JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION
COMMITMENTS AND INTENT
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS - MAY 12, 2022

Overview

In 2017, HeartLands Conservancy added diversity and inclusion as guiding values in our organization's strategic plan. The plan outlined goals to be a more inclusive and diverse organization. As time went on, the organization worked quietly and slowly on these efforts. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, the number of health disparities by race in our region was brought to the forefront. The quiet, slow work we were pursuing was not enough.

Black communities in the southern part of the state, and all over the United States, were being disproportionately affected by the pandemic. There are many reasons for this, but one of them is environmental racism. Communities of color in our region (and in many other regions) have been exposed to more pollution and have less access and exposure to high-quality open space and natural resources than other parts of the region. This has had negative effects on health over decades in low-income communities of color. On top of the health disparities illuminated in 2020, racial injustice instances, such as the Central Park Birder incident and the murder of George Floyd, compounded the need to make faster progress on racial justice.

The environmental movement in the United States has primarily involved and benefited wealthy, white communities. The lack of diverse voices has led to inequitable results. People of color - in our region, primarily Black and Hispanic/Latino communities - have been bearing the largest burden of pollution, lack of access to outdoor recreation opportunities, environmental degradation, and injustice.

The lands, waters, and natural resources of southern Illinois connect the people of our region. However, these natural assets have also been used for centuries to marginalize communities, impacting health, economic opportunities, and the ability to live fully joyful lives.

As a majority-white conservation organization, HeartLands Conservancy recognizes that we have unconsciously benefitted from these injustices. Although HeartLands Conservancy cannot rectify past systems and harms, the organization commits to helping change the future.

Commitments to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
We commit ourselves, as an organization to conserving, connecting, and restoring land, water, and natural resources that sustain the people and communities of southern Illinois, to the following:

- Acknowledging that we still have much to learn about racial equity and justice and this work will be an ongoing journey, and thus we will hold ourselves accountable for our own learning and growth.
- Building a board and staff that is made up of and supports diversity and inclusion that reflects the rich diversity of all the communities in which we work.
- Creating a culturally inclusive organizational culture, from board to staff, that leverages peoples' strengths, encourages open and respectful engagement and interaction among different voices, promotes opportunities for discussion and debate regularly, and reflects all the communities in which we work.
- Reflecting on and adapting our organizational practices and assessing the impacts (intended or unintended) on marginalized communities.
- Prioritizing inclusion and access for those who are most vulnerable to health disparities or have less access to nature.
- Engaging in authentic, mutually beneficial relationships and collaborating with communities and organizations that have been impacted by environmental injustice or excluded from conservation.
- Recognizing and honoring the different ways that people experience nature and their challenges in going outside.
- Fostering a sense of welcome for all people in all of HeartLands Conservancy's spaces and programs.

GOALS AND ACTIONS

Organizational change is long-term work. It is different from programming, and it can be difficult to measure progress. There's no endpoint in this work. It is constant and ongoing. Working equitably means having the capacity for appropriate structures instead of one-size-fits-all solutions.

HeartLands Conservancy developed the following goals and actions based on an organizational assessment of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in 2020-2021. These goals and actions represent organizational priorities and capacity in the near term; however, they do not encompass all the work and further learning that will necessary to be a truly anti-racist organization. That is an ongoing effort. Thus, goals and actions should be revised and added to on a regular basis as the organization grows and learns. The first opportunity to incorporate these concepts is through the strategic planning process.

GOAL 1: Racial equity is a core part of our organizational mission; therefore, we will undertake actions and interventions, as needed and on an ongoing basis, to interrupt patterns of white

domination and power in the day-to-day operations, programs, policies, and practices when these patterns (whether intentional or not) have the impact of benefiting white people but disadvantaging or excluding people of color.

1. Strive to ensure no one is excluded from internal organizational events due to the location, access, time of day, and cost of participating.
2. Review and eliminate the policy and procedural barriers to reporting racism and other oppressive behavior in the workplace.
3. Provide annual professional development opportunities for board, staff, interns, and volunteers to learn to recognize biases and white-dominant culture.
4. Use Racial Equity Impact Analysis (adapted from *Annie E. Casey Foundation*) in decision making, budgeting, and program development. Ask ourselves:
   - Who are the racial/ethnic groups in the area? For the proposed program/decision, what results are desired, and how will each group be affected?
   - Are there current disparities by race around these issues or closely related ones? How will they be affected by this decision/program?
   - What strategies are being used, and how will they be perceived by each group?
   - Are the voices of all groups affected by the decision/program/action at the table?
   - If the answers above do not close gaps in racial disparities, how should the program/decision be revised? Or should the program/decision not be implemented?

GOAL 2: Attract, recruit, hire, develop, and retain diverse staff and board members who are representative of southern Illinois' diverse communities and can work effectively in cross-cultural environments.

1. Conduct an annual review of board composition and culture by the Governance Committee.
2. Develop a diversity statement for the board of directors, specifically.
3. Every three years at a minimum, conduct a formal review of personnel policies and practices, including compensation, promotion, benefits, and other policies.
4. Implement, and adapt as needed, a regular employee check-in and goal-setting process that seeks to elevate employees' key strengths and career goals and identifies relevant opportunities and resources. Check-ins and goal setting should be quarterly and allow for open communication.
5. Implement an iterative staff onboarding progress that adapts based on the position, individual needs, and evaluations from employees.
6. Work toward proportional representation of staff of color throughout all levels of the organization.
7. Support leadership development that helps organization leaders foster a culture of open dialogue, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.

