. That enables us to do our work better because we are closer to reality.

[DEI capacity building work] has helped us see our mission as one that is not just about the environment, but about the integration of the environment with social and economic issues that impact our community. You cannot talk about one without thinking about how they affect each other. Our social, ecological and economic issues all share a common thread and we actively see that now.

[DEI capacity building work] has helped us focus our work and make choices about where we invest our staff and financial resources as an organization. It has helped us attract a diverse staff and an increasingly diverse board and has provided us with a greater ability to be good allies and partners.

[DEI capacity building work] has not only added value, it has transformed our approach to our work. We have people reaching out to [work with us] who rightfully would never have considered us for social justice-oriented work before. We have moved beyond doing strictly environmental work to embrace the crosscutting nature of real social change. And this process of transformation is in its early stages.

Theme 9 • Trainings

Building DEI awareness, knowledge, and skills on an individual level are vital to advancing DEI effectively on the organizational level. Trainings were identified as the most common activity to build this personal competence and awareness, especially for DEI Beginners. DEI point people identified trainings, if done well, as the most effective DEI capacity building activity. They specifically mentioned racial equity trainings for all staff and board members as the most effective. Trainings were also viewed as the least effective DEI capacity building activity when not executed well. (See “The How” section above for an explanation of this dynamic.)

Respondents discussed the value of DEI trainings:

Facilitated trainings focused on "race first" have been the most effective.

All of our staff, and many of our board members [and program participants] have participated in the People's Institute's 2.5 day workshop on "undoing racism." It has provided us with a uniform and consistent basis for understanding the history of racism in America and how it continues to impact society today.

To get leadership involved in DEI awareness trainings/workshops is most effective because it helps provide direction for the entire organization. So getting leadership and the Executive Director to trainings and workshops is a good idea from the start about how they can support their staff in doing this work.

The best thing we ever did was hire [a specific consultant] to lead our first all staff DEI training.

With our current [year-long] work plan, we brought all staff through an intensive training, and this set expectations high before senior managers had opportunity to move forward.

Respondents cited trainings frequently as an important first step for organizations embarking on their DEI journeys. DEI point people recommended the following approaches:

To prepare doing DEI work... hold all staff anti-oppression trainings and anti-racism trainings to get on the same page about how your work intersects with these concepts. Then with this baseline, you can continue building capacity.

Having organizational leaders undergo some individual training on undoing institutional racism can be very helpful in creating receptive ground.

When asked what they would do with additional DEI funding, DEI point people identified trainings as the top activity they would continue. They would like to expand trainings to include more people, especially all staff and volunteers, and to provide additional trainings that will continue to build specific competencies, knowledge, and skills.

Theme 10 • More People & Funding

A need for more funding and people power, including dedicated DEI staff and consultants, was a theme that emerged across the surveys. Respondents described funding that was often insufficient and “spotty,” and they expressed a strong desire for adequate, consistent, and long-term funding for DEI capacity building. Many DEI point people highlighted the struggle of having to maintain funding for this work while simultaneously implementing an effective capacity building program.

Additional funds and staff resources would address a frequently-raised concern: the lack of adequate time to do the necessary DEI work, and do it well. Many DEI point people struggle to fit DEI capacity building into schedules that are already full. DEI point people listed DEI dedicated staff (current or new) and more time appropriated to DEI work for all staff as two concrete inputs that would make their work more effective. They also mentioned a need for consultants for coaching, training, and organizational support. Experienced consultants add strategic value to DEI capacity building.

Funding Needs

DEI point people shared their need for consistent, adequate, long term funding:

Knowing where the funding will come from is... important. This is not the type of work to under resource.

Plan a long time horizon. This work takes years. Don't kid yourself off the top with illusions of a quick easy fix. Spend real resources. Most other organizations blanch when I tell them about our \$100K annual cost, and many of them can afford it much more easily than we can. My answer is that this is work you can't afford not to do.

Essentially no funding [has been our biggest challenge]. Everyone who does this work volunteers their time. And few [foundations] provide capacity building grants—period, let alone to do this work. I could do so much more to implement best practices around the kind of work we do if this was a core part of my job.

Perhaps dedicated resources for DEI capacity building would help us do a better job making time for the work. That seems wrong, and I'm not sure it's true, but it is baked into the non-profit model; you focus on things that you are funded to do and will report on doing.

Staff Needs

Numerous DEI point people mentioned being “under-staffed” and needing one or more staff members “devoted to [DEI] that will help keep moving it forward.” These excerpts express their need for staff support:

Make sure that staff have the time to devote to DEI and have gotten approval from their supervisor to do this work. Raise the funds to hire a staffer(s) completely dedicated to DEI who can assist the organization and individual staff.

[Being] under-staffed and under-resourced in terms of money, and being dependent on partially lumpy or unreliable grant or donor money [have been some of our biggest DEI challenges].

Funding to support the work. Dedicated staff time and expertise [are important elements of readiness for DEI capacity building work].

One DEI point person shared how a dedicated DEI staff position has helped:

[E]quity work can take longer, may be uncharted and thus unfamiliar work, and may delay some processes. The pushback is to prioritize efficiency over taking the time out of regular programming to implement DEI work. This is addressed by the [DEI] position hired for the organization. Because this position has capacity, they can help infuse projects with DEI work and still help maintain efficiency for the organization.

Consultant Needs

DEI point people pointed out the advantages of outside expertise that can guide, support, teach, advise, and help lead the organization to the next stage of growth:

We need funding for further trainings. An outside consultant is MUCH more effective than when the work is internally led. Unfortunately, we have not identified any funding this year for our DEI work which limits our progress and growth in this area.

[W]e really need hands-on coaching for our staff and team, and board to better understand what this really means in the day to day of our work.

We spent a good deal of time reviewing consultant proposals to make sure the one we ended up going with was a good fit for us. That has been very helpful. Our consultant is not only a good facilitator (a skillset we care about) but has deep knowledge about working in white-predominant nonprofits and experience designing strategies and metrics.

Respondents also highly recommended the use of consultants early in the DEI journey:

Seek outside advisors sooner than later. When we first started this work we internally started a committee and attempted to sort of figure it out ourselves. We had some great conversations and learnings, but I'm not sure we were able to turn what we learned into real action.

[E]ngage expertise from consultants who have years of experience to guide [you] through the process.

[Have] supportive coaching in place to manage... expectations and frustrations.

Increasing resources—funding, staff, and consultant support—will allow organizations to go farther and deeper in building DEI capacity and provide opportunities to increase diversity.

Theme 11 • Increasing Diversity: A Complementary Role

Interestingly, despite all the attention paid to it across the environmental movement over the past five years, DEI point people did not identify the goal of increasing staff and board diversity as a main impetus for engaging in DEI capacity building. Mission enhancement, working with communities of color, change agent pressure, changing demographics, and creating an inclusive culture were motivations mentioned more often than increasing diversity internally.

Organizations are realizing that a sole (or primary) focus on diversity does not reap the DEI outcomes they desire. A DEI point person shared:

We also count our staff [and report the number] on Guidestar. In my estimation, [this effort has] so far fallen short of what we need... in developing a more structured and transparent system of measurement.

Another DEI point person strongly stated their desire to change culture and behavior, not numbers:

We want to begin measuring our progress by the impacts our work is having on the culture and behavior of our efforts—NOT by # of people who attend trainings, NOT by the racial diversity of our organization b/c we believe that can be a false indicator due to things like retention or turnover rates—but by the changes in our culture and behaviors.

While not an impetus for engaging in DEI work, diversity was identified as a common measure of the success of these efforts. It is both an easy quantitative calculation and may be a bellwether for whether an organization's culture is inclusive and equitable. But it is not enough; remember that hiring was named as both the second most and second least effective DEI capacity building activity. Our research shows that diversity plays a complementary role to a broad set of DEI capacity building activities and approaches, including trainings, focusing on "the how," emotional intelligence, a growth mindset, and culture change.

Insights for Funders (Based on DEI Point People Themes)

Many environmental organizations are at the early stages of DEI capacity building. A successful transformation will require significant resources to build a strong foundation and shift mindsets and perceptions. Based on the DEI point people themes, below are insights for funders:

Invest more resources for the long-term. To effectively build DEI capacity, organizations need more funding, staff, and consultants dedicated to scale-up efforts. Many DEI point people highlighted the struggle of having to maintain funding for this work while simultaneously implementing an effective DEI capacity building program. They also emphasized the need for reliable, consistent funding for the long term because DEI change follows a long time horizon.

Support trainings. Trainings were the top activity that DEI point people would invest in with more funding. They also had recommendations for making sure trainings are effective:

- Address racial equity.
- Include organizational trainings for all staff and board members. This collective approach raises awareness and makes a case for commitment, which are essential foundational elements for DEI Beginners.
- Target leaders. Consider providing racial equity trainings for cohorts of leaders from across the environmental movement
- Provide ongoing trainings to support specific needs as individuals and organizations grow and evolve.

Additional training topics that our research demonstrates would be useful include:

- Equitable and inclusive approaches and behaviors (“the how”)
- Emotional intelligence (The Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute is an excellent resource.)
- Approaches to effectively communicate and work across difference and through conflict
- Organizational growth and change management
- Organizational culture, including white dominant culture, inclusive culture, and culture change

Support the hiring of staff and/or DEI consultants. DEI consultants and dedicated DEI staff can teach, guide, and coach staff and board members. Many DEI point people valued the experience and wisdom of DEI consultants, especially at the DEI Beginner phase. As organizations build capacity and hire DEI staff, consultants may be used strategically to complement internal expertise and when a third party may be more effective, such as when administering anonymous assessments and surveys. Research findings point to the need for staff or consultants that can:

- Deliver trainings and workshops
- Coach and advise leaders, DEI point people, and other DEI change agents
- Provide further foundation building to support DEI Beginners advancing to the next stage of growth
- Support the organization in making the case for DEI (i.e., collectively answer, “Why is DEI important to our organization?”). This process is useful for DEI Beginners—especially board and staff leadership—to raise awareness and garner commitment and leadership support. It also spurs critical discussions regarding the relevance of DEI to the organizational mission.
- Support the development of new systems, processes, behaviors, and ways of thinking (“the how”) that support DEI values and a growth mindset
- Teach and apply a change management approach to guide the organization through transformation
- Support the development of metrics, both qualitative and quantitative, especially to measure impact and changes in culture, behavior, and approaches
- Provide valuable insight into organizational culture and support culture change.
- Facilitate DEI discussions, especially on difficult topics and to support ongoing learning.

Support readiness for individual organizations embarking or advancing on their DEI journeys. Funders can set up organizations for success by funding the following activities to help build collective awareness, support, and commitment. Leadership participation in these activities is crucial:

- Racial equity trainings for all staff and board members
- Emotional intelligence trainings for all staff and board members
- Facilitated discussions among all staff and board members about why DEI is vital to the organization's mission. Organizations may develop a statement based on these conversations.

Support organizations that are authentically committed to transformation (change that addresses root issues). DEI point people described authentically committed organizations as ones that place the focus on culture change, equity, justice, and internal capacity, and not on increasing diversity. These characteristics, combined with other DEI point people themes and insights discussed above, such as emphasizing “the how” and emotional intelligence, are hallmarks for organizations that are effectively integrating inclusive approaches that will support transformation.

During the proposal and due diligence phases, funders should ask why and how the organization is doing DEI capacity building to help determine the depth and complexity of commitment. In the middle and end of the grant period, assess the growth and efficacy of the work by asking staff of color and utilizing tools, such as the Meyer Memorial Trust (2018) DEI spectrum tool that assesses growth in 12 categories. Funders may choose to identify other qualitative metrics and support the development of additional tools. Continue to support organizations that clearly demonstrate impact and growth. As shown throughout this report, merely doing DEI capacity building does not guarantee effectiveness. More suggestions for supporting transformation are provided in the Staff of Color's Insights section.

Conclusion

DEI point people have a core role in facilitating DEI capacity building efforts. The themes identified in this section provide funders, DEI point people, leadership, staff, and board members a partial guide for advancing DEI in organizations and the broader environmental movement. By focusing on culture change and “the how,” especially with high-quality work that integrates DEI values, emotional intelligence, and a growth mindset, organizations can shift culture and mature beyond the beginner phase.

A critical part of this process lies in elevating staff of color and their experiences. Unfortunately, DEI point people responses did not reveal uplifting, listening to, and following staff of color as an important component to DEI work. This glaring omission, sadly, reinforces the staff of color’s feelings of being excluded, marginalized, and devalued that are obvious in the staff of color research. Once DEI point people and DEI efforts center the experience and leadership of staff color, and in partnership, co-create a path forward, utilizing the findings, insights, and recommendations in this report, then true DEI transformation may occur.

VI. Recommendations for Funders

This report offers much to ponder and process. Based on the report findings and insights, we provide guidelines to funders on how to set up a DEI capacity building grantmaking program at their foundation and recommend what to fund to support effective DEI capacity building efforts in individual organizations and across the environmental movement.

Grantmaking Guidelines

Recommendation 1: Wisely invest significant funds and for the long term.

DEI change work does not occur in one-year grant cycles and requires sustained, wise investments in effective, high impact, and transformative DEI work over many years. Funders and DEI point people emphasized the need for long-term (some mentioned 5-10 years) and significant funding. DEI is complex, and organizations must take the time to build knowledge, skills, and tools; develop foundational goals, tactics, and strategy; and then implement, execute, troubleshoot, and adapt internally and externally. DEI Beginners, in particular, need a high amount of resources to build a strong foundation, grow, and be impactful.

Recommendation 2: Develop a guiding vision/goal and a “why” statement to guide your DEI capacity building investments.

The statement will clarify why DEI is important to your foundation’s overall vision and mission. The vision/goal will support your grantmaking approach.

Recommendation 3: Hire an external thought partner.

The funders who used external thought partners strongly endorsed this recommendation because thought partners helped them achieve a high level of impact by providing advice, coaching, and wisdom, often at crucial points in program development, implementation, and management. Unless the foundation has dedicated staff with extensive experience building DEI capacity for multiple organizations, a funder that is developing a new, effective DEI capacity building grantmaking program should make hiring a thought partner a priority.

Recommendation 4: Be patient and commit to a growth mindset (for yourselves and your grantees).

Consider developing a long-term strategy (5-10 years) that includes a vision, a change process, time for reflection (to assess lessons learned and adjust as needed), and deliberate funding strategies at varying growth stages. For example, invest more funds at the outset on transformational, cohort-style trainings that focus on individual growth and agency, then move more investments to organizational change work. Finally support movement-wide efforts and transformation, such as supporting authentic partnerships with people-of-colored organizations and justice-focused groups to amplify impact. This approach follows the theory of change that impactful change happens first at the individual level, then the organization level, and finally, the movement level.

Recommendation 5: Partner with staff of color and grantees.

