

# Intentional Hiring and Recruitment through the Lens of Equity and Inclusion:

*Insights and Lessons Learned from Crissy Field Center, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy*



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*Our first brief, Examining Equitable and Inclusive Organizations in Environmental Education: Perspectives from the Field (Romero, Foreman, Strang, Rodriguez, Payan, and Moore Bailey, 2019), drew our attention to an important consideration: when examining recruitment and hiring practices, it is imperative for organizations to consider “all aspects of the hiring process, including job descriptions, qualifications, and interview committees,” and to ensure that “diversity goals” go beyond numbers to “articulate what equity and inclusion look like in all areas of the organization” (p. 6).*

*Recognizing the journey of the Crissy Field Center in examining and improving their own recruitment and hiring practices, the Lawrence Hall of Science conducted a series of interviews with Charity Maybury (Deputy Director, Crissy Field Center) and Ernesto Pepito (Associate Director, Crissy Field Center) to document their process. Charity, Ernesto, and Christy Rocca (Associate Vice President, Youth Programs and Services, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy), reviewed the brief to ensure the narrative is authentic and reflects the experiences and voices of Crissy Field Center. The Lawrence Hall of Science offers gratitude to our co-authors for their time, thoughtfulness, transparency, willingness to share, and critical perspectives throughout the writing of this brief.*

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## CONTEXT

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The mainstream environmental education (EE) field continues to go through a period of reflection and reexamination in an attempt to overcome decades of practices that have resulted in a nearly homogenous white workforce (Taylor, 2014). Across environmental-related non-profits, foundations, and other entities, the workforce is disproportionately white, particularly in leadership roles (Taylor, 2014). In a 2018 study, leaders of EE organizations reported that they have a goal to hire more black and brown educators, and they cited three primary barriers to achieving this goal: 1) not enough people of color apply; 2) applicants of color that do apply rarely meet the hiring criteria; and 3) the nature of the job does not meet the needs of people of color (Romero et al., 2019). However, the same study found that current EE professionals of color found that these perceived challenges present a deficit-oriented framing that fails to acknowledge how the current practices of EE organizations may be reinforcing systemic barriers to entry.

In other words, the current hiring practices of many EE organizations are, unwittingly, pushing interested potential environmental education professionals of color away from the field before they can even enter. This finding resonates with researchers who continue to challenge organizations to be reflective in their hiring practices and to always consider how their practices may be deterring potential applicants, marginalizing current staff of color, and reinforcing the status quo (Roberts & Chitewere, 2011; Beasley, 2016; Taylor, 2018).

It is within this larger context that Crissy Field Center (the Center) at the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy has been working to mitigate unconscious bias in their hiring practices for several years. We share this brief to provide an example of the introspection, intention, and attention to detail behind one organization's journey toward a workforce that reflects the youth they serve and their organization-wide core values of equity and inclusion.

### **EXAMINING EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

The 2018 study referenced here revealed a clear disconnect in the way that environmental education organization leaders and educators of color define, experience, and intend to prioritize equity, inclusion, and diversity (far beyond just hiring

practices). Leaders, generally, want to make equity, inclusion, and diversity priorities, but the strategies they use can unintentionally reinforce the status quo of systemic racism and marginalization that educators of color experience. Read the whole study at <http://beetlesproject.org/resources/equitable-and-inclusive-work-environments/>

## INTRODUCTION TO CRISSY FIELD CENTER

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Crissy Field Center opened in 2001 as a project under the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, a partner to the National Parks Service and the Presidio Trust. The Center exists as a youth development and education center that serves San Francisco Unified School District youth and the broader San Francisco community, with a particular focus on youth of color

and low-income individuals. The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy provides financial and infrastructure support to the Center that supports the delivery of the Center's educational programming and services. Crissy Field Center has 19 full-time staff, 4 long-term seasonal staff, 10-12 summer seasonal staff, and 2-4 National Park Service staff.