GOAL 3: Build and strengthen relationships, collaborations, and partnerships with diverse community groups and organizations, especially those that serve or are led by under-resourced communities.

1. Participate and attend events hosted by community partners and collaborators.
2. Collaborate and partner with organizations and groups through shared funding, providing technical assistance (when appropriate), and connecting partners to funders and funding opportunities.
3. Evaluate compensation and workloads of all staff, and ensure staff of color are fairly compensated for additional work they may be absorbing to better serve communities, clients, and partners of color.
4. Share the work of community partners to our members, supporters, and regional/state leaders as appropriate to the mission of HeartLands Conservancy.

GOAL 4: Implement community-oriented programs and projects that provide multiple benefits for the diverse communities of southern Illinois.

1. Identify and listen to the needs and interests of communities historically excluded from the conservation field.
2. Co-develop programs and projects with community input and involvement.
3. Track participation demographics in programs and projects.
4. Identify and prioritize materials and referral outlets that reach communities of color in our region.
5. Hire people and recruit volunteers and board members from the communities we intend to serve with programs whenever possible.

OUR SHARED LANGUAGE

HeartLands Conservancy has embraced the following terms as a part of our framework for decision-making, conservation ethic, and programming. These terms have been provided to us, adapted, or wholly adopted from other entities (indicated in parentheses).

Anti-Racism - the work of actively opposing discrimination based on race by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism tends to be an individualized approach, which is set up to counter an individual's racist behaviors and impact. (*Time's Up*) Today, anti-racism is perhaps most closely associated with Ibram X. Kendi, the founding director of American University's anti-racist research center who popularized the concept with his 2019 book "How to be an Anti-Racist." In it, he wrote: "The only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it — and then dismantle it." (*Business Insider*)

Belonging- the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group or place. In order for people to feel like they belong, the environment needs to be set up to be a diverse and inclusive place. (*deibNOW*)

Diversity- psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals; including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles. A diverse group, community, or organization is one in which a variety of social and cultural characteristics exist. (*deibNOW*)

Equity- the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically under-resourced and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups. (*deibNOW*)

Justice - Elevating the positive vision and power of under-resourced and under-represented groups, especially communities of color, in shaping community conditions by addressing root causes of harm and seeking potential reparative solutions. (*adapted from Sen and Villarosa*)

Inclusion- the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming culture embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. (*deibNOW*)

Intent vs. Impact - this distinction is an integral part of inclusive environments; intent is what a person meant to do and impact is the effect it had on someone else. Regardless of intent, it is imperative to recognize how behaviors, language, actions, etc. affect or influence other people. An examination of what was said or done and how it was received is the focus, not necessarily what was intended. (*Workforce Diversity Network*)

Marginalization - the placement of minority groups and cultures outside mainstream society. All that varies from the norm of the dominant culture is devalued and at times perceived as deviant and regressive. (*The National Multicultural Institute*)

Multiculturalism/Working "Cross-Culturally" - the practice of acknowledging and respecting the various cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, attitudes, and opinions within an environment. The theory and practice promote the peaceful coexistence of all identities and people. (*University of Maryland*)

Oppression - the systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups. (*Adams, Bell and Griffin*)

People/Person/Community of Color - is not a term that refers to real biological or scientific distinctions between people, but the common experience of being targeted and oppressed by racism. While each oppressed group is affected by racism differently and each group maintains its own unique identity and culture, there is also the recognition that racism has the potential to unite oppressed people in a collective of resistance. For this reason, many individuals who identify as members of racially oppressed groups also claim the political identity of being People of Color. This in no way diminishes specific cultural or racial identity; rather it is an affirmation of the multiple layers of identity of every individual. This term also refrains from the subordinate

connotation of triggering labels like "non-White" and "minority." (*Office of Racial and Ethnic Concerns of Unitarian Universalist Association*)

Racism - A system of advantage or oppression based on race. A way of organizing society based on dominance and subordination based on race. Penetrates every aspect of personal, cultural, and institutional life. Includes prejudice against people of color, as well as exclusion, discrimination against, suspicion of, and fear and hate of people of color. Racism = Prejudice + the POWER to implement that prejudice. (*Exchange Project of the Peace & Development Fund*)

Unconscious Bias - refers to social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing. (*UCSF, Office of Diversity & Outreach*)

White Dominant Culture- Culture defined by white men and white women with social and positional power, enacted both broadly in society and within the context of social entities such as organizations. Oftentimes the characteristics of white supremacy manifest in organizational culture, and are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the full group. The characteristics are damaging to both people of color and white people in that they elevate the values, preferences, and experiences of one racial group above all others. Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun identified twelve characteristics of white supremacy culture in organizations: Perfectionism, Sense of Urgency, Defensiveness, Quantity of Quality, Worship of the Written Word, Paternalism, Power Hoarding, Fear of Open Conflict, Individualism, Progress is Bigger/More, Objectivity, and Right to Comfort. (adapted from *Equity in the Center, Awake to Woke to Work Glossary*)

White Supremacy- The existence of racial power that denotes a system of structural or societal racism which privileges white people over others, regardless of the presence or the absence of racial hatred. White racial advantages occur at both a collective and an individual level, and both people of color and white people can perpetuate white dominant culture, resulting in the overall disenfranchisement of people of color in many aspects of society. (*Equity in the Center, Awake to Woke to Work Glossary*)