Co-create a DEI capacity building grantmaking program with grantees (and other environmental organizations within the region served) and staff of color from these organizations. Initially, gather information (through discussions and anonymous surveys) to gauge interest in and build support for DEI capacity building and to shape a program relevant to its users. As the program grows, continue to gather valuable feedback, and adjust program approaches and offerings to best serve the evolving needs. Demonstrate DEI values and behaviors in the co-creation and implementation of the program. Intentionally build relationships based on trust and safety, especially with staff of color, to create an atmosphere that encourages frank feedback.

Recommendation 6: Support organizations that are authentically committed to transformation.

Transformation will come when organizations adopt the approaches and efforts recommended in this report: follow “the how”; shift from a white dominant culture to an inclusive culture; listen to and follow the advice of staff of color; learn about and address institutional and systemic racism; leaders grow their DEI competency; and all of the staff and board members do this work and grow together. You may ask why the organization is doing DEI capacity building, how it is approaching the work and implementing activities, and what the organization is doing to address root issues. During and after the grant period, assess the impact and efficacy of the work—especially by soliciting feedback from staff of color since their experiences serve as “DEI barometers.” Staff of color can help guide (and provide feedback on) DEI work since they often feel the impact of DEI efforts — positive or negative—first and most. Continue to support organizations that are growing and achieving impact.

Recommendation 7: Add support for people-of-color-led/justice-focused groups working on environmental issues.

All funders interviewed also provided funds to groups that are led by people of color or that focus on justice, which was a top funder recommendation. Many of these funders understood (either initially or at a later stage) that supporting DEI capacity building in mainstream environmental organizations means supporting both equity and environmental outcomes. They realized that if racial equity outcomes in environmental programming are an ultimate goal, then they must fund the groups (i.e., people-of-color-led/justice-focused groups) that are currently most effective at achieving both racial equity and environmental outcomes. As this report demonstrates, many mainstream environmental groups are at the beginning stages of DEI work, which means that they will not achieve consistent and high-impact racial equity outcomes until they reach a more advanced stage. After self-reflection (and going through their own internal DEI process), many funders have realized how their actions can reinforce certain inequities, such as continually overfunding mainstream, dominant-culture environmental organizations and underfunding (or, in many cases, not funding at all) under-resourced people-of-color-led/justice-focused groups that are advancing environmental protection.

Recommendation 8: Build DEI capacity at your foundation.

Foundations will reap the same benefits for doing DEI work as their grantees: mission enhancement; a higher-performing organization with relevant programming; and robust relationships and more successful work with the strongest environmentalists—people of color. You and your colleagues at your foundation must be deeply introspective about your own DEI journey, humbly understanding your current state of DEI competency and being honest with yourselves about how much work you need to do to achieve your own DEI transformation. A shared experience of learning and growing together with grantees promotes authenticity, integrity, and a mutual appreciation for the importance of DEI capacity building and the need to do it well. This practice also demonstrates a genuine commitment to DEI and builds trust with grantees and staff of color. Almost all funders interviewed were building internal DEI capacity at their foundation. Additionally, DEI point people and staff of color commonly recommended this internal work when asked, “If a foundation wants to start a new DEI capacity building program, what would you recommend to them? What would be the crucial elements?”

How to Support Individual Organizations**Recommendation 9: Support effective, ongoing trainings for all staff and board members, especially leaders.**

Focus on personal development, deep transformation, and racial equity that addresses white dominant culture and institutional and systemic racism.

- Other training topics to support:
- Organizational growth and change management
- Equitable and inclusive approaches and behaviors (“the how”)
- Organizational culture, including white dominant culture, inclusive culture, and culture change
- Communicating across difference and through conflict
- Emotional intelligence

Recommendation 10: Support the hiring of DEI consultants and staff that can guide and implement report recommendations and insights.

DEI consultants and dedicated DEI staff can teach, guide, and coach staff and board members and, when used discerningly, can expedite DEI progress. Funders, staff of color, and DEI point people valued the experience and wisdom of DEI consultants, especially at the DEI Beginner phase. As organizations build capacity and make a clear case for hiring DEI staff, consultants may be used strategically to complement internal expertise and when a third party may be more effective, such as when administering anonymous assessments and surveys. Research findings point to the need for staff or consultants that can:

- Deliver trainings and workshops on racial equity, culture change, and other topics recommended in this report
- Coach and advise leaders and DEI change agents
- Support all staff and board members in making the case for DEI
- Support the development of new organizational systems, processes, structures, and new personal behaviors and mindsets (“the how”) that support the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and that do not reinforce white dominant culture
- Identify teams and supervisors within the organization that exemplify inclusion and replicate how they operate
- Provide valuable insight into organizational culture, support culture change, and guide change management. Successfully evolving from a white dominant culture to an inclusive culture requires an intentional and tactical approach. Marilyn Loden’s (1995) “Diversity Adoption Curve” and John Kotter’s (2012) “Eight Stage Process” for leading change are examples of tools that can support culture change.
- Develop a growth mindset culture. The Multicultural Organizational Development Model (Jackson 2014; Jackson & Holvino 1988) and Meyer Memorial Trust’s (2018) DEI Spectrum are two tools that outline DEI growth stages or areas. This exposure can especially help DEI Beginners grasp how to advance DEI effectively. Providing a common framework for the entire staff to understand the organization’s current DEI state and how to grow can support collective understanding, buy-in, and commitment towards meaningful next steps.
- In partnership with staff of color, co-create staff of color support systems—such as employee resource groups
- Teach skills and put systems in place to navigate difficult conversations and communicate effectively across difference, especially when mistakes or conflicts occur. The Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute is an excellent resource.
- Facilitate DEI discussions, especially on difficult topics and to support ongoing learning

Recommendation 11: Support readiness work to prepare organizations beginning the DEI journey.

It is vital to set organizations and staff up for success from the beginning, focusing on high impact change work that addresses root issues. Readiness work includes:

- Racial equity trainings, as discussed above
- Making the organizational case for DEI (i.e., collectively answer, “Why is DEI important to our organization and our mission?”). This process is useful for DEI Beginners—especially board and staff leadership—to raise awareness and garner commitment and leadership support. It also spurs critical discussions regarding the relevance of DEI to the organizational mission.

How to Support the Environmental Movement

Recommendation 12: Support people of color networks.

These networks are critical for the retention, happiness, and success of staff of color and provide a solid foundation for all DEI work. For some people of color, support networks are the sole reason they remain working at their organizations.

Recommendation 13: Support readiness across the environmental movement for organizations embarking on their DEI journeys.

In some instances, providing spaces for organizational leaders and DEI change agents who are thinking about, or about to start, DEI capacity building efforts to build relationships and have initial discussions may be an appropriate first step before engaging the full staff and board of the organization. Consider a cohort model that includes a few organizational representatives from multiple organizations. The following activities will help build awareness and commitment and equip change agents and leaders with knowledge, skills, and approaches to more effectively advance DEI at their organization:

- Racial equity trainings that include institutional and systemic racism and white dominant culture topics and emphasize personal development
- Facilitated discussions answering, “Why is DEI important to my organization’s mission?”
- Workshops on organizational change management approaches

Recommendation 14: Support learning cohorts for organizational leaders.

Since leaders play a critical role in the experience of staff of color and setting the tone of DEI efforts, they need to continue to gain the DEI knowledge, skills, and competence required to effectively lead an organization committed to DEI. According to our research, this leadership requires a unique skillset: clear and inclusive decision-making processes, transparency, humility, vulnerability, emotional intelligence, an understanding of how power, privilege, and actions may unintentionally reinforce inequity and exclusion, and consistent behaviors and approaches that embody inclusion and equity. Most importantly, leaders must continuously grow their DEI aptitude, especially as their organization evolves.

To support this growth, funders should create sustained learning and support cohorts comprised of leaders from several organizations that together participate in the following trainings and coaching opportunities:

- Provide trainings on racial equity, emotional intelligence and other topics as described above in the trainings recommendation.
- Provide trainings or workshops on inclusive leadership styles and approaches.
- Provide DEI coaching. Leaders need guidance on how to model DEI and how to inclusively and tactfully maneuver through DEI opportunities and challenges.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for cohorts to share advice and lessons learned, troubleshoot, and support each other as their DEI competency evolves.

Recommendation 15: Support the development of a staff of color cultural assessment.

As noted earlier in the report, staff of color experiences are the barometers of effective DEI work. Therefore, measuring the quality of these experiences over time can provide critical information regarding effective DEI approaches and charting the environmental movement's growth. The assessment should include questions about white dominant culture and inclusive culture. Also, both staff of color and white staff should participate, and the assessment should be administered periodically, so differences and similarities of experiences may be analyzed.

Recommendation 16: Produce a report (or report series) of case studies about organizations demonstrating how DEI capacity building is adding value to their mission and making them a better organization.

DEI point people identified mission enhancement as a main motivator for embarking on DEI capacity building. When organizations and leaders understand the power and promise of DEI—that it will help them achieve their mission at a higher level of success—they are more likely to commit to DEI capacity building. This report could motivate and inspire others to build DEI capacity and dispel the myth that DEI is mission drift, which commonly blocks DEI progress. Some of the most powerful quotes from DEI point people were about DEI enhancing their mission. One such quote is below:

[DEI capacity building work] has made us more powerful, and more relevant. It has brought us new supporters (even while we have lost others). It has made our work richer and smarter, as we work with others who have different perspectives. It has helped us draw on a broader pool of qualified applicants, and made us a more attractive place to work. It has energized staff and board, and made us feel more satisfied in our work.

VII. Recommendations for Staff of Color, DEI Point People, & Staff Leaders

Recommendations for Staff of Color

- **Develop a personal support network.** Seek formal and informal support networks, which may include other people of color, co-workers, supervisors, family, and friends. Identify mentors and mentees.
- **Practice self-care.** Working in the environmental movement brings additional stress and may be traumatizing because of oppressive and exclusive practices as described in this report. Regularly engage in activities to rest and rejuvenate.
- **Pace yourself.** If you take on a DEI capacity building leadership role, seek opportunities to grow and develop your DEI agency. Do not try to do everything at once. Pick your battles.
- **Set yourself up for success.** Seek workspaces (either in organizations or teams within the organization) that operate inclusively and that value your voice. Seek an organization that is genuinely committed to DEI and has strong leadership that models DEI. Find a position where the supervisor is known for being inclusive. These spaces are set up for you to succeed.
- **Know when to walk away.** Avoid toxic workspaces set up for you to fail. If there is no intentional effort to support you in an inclusive and equitable way, then the situation is set up for you to fail. If you remain in these situations, you risk trauma and jeopardize your overall health.
- **Get help.** New leaders of color should hire an executive coach and/or attend trainings to support your growth and effectiveness and to set you up for success.

Recommendations for DEI Point People (and Their Organizations)

- **Cultivate staff of color DEI leadership positions.** If people of color choose to lead the DEI effort, follow their lead, and invest in their professional development to set them up for success.
- **Prioritize staff of color's feedback and input into DEI work.** Listen to, invite, involve, and build trust with staff of color. When asking staff of color to share their experience, build a close relationship based on safety, trust and inclusion first. Be clear why you are doing DEI work, what you are trying to improve, why you are asking staff of color for input, and what you will do with the information shared.
- **Invest in staff of color leadership.** Hire and promote staff of color into leadership positions. Provide leadership development opportunities for staff of color.

- **Do the work.** Follow the recommendations in this report. Strategically hire consultants to complement internal DEI staff capacity. DEI staff and consultants should:
 - ▶ Deliver trainings and workshops
 - ▶ Coach and advise leaders
 - ▶ Support the organization in making the case for DEI (i.e. collectively answer, “Why is DEI important to our organization and our mission?”).
 - ▶ Support the development of new organizational systems, processes, and structures, and personal behaviors and ways of thinking (“the how”) that support the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and that do not reinforce white dominant culture.
 - ▶ Identify teams and supervisors that exemplify inclusion and replicate how they operate.
 - ▶ Guide change management. Teach and apply a change management approach to guide the organization through transformation.
 - ▶ In partnership with staff of color, help create staff of color support systems—such as employee resource groups. Also provide funding for staff of color to participate in external support networks.
- **Continue to cultivate a growth mindset.** Develop systems to reflect on and improve approaches, especially when mistakes occur. Setbacks are opportunities to grow.
- **Support ongoing learning.** Provide opportunities for staff to continue their knowledge and skill-building via discussions, readings, videos, workshops, and/or trainings. Skilled internal or external DEI facilitators should lead these activities.
- **Dedicate funding.** Develop and/or advocate for DEI budget line items in the organization’s operating budget.
- **Practice self-care.** Value, support, and create space for self-care for yourself and others involved in DEI capacity building, especially since the work carries a heavy emotional toll. Consider connecting to DEI point people in other organizations and hiring a DEI coach for additional support.

Recommendations for Staff Leaders, Especially Executive Directors and Presidents

This stakeholder group was not surveyed or interviewed. After analyzing the data, however, a unique and critical role emerged for staff leaders, which is why these recommendations are included.

- **Commit to and support DEI.** Leadership is often the organizational gatekeeper. Your “green light” is needed as the organization embarks on its DEI journey. Support it by allotting staff time to DEI capacity building work. At the beginning stages, consider hiring a consultant who can guide and develop a path forward. As the organization advances and develops a clear need, consider hiring DEI staff. Commit to transformational work that addresses root causes.
- **Grow your DEI competency.** Humble yourself in knowing that there is a lot about DEI that “you know that you don’t know” and that “you don’t know that you don’t know,” but you are committed to learning. Attend racial equity and inclusive leadership trainings. Participate in ongoing learning opportunities with staff. Hire a personal DEI coach.
- **Make the case for DEI.** Learn how DEI enhances your organization mission and develop your “why.” Work with board and staff leadership on making the case for DEI work to raise awareness, garner commitment and support, and build a strong foundation for future DEI work.
- **Model DEI and be inclusive.** Your voice and commitment to DEI hold weight. Your inclusive or exclusive behavior profoundly impacts the experience of people of color. How you exemplify DEI can have loud repercussions not only within your organization but also across the environmental movement.
- **Hire leaders of color.** Promote staff of color to leadership positions, including DEI leadership positions if they desire. Provide leadership development opportunities for staff of color.
- **Commit funding to DEI.** Designate DEI budget line items in the organization’s operational budget.
- **Find support.** Join a learning cohort of other leaders committed to DEI. You are not alone.

VIII. Conclusion

As the research in this report demonstrates, simply doing DEI work is not enough. You need to do it effectively—focusing on “the how,” shifting to an inclusive culture, addressing white dominant culture, and honing in on and responsibly responding to people of color’s experiences and parsing what they tell us.

Collectively, as an environmental movement, we are all relatively new to DEI capacity building—creating the path as we go and pioneering a new space and direction for the environmental movement. In order to grow together, we need to be “all in.” Institutions demonstrate what they value and prioritize by what they fund and spend time on. If we are to become truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive, there is no room for half efforts. Committing all that we have now—time, funding, people, brainpower, and heart—will ensure a stable and sustainable foundation for future generations, especially in a future when our nation is a majority people of color. Building this strong foundation now will set us up to succeed through the challenges of more mature DEI phases, such as maintaining an inclusive culture during personnel changes and the effects of systemic racism and white dominant culture outside the organization.