### IN ITS OWN WORDS:

"Crissy Field Center (<https://www.parksconservancy.org/programs/crissy-field-center>) is a dynamic hub of youth engagement for the Golden Gate National Parks and a model program of the National Park Service. Crissy Field Center programs encourage new generations to become bold leaders for thriving parks, healthy communities, and a more environmentally just society.

Crissy Field Center's state-of-the-art, green education facility consists of classrooms, labs, and gathering spaces for youth enrolled in the Center's camps, field trips, and programs. With a focus on engaging people who traditionally have had little—if any—access to national parks, the Center has developed strong partnerships with schools and community centers in underserved areas, providing a majority of its programming for free or at low cost."

## BUILDING A CENTER THAT IS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY: LEADING WITH EQUITY AND INCLUSION THROUGH REFLECTION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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Since its inception in 2001, under the leadership and guidance of a community advisory board, the Center has held a strong commitment to serving the community by including the community. They realize that the success of the Center depends on their ability to recruit and retain a staff that reflects the makeup of the youth community they serve in order to ensure that: 1) the goals, priorities, and programs are reflective of the community's needs; 2) they are able to provide culturally relevant, multicultural, and community-based

education programs; and 3) that youth are able to see themselves in the fabric of the organization—both in the physical appearance of spaces and in its staff. Therefore, the Center decided that individuals who inform the development of the Center and who comprise the staff should be members of the San Francisco community. Through this approach, the Center had to think critically about the hiring and recruitment process. Today, 85% of the Center staff are people of color, and five languages are spoken fluently across the team.

Over the years, the Center has engaged in an iterative process of critical reflection and continuous improvement to cultivate and institutionalize a recruitment and hiring process that is equitable and inclusive—that opens up opportunities for individuals who may not otherwise enter the mainstream environmental education field and who experience a work environment that is inclusive of and values their lived experiences. The staff at the Center admit that they are still learning—building on what has worked (and what hasn't), drawing on research-based practices, and pushing themselves to be reflective and

*"I think one of the big things is making sure that we have representation of staff [so that] youths are able to identify with some of the staff, that [they] have some sort of shared identities, whether it's through race or gender identity or sexual orientation."*

*—Crissy Field Center Staff*

## DEFINING EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND DIVERSITY

We used the following definitions in this study:

**Equity:** The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented full participation of certain groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that historically underserved and underrepresented populations exist and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to ensure equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups. (adapted from UC Berkeley Initiative for Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity; Youth Outside).

**Inclusion:** The act of creating environments in which any individual or group feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in both words and actions for all people. (adapted from UC Berkeley Initiative for Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity; Youth Outside)

**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, or mental or physical ability. A diverse group, community, or organization is one in which a variety of social and cultural characteristics exist. (adapted from The National Multicultural Institute; Youth Outside).

*Note: We often hear people incorrectly use “diverse” or “diversity” to only refer to communities or individuals that have characteristics outside of the “norm,” or outside of a dominant culture—e.g., people of color or individuals from the LGBTQ+ community.*

forward-thinking. The following key insights include the Center’s reflections and lessons learned about what has worked well for them and where they hope to continue to grow.

### Key Insight 1: Commit to Equity and Inclusion

Crissy Field Center is part of a tri-agency partnership, and so is subject to many complex policies and practices. However, because the Center was founded specifically to serve the community, it can function somewhat independently to experiment with

*“So I think that’s maybe where the problem lies, when an organization is trying to create a new culture just by bringing in new people, but nothing’s really going to change. Bringing in new people, without addressing other equity and inclusion issues won’t change the culture. To create something new, you really have to change the dynamics.”*

*–Crissy Field Center Staff*

approaches that advance its core values of equity and inclusion. Crissy Field Center staff report that saying an organization is committed to equity and inclusion, and actually demonstrating that commitment are quite different: demonstrating a committing to equity and inclusion requires a genuine willingness to spend resources, experience discomfort, and acknowledge that achieving these values may not happen quickly. Creating change also requires some prerequisite organizational habits of mind: an openness to change, a regular practice of reflection, an eagerness to receive feedback, a willingness to give up some old ways of operating even at the risk of temporarily losing some efficiency, and a recognition that achieving equity and inclusion may require following an indirect and iterative pathway. Now, the Center hopes to lead by example, sharing what they have learned with other departments in the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy with the goal of contributing to larger institutional changes.