The environmental movement already contains funders, leaders, people of color, and consultants who have an advanced understanding of the DEI and environmental protection spaces. These DEI change agents embody the skills, wherewithal, commitment, and know-how to achieve the high impact that is needed. The question now is whether we tap these resources at a time when our planet and the species that inhabit it need us more than ever. Change can be slow, but history shows that it does not have to be. This evolution requires a fearless commitment to transformation, infusing significant financial resources, investing them wisely, and utilizing our collective power effectively. When this happens, we will finally live into the promise of DEI—reaching an unprecedented level of success in protecting a flourishing, healthy, and sustainable planet.

IX. Appendix

Figures from Staff of Color Survey Findings

Figure 1

Which of the following categories best describes your race/ethnicity? (select all that apply)

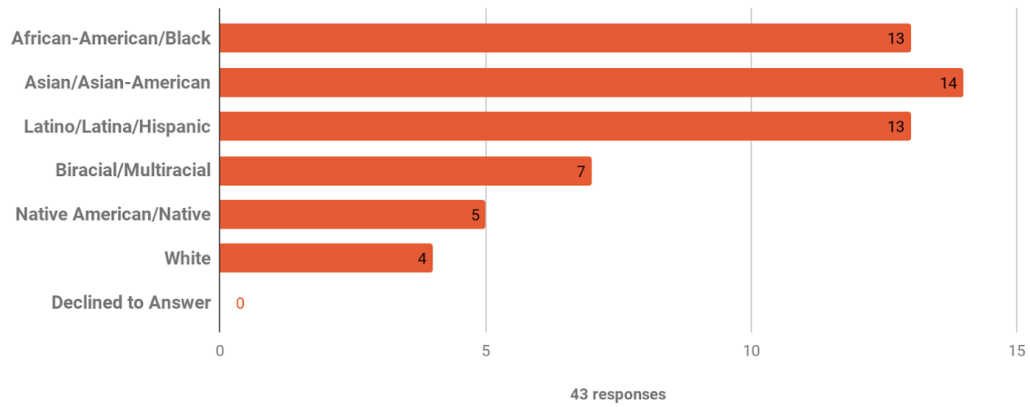


Figure 2

Which of the following categories best describes your gender identity?

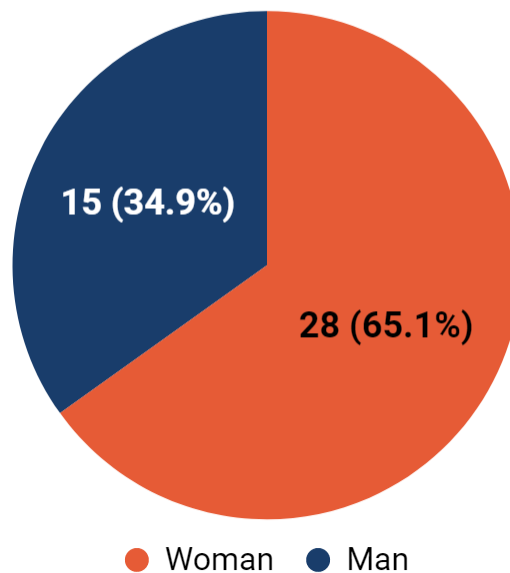


Figure 3

Which of the following categories best describes your sexual orientation?

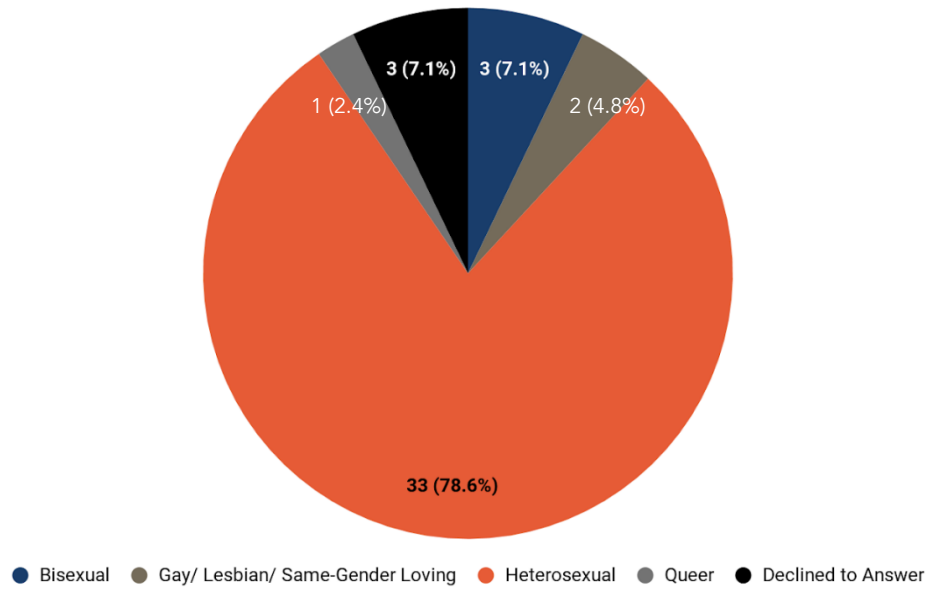


Figure 4

How long have you worked at your current organization?

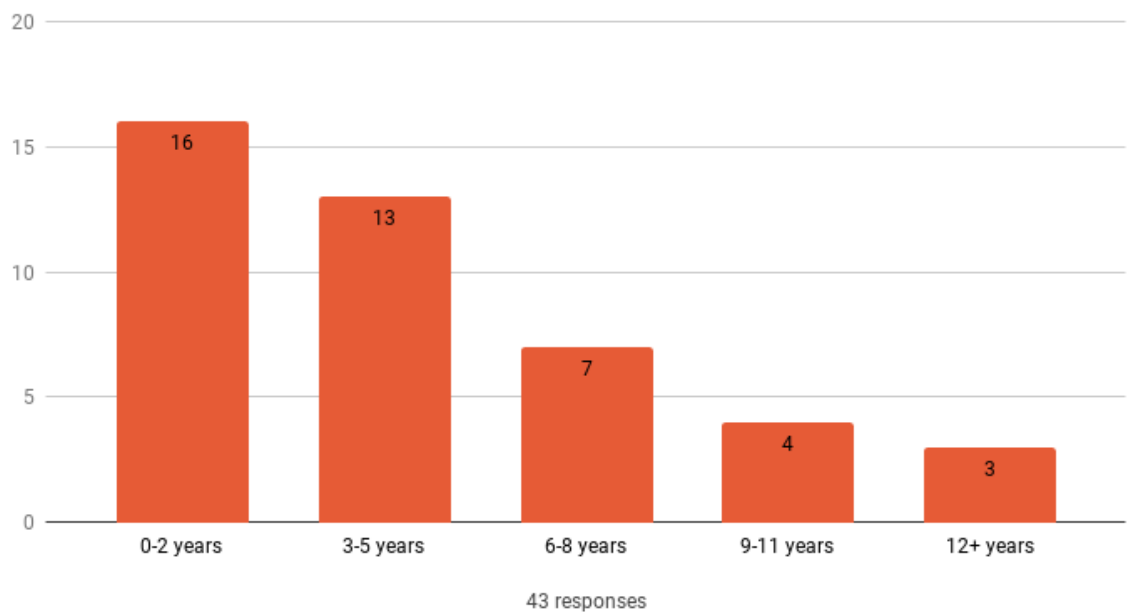


Figure 5

How would you describe your current title?

43 responses

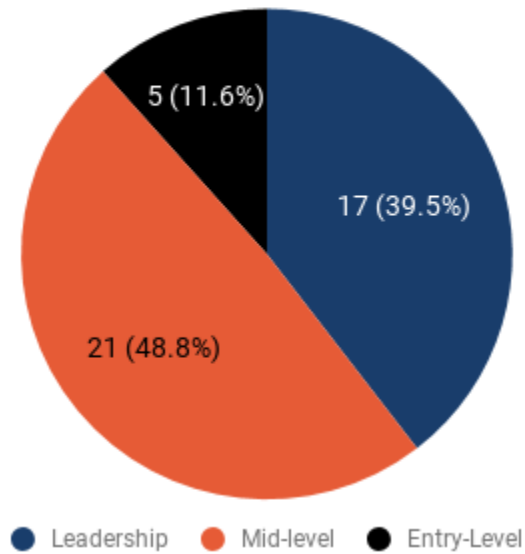


Figure 6

How many staff work at your organization?

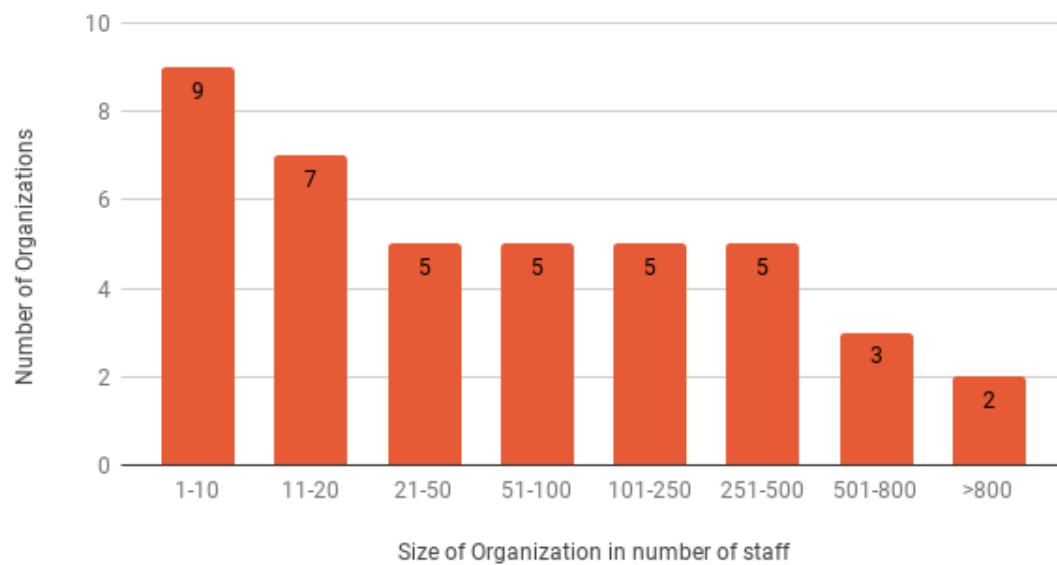


Figure 7

What percent of staff are people of color?



Figure 8

What is your organization's average yearly budget?

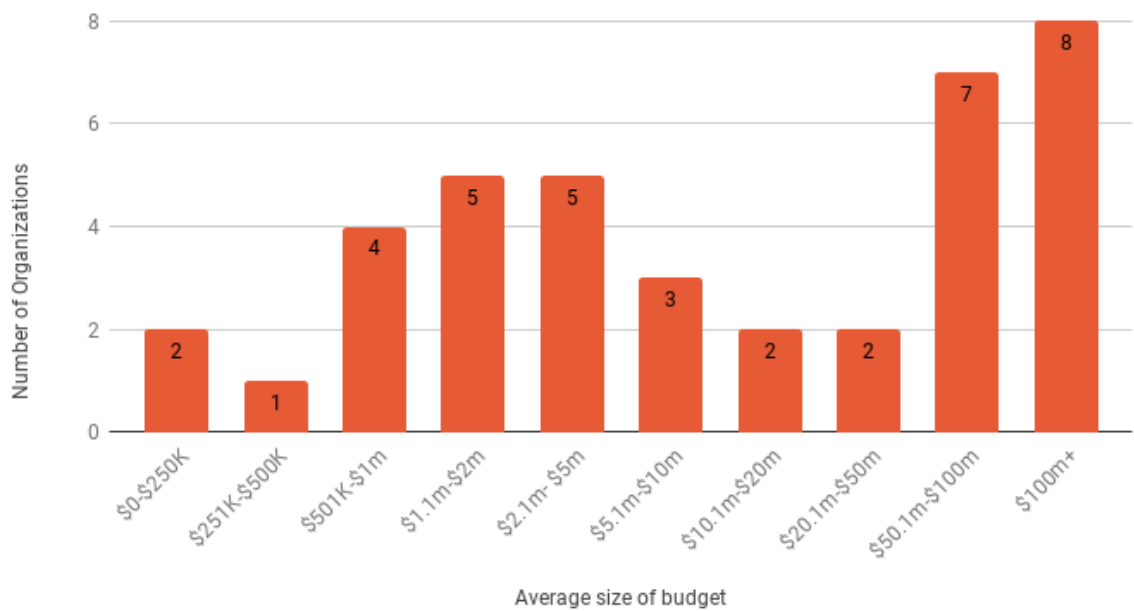


Figure 9

“I feel I have to conform to the current organizational culture in order to succeed.”

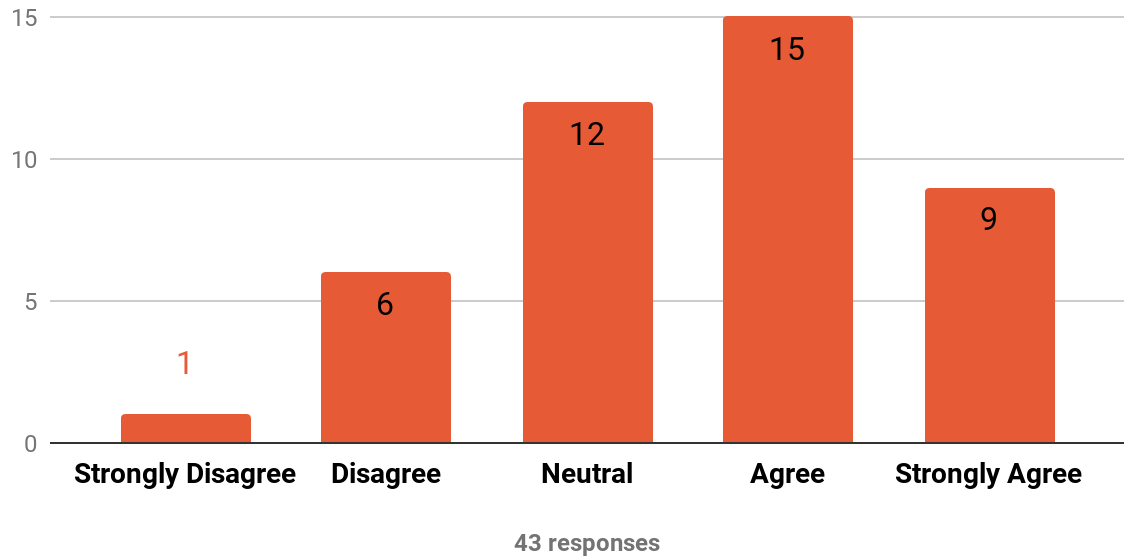


Figure 10

“I am thriving at my workplace.”

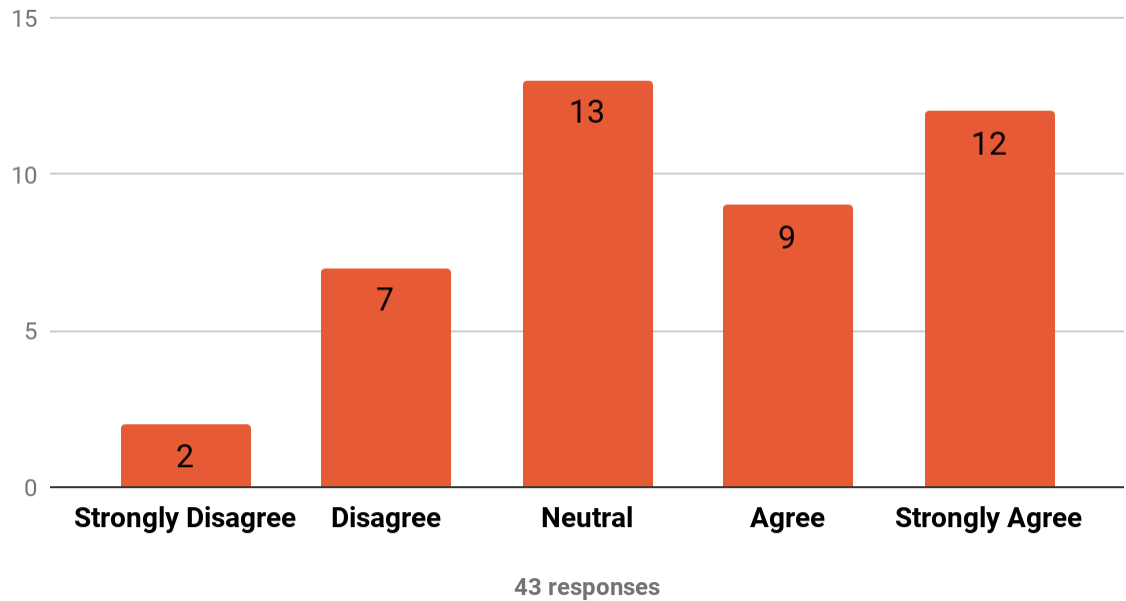


Figure 11

“My perspective is valued.”

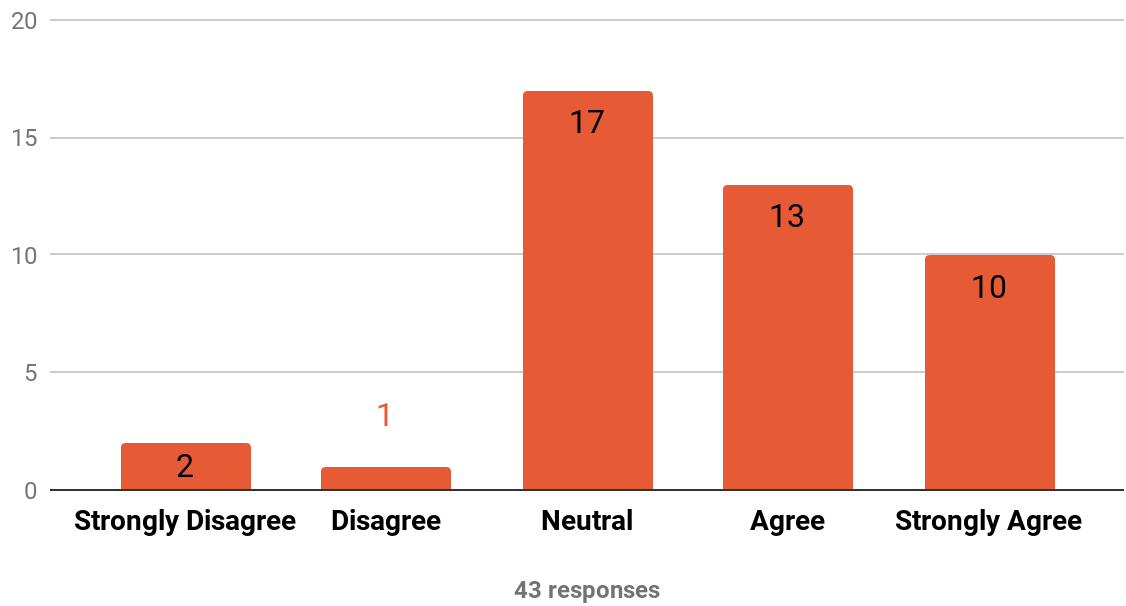


Figure 12

“I feel tokenized at my organization.”

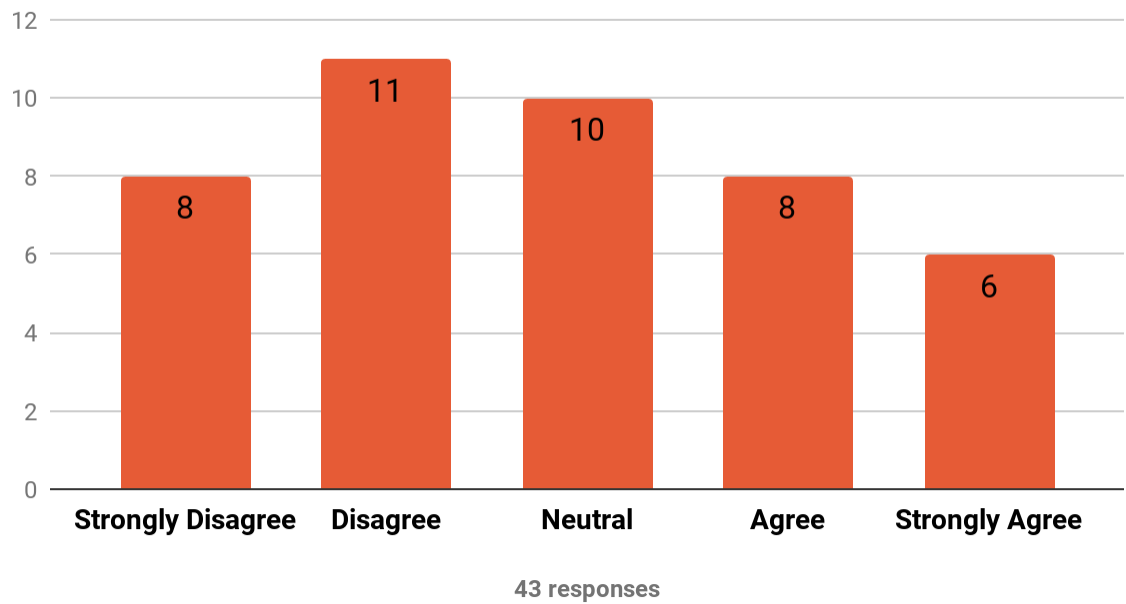


Figure 13

“People of color are included in important decisions for my organization.”

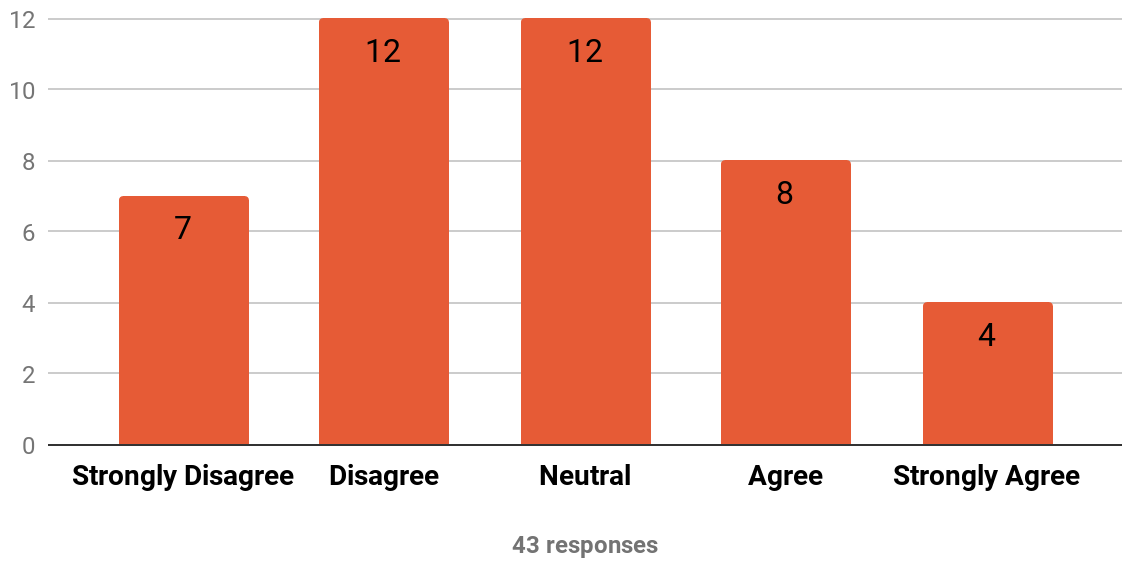


Figure 14

“My organization operates in an inclusive manner.”

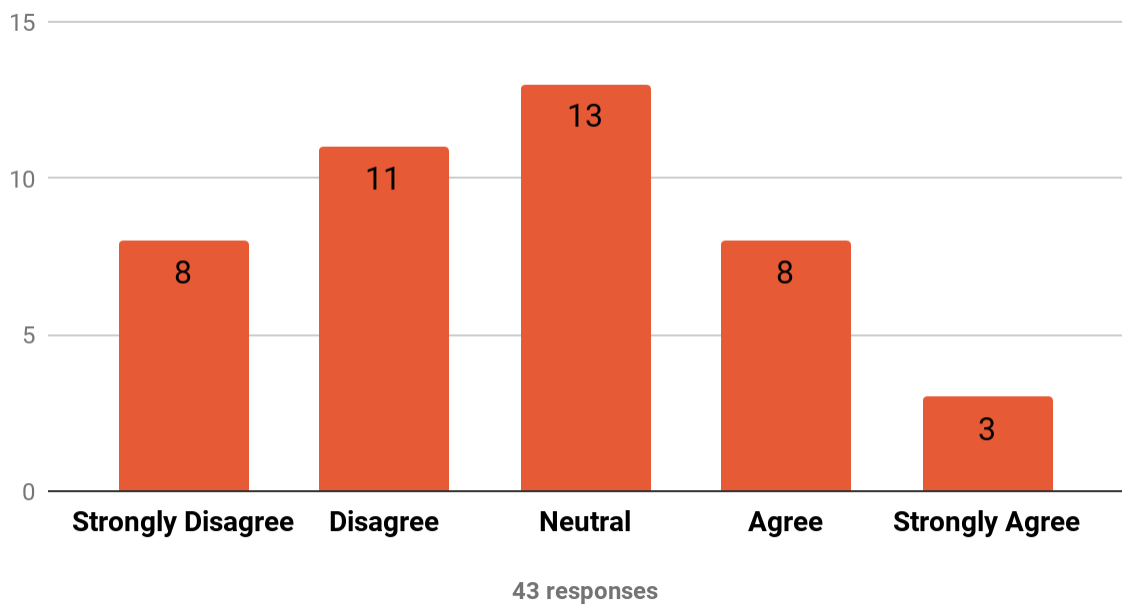


Figure 15

“The environmental movement’s culture is inclusive.”

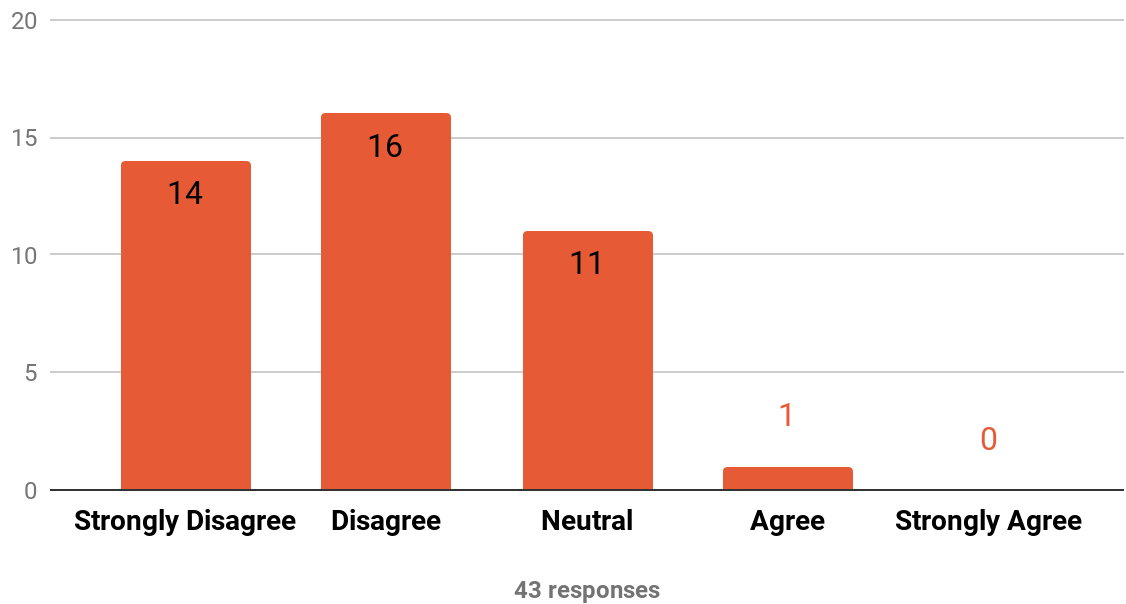


Figure 16

“I am satisfied with the DEI capacity building work of my organization.”

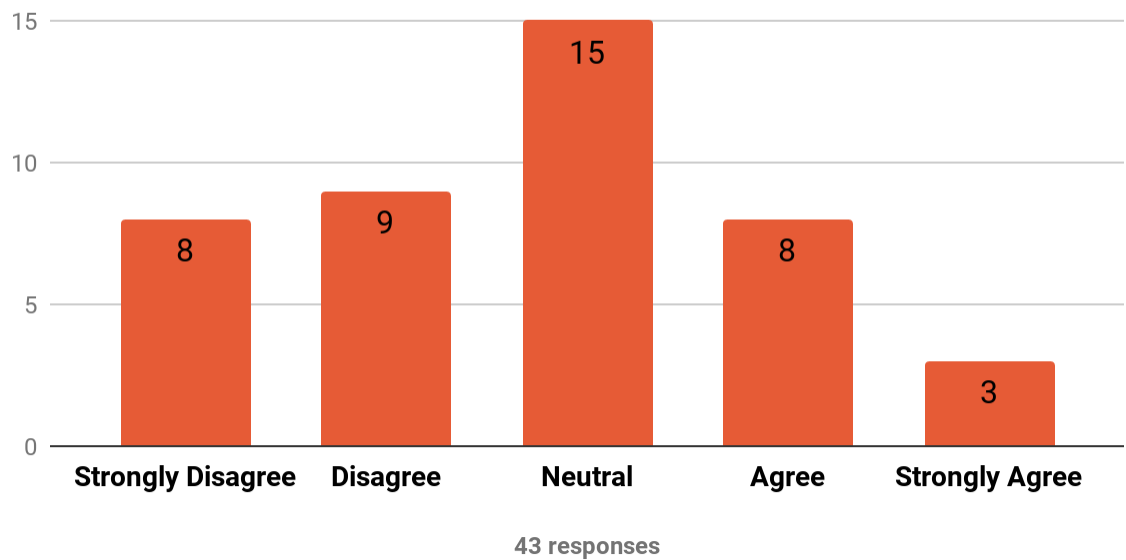


Figure 17

“My workplace experience has improved because of my organization’s DEI capacity building work.”