### Key Insight 2: Reflect On and Work Towards Mitigating Biases

Everyone holds biases that stem from our lived experiences and the conditions of systemic racism and oppression that surround us. These biases influence how we individually and collectively navigate the systems in which we exist.

## IMPLICIT BIAS AND HIRING

Environmental education is certainly not the only field facing hiring and advancement practices that continue to marginalize people of color and those from low income communities. Several studies have shown that unconscious bias affects

how job descriptions are written, which resumes get calls back, how candidates are interviewed, how candidates are rated, and, ultimately, who gets the job.

(Agarwal, 2018; Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011; Johnson, Hekman, & Chan, 2016; Rivera, 2012).

Crissy Field Center recognized that implicit biases impact the recruitment and hiring process: the use of specific language and framing in job announcements and job descriptions, what counts as “qualified,” the composition of hiring and interview committees, the formation of interview protocols and rubrics, etc. To mitigate these impacts, the Center now uses research-based tools to help them critically examine and improve their recruitment and hiring documents. For example, the Center has used the Hiring Toolkit (Avarna Group, 2018) to identify and mitigate bias in the job description, list of qualifications, and other job-related text. In this review, the position supervisor looks closely for coded language (e.g., minority, urban, underrepresented, at risk) and replaces it with specific, inclusive language. Crissy Field Center also experimented with screening redacted applications (i.e., applications with names and graduation dates removed). The redacted applications are scored by the hiring committee to select interviewees. The process of redaction has been a recommended practice that can also mitigate biases—encouraging staff to assess the experiences and skills included in the application package without making assumptions about a person’s race, ethnicity, gender, or age (Knight, 2017). Crissy Field Center is in the early stages of exploring whether this is a strategy that supports its organizational goals.

### Key Insight 3: Value Youth Voices and Multiple Perspectives

With youth at the core of its mission, the Center holds a deep commitment to engage and develop youth in meaningful ways. Immediately upon entering the Center, the pictures, words, voices and work products

of youth are visible everywhere. There are community spaces for both youth and staff to mingle and enjoy. In this same spirit, the Center makes an intentional effort to include youth voices and perspectives throughout the hiring process. Crissy Field Center also views having youth involved as a professional development opportunity for youth who participate: they receive mentorship and support throughout the process so they are empowered to voice their opinions, while also learning about how hiring processes work. While this approach is largely possible because the Center is able to build deep, long term relationships with youth, all organizations can consider how to build connections with their community: young people, teachers, community leaders, or other stakeholders. Many organizations have had success implementing youth and/or community advisory boards to provide input on organization systems, including hiring practices. There is no singular approach to engaging the community. It requires organizations to carefully think about who comprises their “community,” and when and how to engage community voices.

*“We try to have participation in the hiring process as a development opportunity for our youth, but also give a lot of weight to their voice and their opinion on who should come. Recently, for our high school coordinator position, [one staff person] might have been rooting for a different candidate and our young people made their case of why they think it should be someone else. So, there’s a lot of weight given to their input.”*

*–Crissy Field Center Staff*

In addition to incorporating youth voices, the supervisor of the position being hired is responsible for including multiple internal perspectives in the hiring process. For each position, there is a hiring committee that includes 3-8 individuals. They each represent different positions and levels of leadership from throughout the organization. Through this structure, the perspectives and voices of staff across

## Crissy Field Center: Resume Review Score Sheet

Position: Environmental Education Specialist

Directions: Rank applicants strength in each skill on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high):

Category	Applicant Names									
Curriculum development and delivery- experience developing and facilitating hands on environmental science programs and curriculum										
Program coordination-experience with scheduling, logistics, working in a team, program documentation										
College degree or equivalent experience in environmental science or env. studies										
Experience mentoring and supervising youth interns and adult staff										
Youth development- understanding and experience with different age groups, developmental stages, asset (versus deficit) thinking, scaffolding										
Understanding of challenges of urban communities, especially those in San Francisco Bay Area										
Experience or demonstrated interest in equity										

Figure 1. Excerpt of Crissy Field Center Rubric.  
See Appendix A for complete document.

leadership positions are valued and included. By engaging individuals who hold different roles and lived experiences, there are more opportunities to check assumptions and biases that may manifest throughout the hiring process.