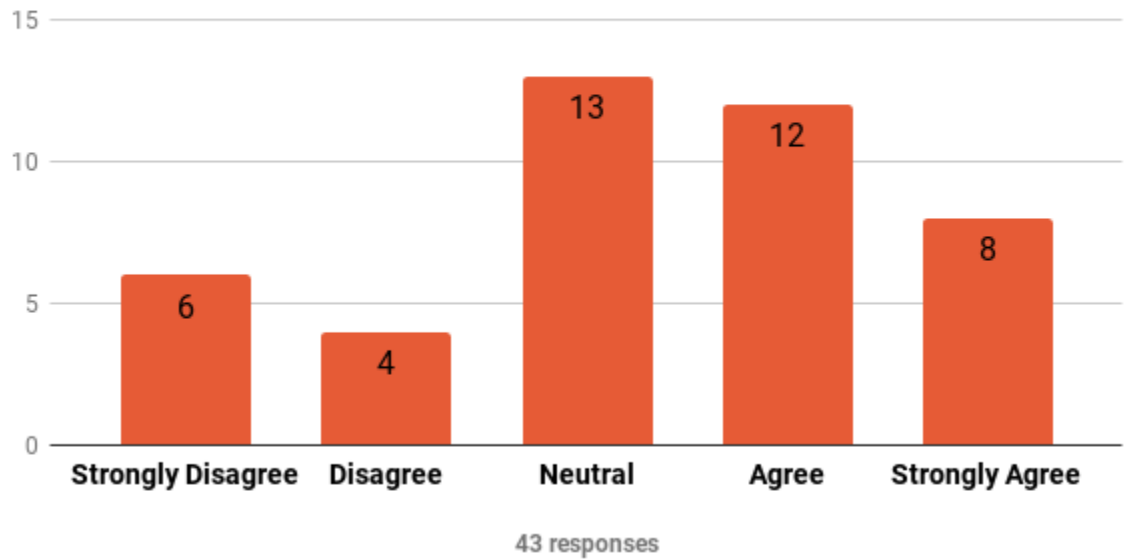


Figure 18

“The DEI capacity building work is improving my organization”

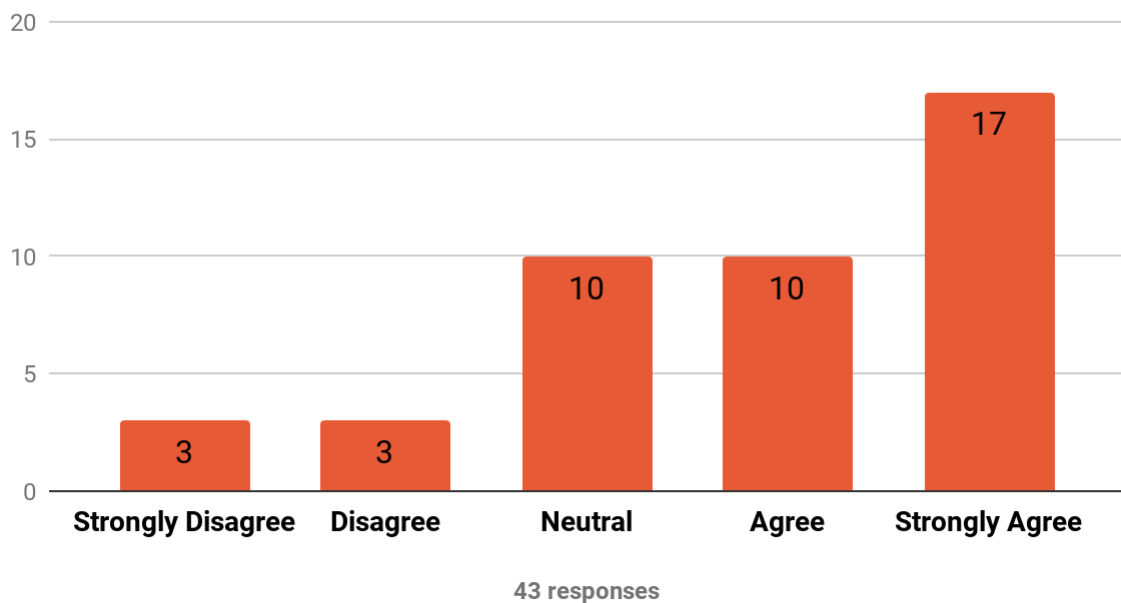


Figure 19

“My organization is effective at DEI”

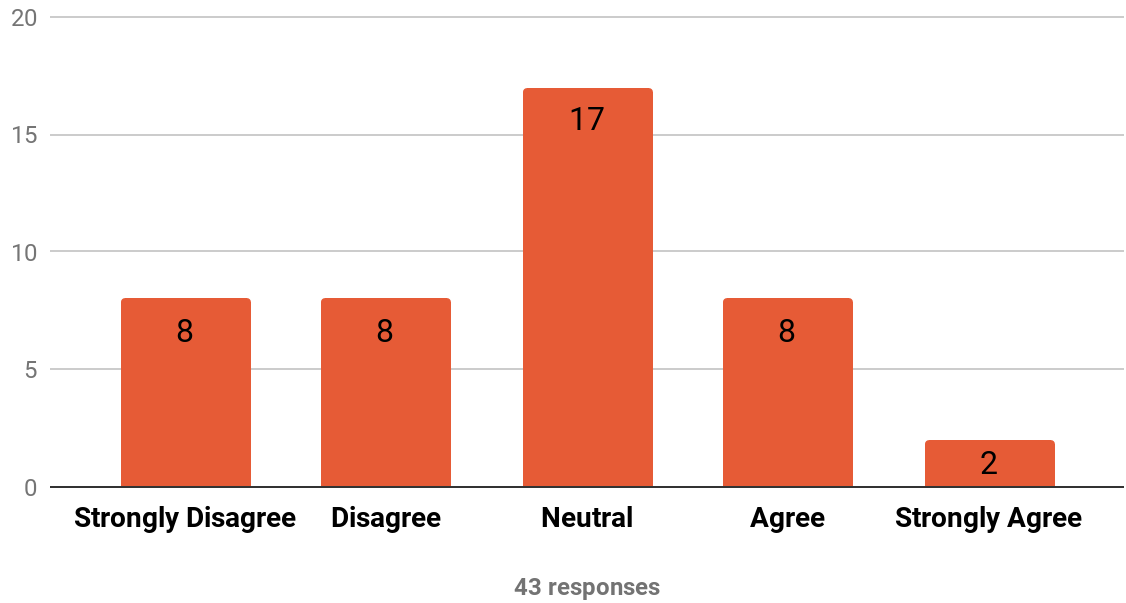


Figure 20

“My organization has sufficient capacity to advance DEI effectively.”

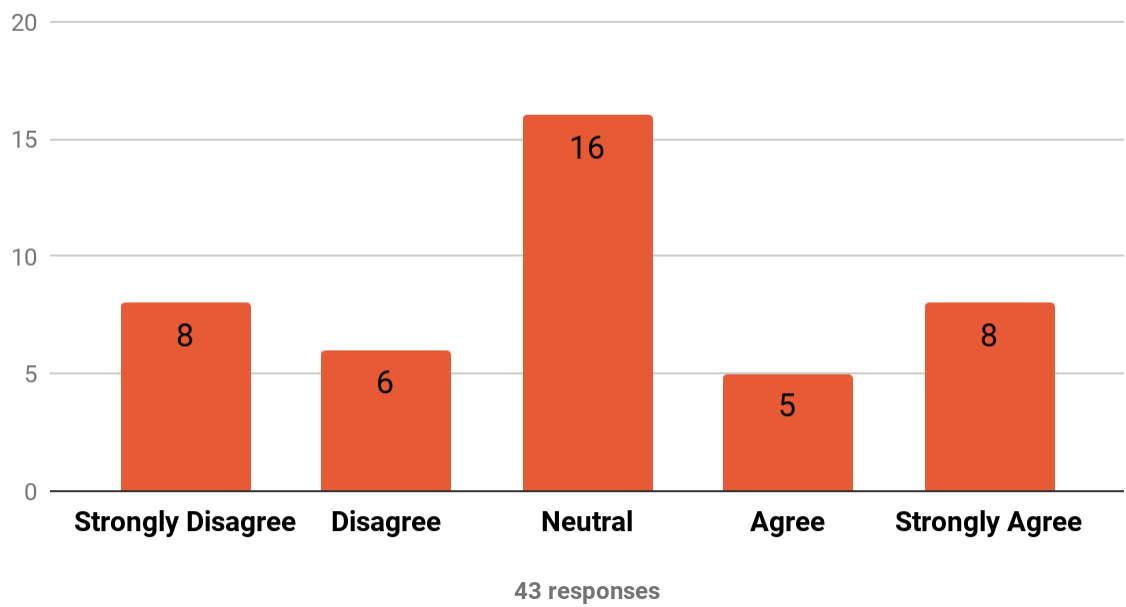


Figure 21

"I can bring my full self to my workplace every day."

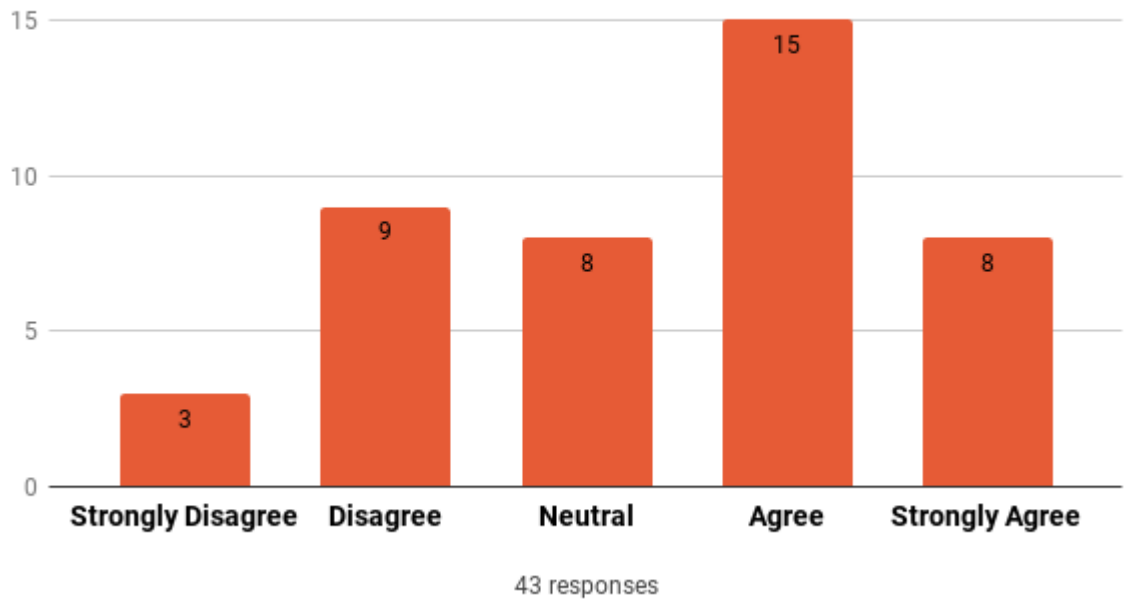


Figure 22

"I am struggling at my workplace."

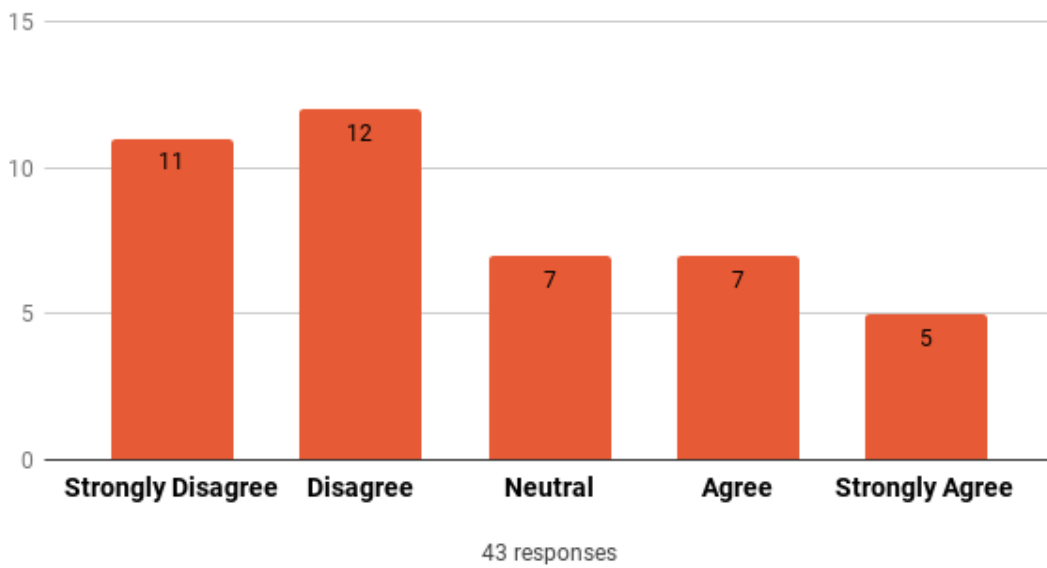


Figure 23

"I feel marginalized at my organization."