### Key Insight 4: Value Applicants' Lived Experiences

Crissy Field Center recognizes that a multitude of experiences and skills contribute to its mission; their community encompasses many intersectional identities, and this warrants having a staff of individuals who hold diverse lived experiences, have multifaceted interests, and are able to build connections and relationships to enhance the work of the center. This pushed the team to think critically about what they were identifying as “qualifications and relevant experience.” Crissy Field Center now recognizes that applicants can bring a wide range of skills and experiences that may not be traditionally deemed as professional or academic qualifications but can improve one’s likelihood of success in the position. The Center has committed to

*“[In our job announcements], it’s implied we haven’t figured this out versus ‘We just need you to fill in a spot.’ So I think it is part of [an equitable approach to hiring] to ask yourself, what part of what you’re already doing are you going to give up so that there can be new leadership there?”*

*–Crissy Field Center Staff*

accurately identifying what qualifications and skills are really required for someone to bring to the position, and which can be taught on the job. The items that can be taught on the job are removed as requirements. The goal here is to create a job description that reflects the necessities of the position and “promotes a broader range of talented people” (Avarna Group, 2018), while also eliminating potential barriers to entry.

Despite this commitment, Crissy Field Center still noticed that when previous program participants applied for jobs, they were frequently overlooked because they had less professional experience in comparison to other applicants. In response, the Center developed a rubric to inform how hiring committees review resumes in the initial screening process and how they evaluate the information shared by applicants in interviews (see Appendix A to view the complete rubric). The goal of this rubric is to capture some of the additional skills, expertise, and experience that aren’t always valued in a traditional hiring process, such as being a prior program participant, fluency in various languages, and/or having experience working with the local community. By looking for and valuing these skills and experiences, the Center demonstrates that these attributes are of equal weight as other more traditional qualifications like a college degree. This rubric intentionally deprioritized specific science knowledge, which is often highly valued in environmental education organizations (Romero, et al, 2019). In considering what skills or experiences actually contribute most to the Center’s mission, Center staff realized that out of their 20 positions, less than a handful really require a high degree of science knowledge that can’t be learned on the job.

The rubric resulted in the hiring team having a better understanding of the strengths and experiences of applicants, how they match up with job duties, how they might complement or enhance the existing staff, and how much supervision or mentorship they might need. The rubric also helped to standardize the review process so no matter who is doing the hiring, everyone is using a similar process and similar criteria for reviewing and evaluating applicants.

### Key Insight 5: Communication and Marketing

Based on previous experiences, the staff found that when job announcements started with “National Parks Conservancy” or “Environmental Education Center,” they did not attract the applicants they wanted. The Center had to re-think what story they wanted to communicate to “new listeners.” They want potential applicants to know they are community-based, multicultural, and contributing to social justice. While science and environmental education play an important role in the organization’s mission, they are not necessarily the part of the mission that the organization needs the most help to achieve. Crissy Field Center also considered how qualifications are communicated to potential applicants.

*“There was something that was attracting in the job description in the first sentence. There was something about the Center’s mission that was already trying to tell a different story to people who hear, “Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy” and turn off, or who hear “environmental education center” and don’t necessarily say, “Oh, that’s where I want to apply.”*

*–Crissy Field Center Staff*

Job descriptions can be obscure and loaded with jargon that can make it difficult for potential applicants to understand whether the position would be a good fit for their skills, interests, and goals. To address this, the Center started using job announcements to communicate first and foremost about its community-focused mission. These announcements also include an image and/or a headline that attempts to capture

the essence of the job, such as, “Are you interested in social and environmental change?” Announcements also provide a high-level overview of the position’s key responsibilities, desired qualifications, and guidelines for how to apply. Crissy Field Center distributes only job announcements initially, and then during the interview phase provides a more detailed job description. This process attracts a wider range of applicants and reduces the obstacles that deter people from submitting an application.