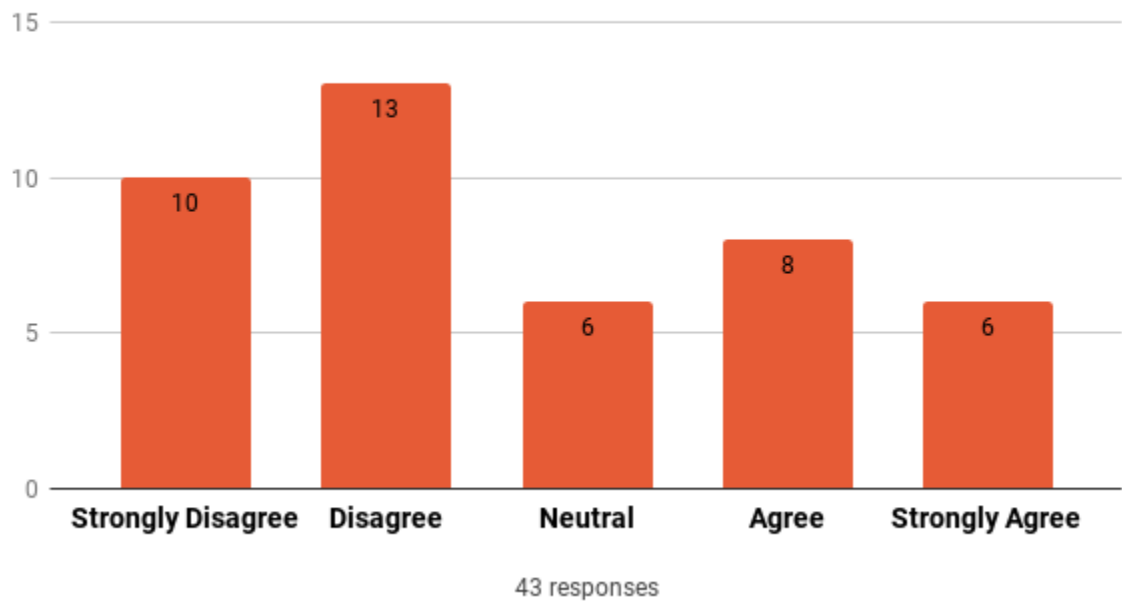


Figure 24

"I have thought about leaving my organization."

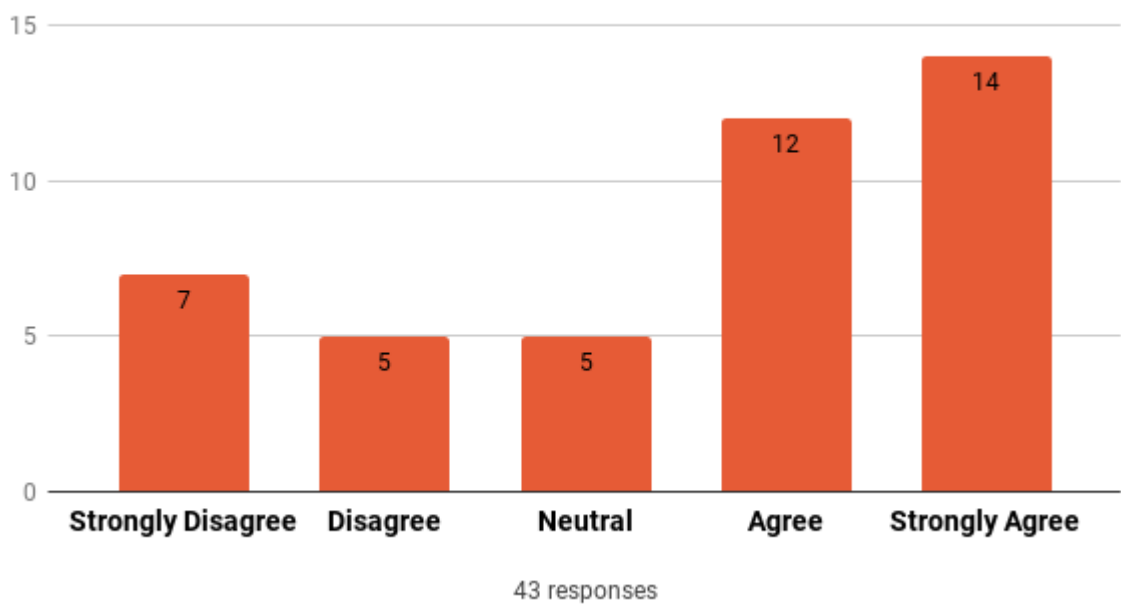


Figure 25

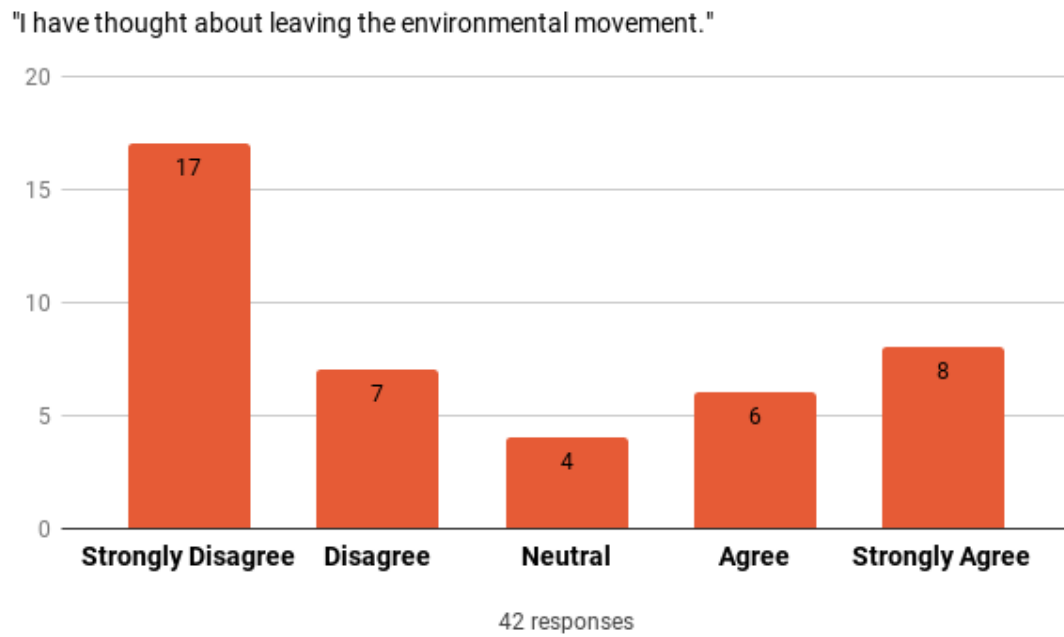


Figure 26

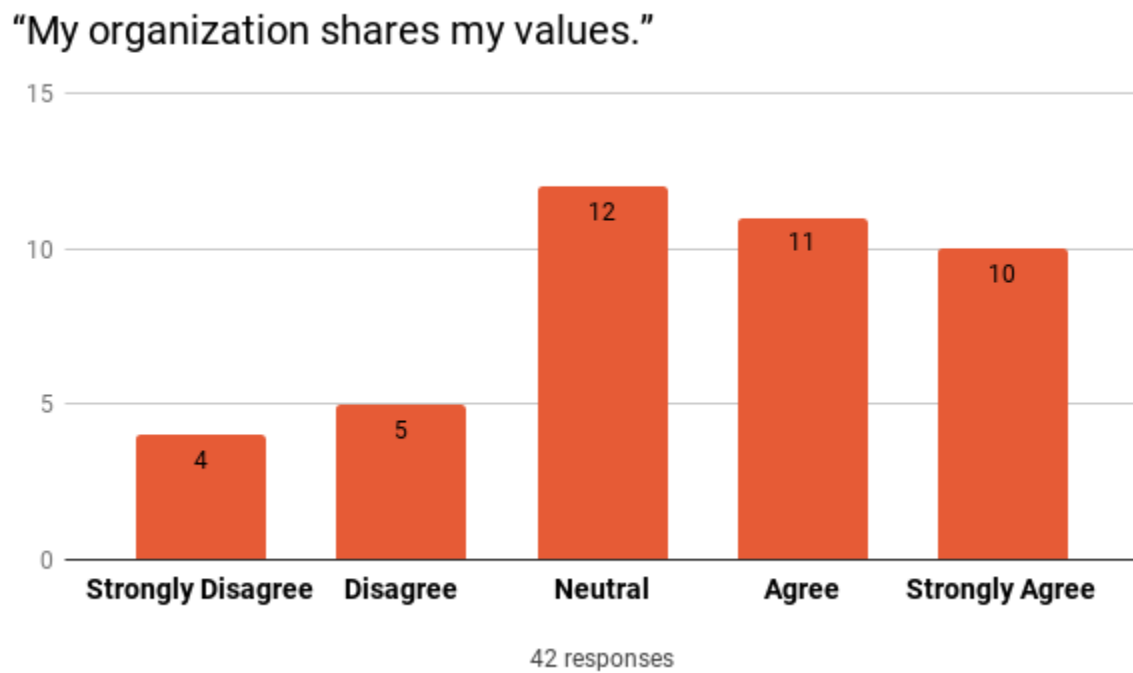


Figure 27

“My organization is authentically committed to DEI.”

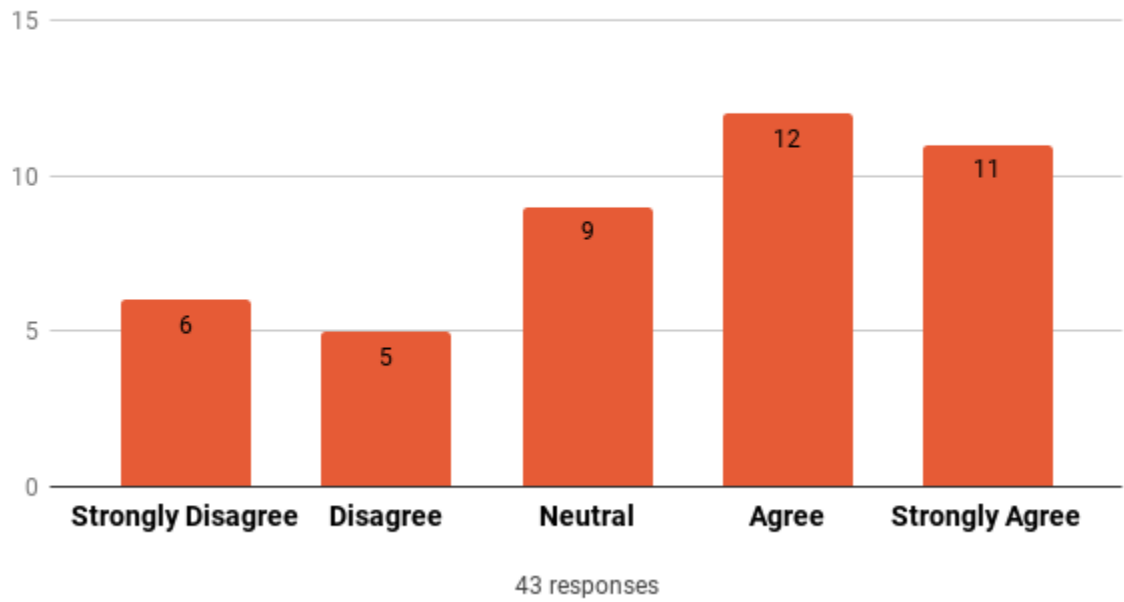
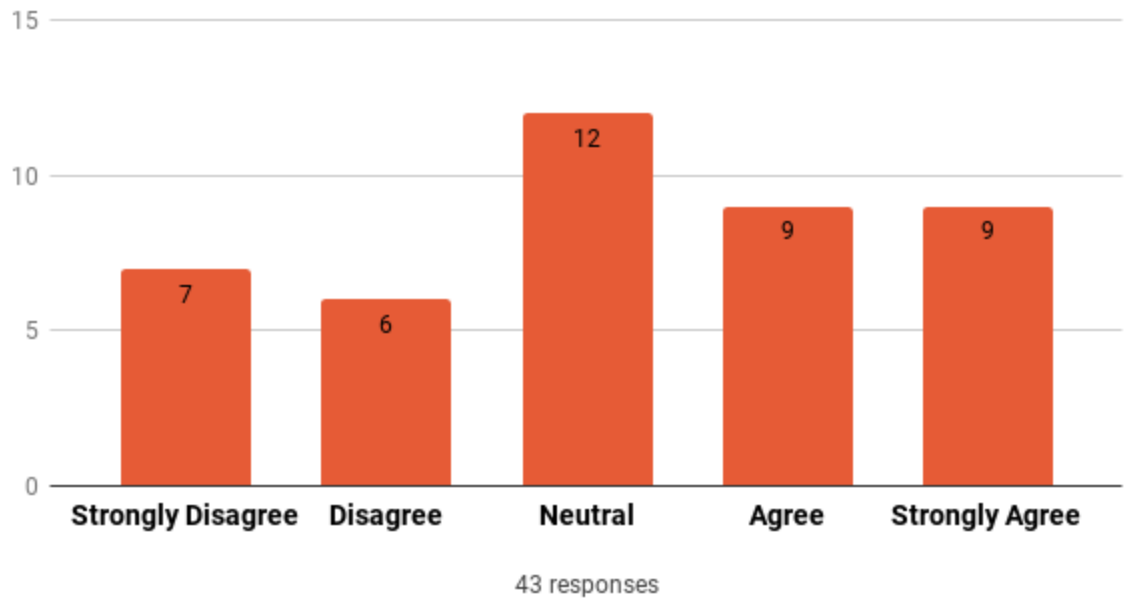


Figure 28

“I am included in important decisions for my organization.”



Figures from DEI Point People Survey Findings

Figure 29

Which of the following categories best describes your race/ethnicity? (select all that apply)

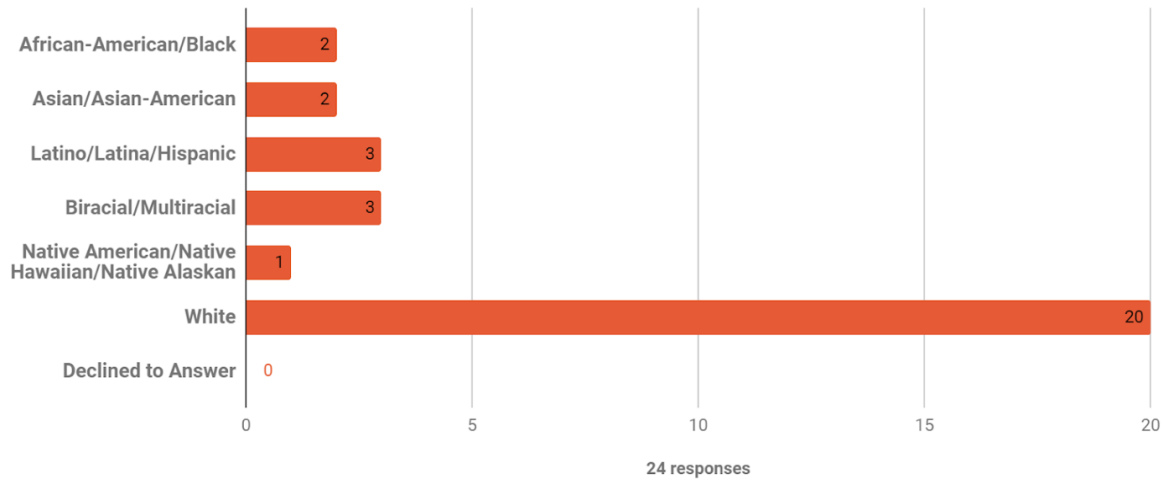


Figure 30

Which of the following categories best describes your gender identity?

24 responses

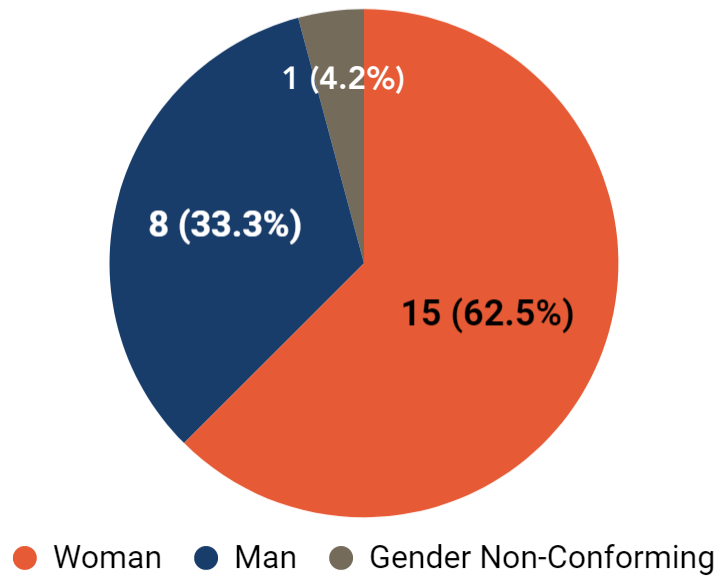


Figure 31

Which of the following categories best describes your sexual orientation?

24 responses

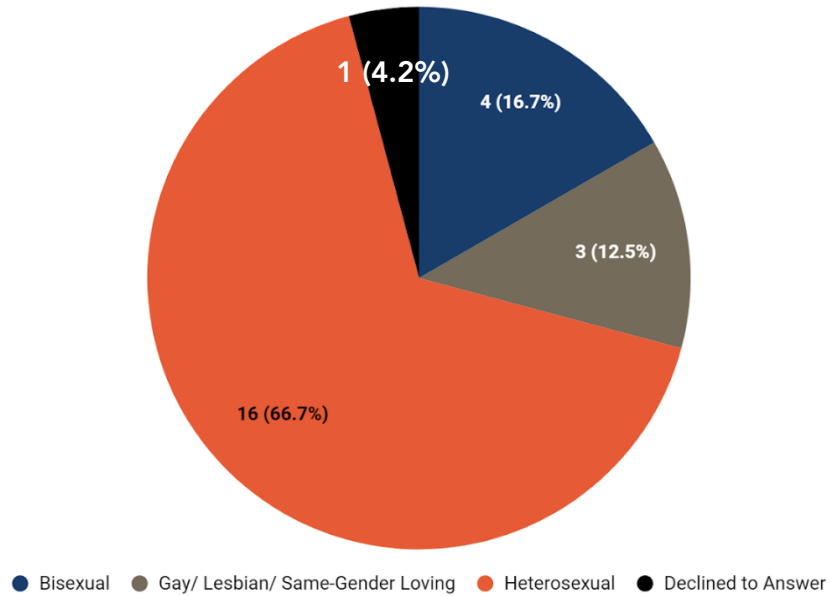


Figure 32

How long have you worked at your current organization?

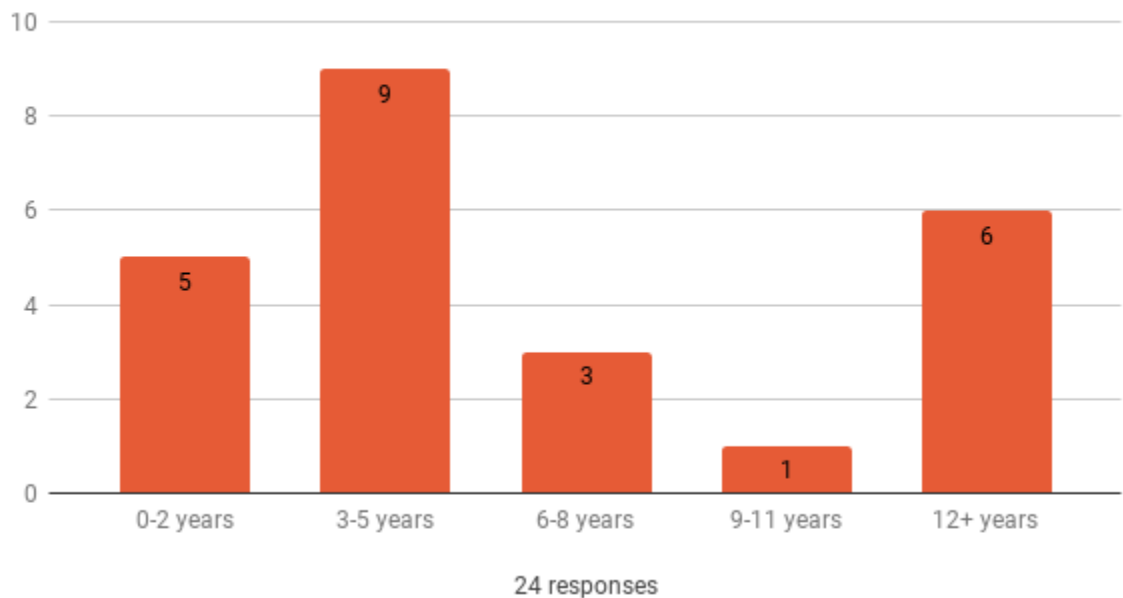


Figure 33

How would you describe your current title?

23 responses

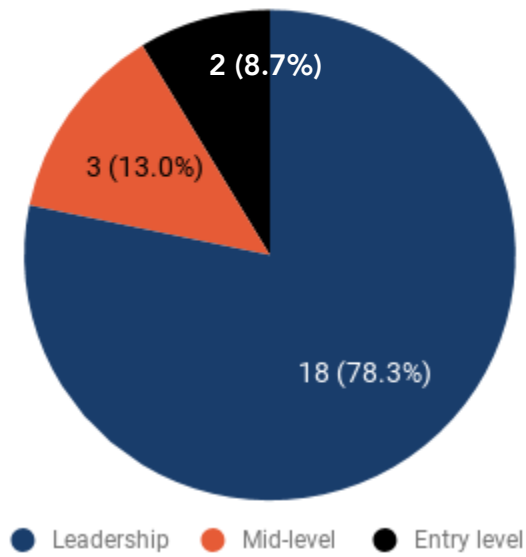


Figure 34

How many staff work at your organization?

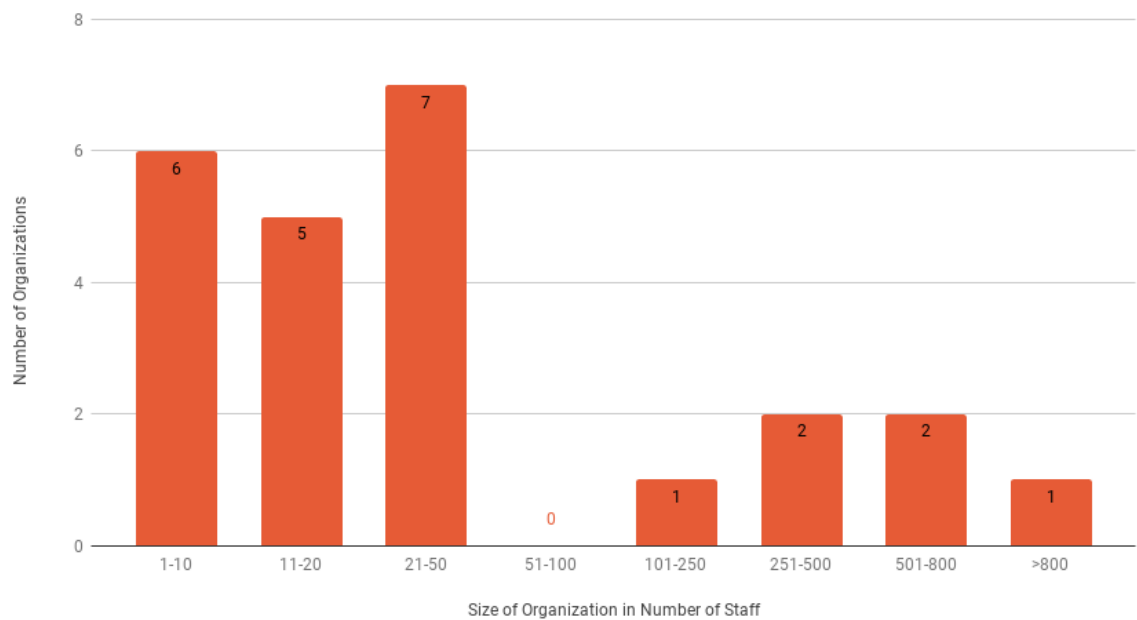


Figure 35

What percent of staff are people of color?

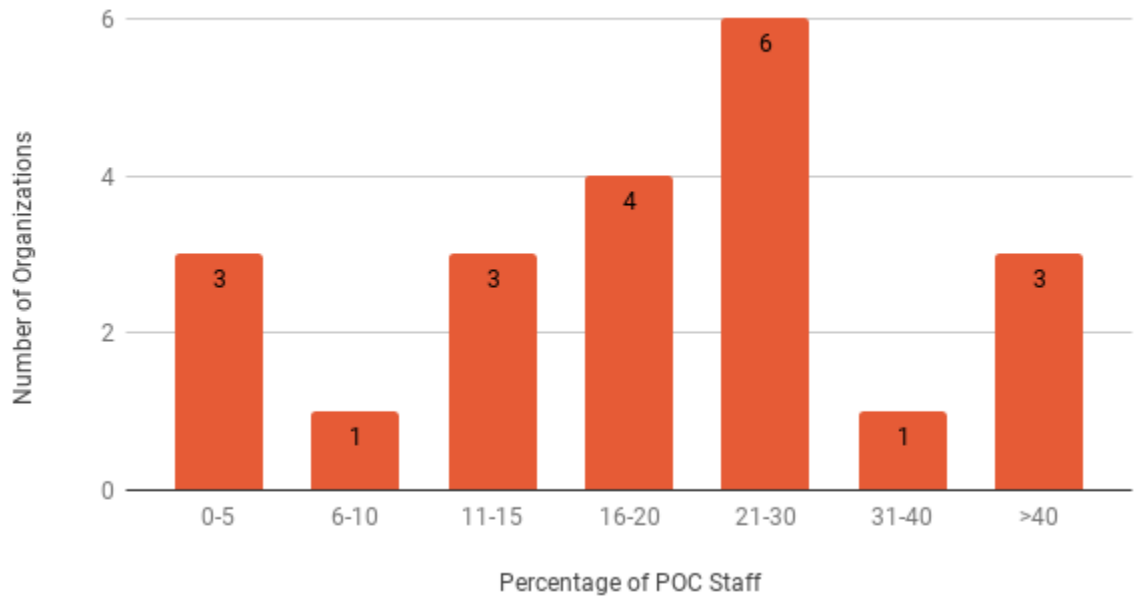


Figure 36

What is your organization's average yearly budget?

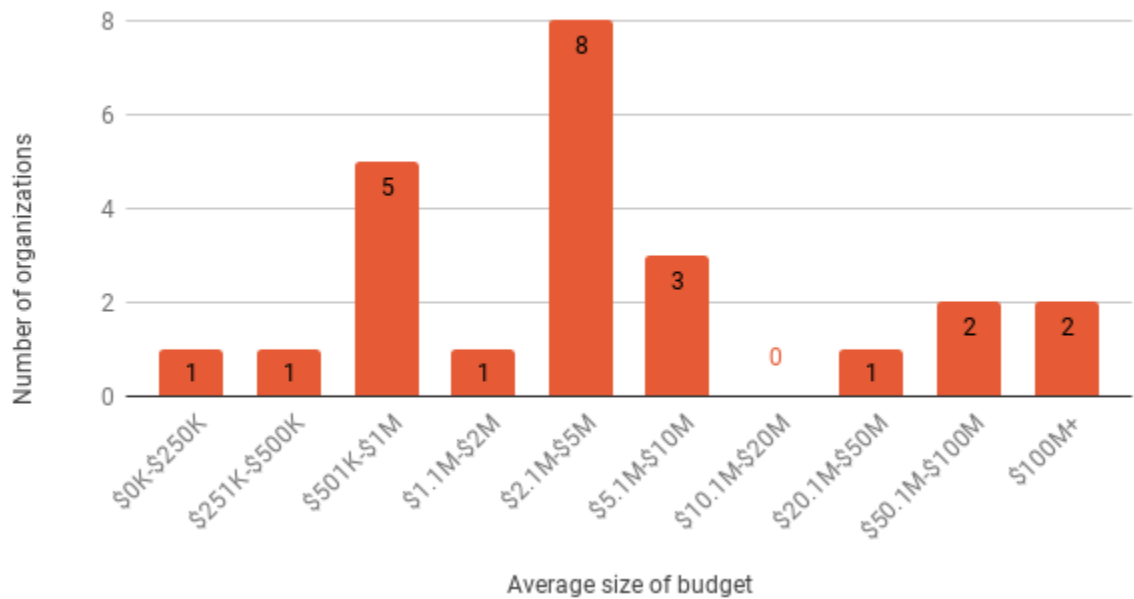


Figure 37

How many various types of DEI trainings have you attended?



Interview & Electronic Survey Questions

Funders (Phone or In-Person Interviews)

Below are the questions that guided the discussions with funders (due to time limitations each funder was not asked every single question):

DEI Capacity Building Program

- Please Describe Your DEI Capacity Building Program
 - What have you funded in the past? What are you funding now? How did you decide to fund these specific DEI capacity building activities?
 - Are you open to new, different, innovative, and/or inclusive approaches?
 - Is there anything you support specifically for organizations at beginning stages?
 - Do you support ongoing learning/education? What does that look like?
 - What guides your funding approach? / Do you have a vision, strategy, goal, and/or other to guide your DEI Capacity Building Program? Do you have a purpose or rationale statement that explains “the why”?
 - How have you included the values and practices of equity, inclusion, and diversity into your grantmaking approach? Please provide examples.
 - At what levels are you providing support for DEI growth/change?
 - Individual
 - Organizational
 - Movement
 - Systemic/societal
 - Who can apply? Just grantees or open call? Do you proactively reach out to groups (i.e., past grantees and new groups)?
 - How much total in grant funding do you give per year (and overall)? What are average grant sizes? How many organizations are funded (per year and overall)? How long is the time period for the grants? How big are the organizations (i.e., people, budget, region served)?
 - How do you decide on average grant size and length of grant? Has this led to the impact (i.e., advancement of DEI) you were hoping for?
 - What are the funds specifically used for (i.e., specific line items)? Consultant, staff time, materials, other?
 - What is the time commitment for organizations?
 - What is your application process? What is the estimated time to complete?

- What is your reporting process? What is the estimated time to complete the reports?
 - Do you have a process set up to receive real and honest feedback from grantees? (For example, when reporting is it mainly smooth sailing or do they report messiness and challenges?) Do you believe grantees have been truthful with you regarding the success and challenges of the work?
- What is the time length from application to receiving funds?
- Are there time commitments expected from organizations? (Like participating in a fundee cohort?)
- Do you or grantees directly hire DEI consultants? Do you pay them directly or do grantees? Do you have special arrangement with specific consultants? If so, how did you decide on this approach?
 - Do you hire consultants to set up the program? What do they do? How much do you pay them? How did you choose them?
 - Do you use an intermediary to re-grant the capacity building work? What do they do? How much do you pay them? How did/do you choose them?
- How long have you supported DEI capacity building? How long have you had a program?
- How long do you provide funding for groups? For example, do you invest in deep change with a small amount of groups or superficial level change with a lot of groups? Do you have a long-term plan to support the evolution of organizations?
- Do you assess readiness for DEI capacity building? If so, how do you assess readiness?
- Do you have tools and/or resources to help grantees? If so, what are they? How have they helped?
- Who makes the decisions for this program? What are the demographics of the people who make decisions? Is it an inclusive process? How do they know their approach is effective?
- Do you fund environmental justice and/or racial equity focused groups? If so, how much funds do you give? What percentage of your funds go to these groups?
 - Do you support partnerships between these groups and mainstream environmental groups? If so, how do you support setting up the partnership for success?

Success Factors/Advice

- What aspect of your program has led to the most DEI progress? What has been the most effective aspect of your program?
- What DEI capacity building activities have been the most effective for your grantees?
- Do you feel your DEI capacity building grantmaking program is making an impact? If so, how? If not, what can you do better?
- How do you measure success? How does the grantee measure success? How do you measure success for your program?
- Please share lessons learned. What works well? What can be improved? What has not worked well?
- If a foundation wants to start a new DEI capacity building program, what would you recommend to them? What would be the crucial elements? What would you tell them to include and not include?

Other questions

- Is your foundation doing your own DEI capacity building work? If so, what activities?
 - If yes or if no, what have been the benefits and lost opportunities?
- Anything else you would like to share?
- Do you have questions you would like to ask us?

Background Information

- Which of the following categories best describes your race/ethnicity? (select all that apply): African-American/Black; Asian/Asian-American; Latino/Latina/Hispanic; Biracial/Multiracial; Native American/Native Hawaiian/Native Alaskan; White; Decline to Answer; Other
- Which of the following categories best describes your gender identity?: Gender non-conforming; Man; Transgender; Woman; Decline to Answer; Other
- Which of the following categories best describes your sexual orientation?: Bisexual; Gay/Lesbian/Same-Gender Loving; Heterosexual; Queer; Questioning/unsure; Decline to Answer; Other
- How long have you worked at your current organization?: 0-2 years; 3-5 years; 6-8 years; 9-11 years; 12+years
- How would you describe your current title?: Entry-level; Mid-level; Leadership; Other
- What region(s) does your foundation serve?

Electronic Survey Questions For Staff of Color (at groups doing DEI capacity building work)

Survey Purpose & Confidentiality

Through a Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF) funded project, The Raben Group has been contracted to gather information from three sets of stakeholders, including people of color who work in organizations that are actively building DEI capacity (see DEI Capacity Building definition below). The data gathered will serve two purposes: (1) provide recommendations to DDCF's Environment Program, regarding a potential new DEI capacity building program and (2) provide recommendations to environmental foundations who are starting (or looking to improve) a DEI capacity building program.

The objective of this survey is to assess the role of DEI capacity building in the experiences of staff of color.

For the overall project, we are gathering information from three sets of stakeholders:

1. Foundations that have DEI capacity building programs for environmental groups
2. Environmental groups who are investing resources in DEI capacity building
3. People of color who work in organizations that are doing DEI capacity building activities

We define DEI Capacity Building as the following: Any effort, initiative, or activity adopted for the purpose of effectively advancing diversity, equity and inclusion at the organization. These could be internal or foundational elements. Examples of DEI capacity building activities include (but are not limited to) DEI focused trainings, leadership development programs, plans/strategies, assessments, organizational statements, visioning, coaching, and committees.

Confidentiality:

Your name and organization will remain confidential and will not be shared with Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, funders, or others unless you explicitly state that you approve for your name and/or organization to be shared. We, the researchers, will collect data in three categories and analyze and present data collectively. We will use your name and/or organization (if provided) for the sole purpose to follow up with you if needed. Lastly, if you are comfortable to share a quote with your name and/or organization, please let us know at [xyz@xyz.xyz]

Name and Organization (optional)

Your name and organization will remain confidential and will not be shared with Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, funders, or others unless you explicitly state that you approve for your name and/or organizations to be shared. We, the researchers, will collect data in three categories and analyze and present data collectively. We will use your name and/or organization (if provided) for the sole purpose to follow up with you if needed. Lastly, if you are comfortable to share a quote with your name and/or organization, please let us know at DEIcapacity@rabengroup.com.

- First Name
- Last Name
- Organization
- E-mail

DEI Capacity Building Journey & Activities

- Is your organization building DEI capacity (see definition for DEI Capacity building)?
- What has your organization done, regarding DEI capacity building activities?
- What is your organization doing to build DEI capacity? Please describe and share specific activities.
- How long has your organization been doing DEI capacity building work?
- In terms of DEI, how has your organization improved the most?
- What are your organization's biggest DEI challenges?
- What else should your organization be doing, regarding DEI?
- How has your organization included the values and practices of equity, inclusion, and diversity into the approach of the organization's DEI activities? If yes, please provide examples.
- Does your organization have a DEI vision, strategy, plan and/or goal (in your organization's strategic plan) to guide your DEI capacity building work? Multiple choice
 - Please explain your response to the previous question.
- What are your perspectives, thoughts, and/or feelings about your organization's DEI capacity building activities?
- What is your role, if any, do you please in the organization's DEI capacity building work? Did you volunteer for this role or was it assigned to you? Do you like or dislike the role? What type of role would you prefer?

Your Experience within the Organization (Part I)

- Likert scale questions (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree; after each question a box is provide if the respondent chooses to explain further.)
 - "I feel I have to conform to the current organizational culture in order to succeed."
 - "I can bring my full self to my workplace every day"
 - What does your workplace do well so you can give your full self?
What can your workplace do better so you can give your full self?
 - "I am thriving at my workplace."
 - "I am struggling at my workplace."
 - "My perspective is valued."
 - Please provide examples of when you feel valued or not valued
 - "I feel marginalized at my organization."
 - "I feel tokenized at my organization."
 - "I have thought about leaving my organization."
 - "I have thought about leaving the environmental movement."
 - "I am satisfied with the DEI capacity building work of my organization."
 - "My organization shares my values."
 - "I am included in important decisions for my organization."
 - "People of color are included in important decisions for my organization."
 - "My operation operates in an inclusive manner."
 - Please provide examples of inclusion and/or exclusion at your organization.
 - "The environmental movement's culture is inclusive."
 - "My workplace experience has improved because of my organization's DEI capacity building work."
 - How would you describe your experience before DEI capacity building work began? How would you describe after?
 - "The DEI capacity building work is improving my organization."
 - Please provide examples of how DEI capacity building work is improving (or not improving) your organization.
 - "My organization is authentically committed to DEI."
 - "My organization is effective at DEI."
 - "My organization has sufficient capacity to advance DEI effectively."
 - Overall, is working at your organization a positive, negative, or both positive and negative experience? [open-ended question]

- If you responded 'positive' or both 'positive & negative' to the previous question, what has been the core to your positive experience?

Your experience with the Organization (Part II)

- What DEI capacity building activities have resulted in positive impact for you and your work experience?
- What DEI capacity building activities have resulted in no or negative impact for you and your work experience?
- What about your experience would you like improved? What do you struggle with at your workplace?
- What about your experience would you like continued? What do you love about your workplace experience?
- What has been the most crucial effort that has helped you survive and/or thrive in the organization? Please explain why.
- What has been the most crucial effort that has helped you survive and/or thrive in the environmental movement? Please explain why.
- Why do you work at your organization?

Your Advice

- If a foundation wants to start a new DEI capacity building program, what would you recommend to them? What would be the crucial elements?
- Anything else would you like to share?

Background Information

- Which of the following categories best describes your race/ethnicity? (select all that apply): African-American/Black; Asian/Asian-American; Latino/Latina/Hispanic; Biracial/Multiracial; Native American/Native Hawaiian/Native Alaskan; White; Decline to Answer; Other
- Which of the following categories best describes your gender identity?: Gender non-conforming; Man; Transgender; Woman; Decline to Answer; Other
- Which of the following categories best describes your sexual orientation?: Bisexual; Gay/Lesbian/Same-Gender Loving; Heterosexual; Queer; Questioning/unsure; Decline to Answer; Other
- How long have you worked at your current organization?: 0-2 years; 3-5 years; 6-8 years; 9-11 years; 12+years

- How would you describe your current title?: Entry-level; Mid-level; Leadership; Other
- What region(s) does your organization serve?
- Where is your office located (city, state)? Is this location considered the Headquarters for the organization?
- How many staff work at your organization?
- What percent of staff are people of color?
- What is your organization's average yearly budget?: \$0-\$250K; \$251K-\$500K; \$501K-\$1m; \$1.1m-\$2m; \$2.1m-\$5m; \$5.1m-\$10m; \$10.1m-\$20m; \$20.1m-\$50m; \$50.1m-\$100m; \$100m+
- What is your organization's mission and core activities?
- How many various types of DEI trainings have you attended?: 0; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6 or 6+
 - Please describe the trainings attended (if applicable)
- How long have you worked in the environmental movement? During this time, how many organizations have you worked for?

Thank you!

Thank you so much for filling out this survey! Your time commitment and responses are invaluable to this effort and to building a stronger environment movement. If you have follow up questions and/or would like to receive a copy of the final report, please contact us at [xyz@xyz.xyz]

Electronic Survey Questions For DEI Point People

Survey Purpose & Confidentiality

Through a Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF) funded project, The Raben Group has been contracted to gather information from three sets of stakeholders, including point people who work in environmental organizations that are actively building DEI capacity (see how we define DEI Capacity Building below). The data gathered will serve two purposes: (1) provide recommendations to DDCF's Environment Program, regarding a potential new DEI capacity building program and (2) provide recommendations to environmental foundations who are starting new or looking to improve existing DEI capacity building programs.

The objective of this survey is to explore which capacity building activities and approaches have led to the most effective DEI growth and the role of funders.

We are gathering information from three sets of stakeholders:

1. Foundations that have DEI capacity building programs for environmental groups
2. Environmental groups who are investing resources in DEI capacity building
3. People of color who work in organizations that are doing DEI capacity building activities

We define DEI Capacity Building as the following: Any effort, initiative, or activity adopted for the purpose of effectively advancing diversity, equity and inclusion at the organization. These could be internal or foundational elements. Examples of DEI capacity building activities include (but are not limited to), DEI focused trainings, leadership development programs, plans/strategies, assessments, organizational statements, visioning, coaching, and committees.

Confidentiality:

Your name and organization will remain confidential and will not be shared with Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, funders, or others unless you explicitly state that you approve for your name and/or organization to be shared. We, the researchers, will collect data in three categories and analyze and present data collectively. We will use your name and/or organization (if provided) for the sole purpose to follow up with you if needed. Lastly, if you are comfortable to share a quote with your name and/or organization, please let us know at DEIcapacity@rabengroup.com.

Name and Organization (optional)

- First Name
- Last Name
- Organization
- Title
- E-mail

DEI Capacity Building Journey & Activities

- Provide a brief summary of your organization's DEI journey and DEI capacity building activities. (You may also send us documents and links to mbonta@rabengroup.com)
- Do you have an organizational DEI vision, strategy, plan, and/or strategic plan goal to guide your DEI capacity building work?
 - Please explain your response to the previous question.
- How long has your organization been doing DEI capacity building work?
- What is (or was) your organization's motivation for engaging in DEI capacity building?
- What stage do you feel you are at currently on scale of 1-10?
 - How would you score yourself before the work started?
- Was and/or is there pushback for DEI? If so, how have you addressed pushback?
- At what levels are you providing support for DEI growth/change?
 - Individual
 - Organizational
 - Movement
 - Systemic/societal
- How much resources are you investing (i.e., money, staff time)?
- Who leads your DEI work? Do they operate with the values and practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion? Please provide examples.

Reflections

- How do you measure success of DEI capacity building activities?
- What DEI capacity building activities have been most effective?
- What DEI capacity building activities have been least effective?
- In what area(s) have you improved and/or grown the most? Why?
- What have been your biggest challenges?
- Have you overcome those challenges? If so, how were you successful? If not, how are you addressing them?
- What currently are your greatest strengths in moving DEI forward?
- What are your current DEI capacity building needs?

- As you look back at the beginning stages of this work, is there anything you wish you did differently? What would you do again?
- What are important elements of readiness for DEI capacity building work? What would you recommend to other organizations thinking of embarking in DEI capacity building work? How do they prepare?
- How have you included the values and practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion into the approach of your DEI activities? Please provide examples.
- Has your DEI capacity building work added value to your mission/overall work? If so, how?

Funders & Funding

- How does your DEI capacity building work get funded? Options: Foundation Funding; Unrestricted Funds; Other
 - If you selected “Foundation Funding” in the previous question, please name the foundation(s) below
- Have funders helped and/or hindered your DEI progress? Please explain.
- When reporting to funders, have you provided real and honest feedback (including the challenges and messiness) regarding your DEI work? Why or why not? Do funders provide a process to receive your honest and open feedback regarding your DEI work?
- How much total funding have you committed to DEI activities total and for what length of time? Has it been a sufficient amount? If not, how much funding over what period of time do you need to do advance DEI effectively?
- What other DEI activity or activities would you look to do if you had funding?
- Do any of your (current or potential) funders make DEI-related requirements for funding? If so, what are they? Do these same funders provide DEI capacity building support? Are they doing their own DEI capacity building work at their foundation?
- Do you notice any funders that have included the practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their funding program? If so, please share the practices.
- If a foundation wants to start a new DEI capacity building program, what would you recommend to them? What would be the crucial elements?

Background Information

- Which of the following categories best describes your race/ethnicity? (select all that apply): African-American/Black; Asian/Asian-American; Latino/Latina/Hispanic; Biracial/Multiracial; Native American/Native Hawaiian/Native Alaskan; White; Decline to Answer; Other
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- What is your organization's mission and core activities?
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 - Please describe the trainings attended (if applicable)

Thank you!

Thank you so much for filling out this survey! Your time commitment and responses are invaluable to this effort and to building a stronger environmental movement. If you have follow up questions and/or would like to receive a copy of the final report, please contact us at [\[xyz@xyz.xyz\]](mailto:xyz@xyz.xyz)

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