The Crissy Field Center is looking for an **Environmental Education Specialist**, whose primary responsibilities are to develop, coordinate, and deliver relevant and rigorous environmental education programs to youth. Programs are delivered in the national park, other public spaces, and in our participants’ home communities.

This position specializes in delivering environmental science and environmental justice curriculum through the lens of youth development. Creativity, flexibility, a passion for the environment, and the ability to work with a diversity of groups and individuals are the foundations of this position. The programs implemented by this position will meet the

Figure 1. Crissy Field Center Job Announcement.  
See Appendix B for complete document.

### Key Insight 6: Continuous Improvement through Documentation and Reflection

One of the most critical elements of this process is documentation and reflection. For the first ten years of its existence, the Center did not document their hiring process. While they assumed their staff all had similar values and practices, they recognized that developing a document, now known internally as the Hiring Blueprint, would: 1) provide an opportunity for staff members to be explicit about their guiding values that support consistent hiring processes, and 2) build staff capacity to participate in hiring processes. While the Hiring Blueprint does not serve as a formal policy that dictates the hiring process, it does serve as a tool to guide staff in being reflective and intentional throughout the hiring process. The document, in its current state, outlines guiding principles and suggests practices for reviewing staffing needs and allocating funds. It describes how to post and announce the position, who is involved in the application review process; which criteria staff should consider; and how offers are made.

When staff post a position now, they will visit the Hiring Blueprint first. After the search, they will revisit the Blueprint to reflect on how the process went, and consider revising it and associated documents. As new research or tools become available, Center staff review the Blueprint, discuss with one another, consider whether to try out new strategies, and then decide whether to revise the existing documents or not. This process requires a commitment to revisiting and refining based on changing conditions and contexts. It also requires a commitment to nimbleness: what works in one search may not work as well in another; what works for one department may not work for another. This requires individuals to be flexible, to dig into the literature to educate each other, and carefully think at each step about meeting the organization's goals for equity and inclusion.

*"I think that the Blueprint is our attempt to put our values on paper, and we continue to revise it so that it can have some backing, some legs to define why we're doing what we do."*

*-Crissy Field Center Staff*

### **Key Insight 7: Hiring is Not the End**

For Crissy Field Center leaders, hiring is just one piece of fostering equity and inclusion within its work environment. They are committed to creating a work culture that allows staff to show up as their full selves, to see themselves growing and learning at the organization over the long term, and to have agency and creativity in

their positions.

Crissy Field Center also supported staff of color to establish an Environmental Educators of Color face-to-face and online affinity space for themselves. The group started out small, but has gradually grown to include EE professionals of color across organizations throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The Environmental Educators of Color group meets monthly in-person, with space and food provided by the Center. As Crissy Field Center seeks to increase equity and inclusion in its hiring practices, organization leaders are keenly aware that they also need to embrace practices that focus on community building, job satisfaction and retention.

*"It doesn't come with the tangible, monetary promotion, or change of title, but the fact that someone can come in and gradually vision out what they want their position or department to be. That is a freedom. It's tangible. They're going to create, they're going to get to partner with whoever they want, they're going to get to redesign things, and they'll have our full support building those skills and getting the training that they need."*

*-Crissy Field Center Staff*

## **CONCLUSION**

The Crissy Field Center has committed to advancing equity and inclusion in its organization and programming, and they are adamant that having a staff that represents the community they serve is essential to achieving their mission. Since 2001, the Center staff have been deliberate in building equity and inclusion into their hiring practices. They have dedicated resources—both money and time—to ensure that their hiring is based on current thinking and best practices, and includes research, gathering regular feedback,

engaging in continual reflection. The seven key insights that emerged and are described in this brief continue to guide the Center into the future.

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# APPENDIX A:

## Crissy Field Center: Resume Review Score Sheet

Position: **Environmental Education Specialist**

**Directions:** Rank applicants strength in each skill on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high):

Category	Applicant Names									
Curriculum development and delivery- experience developing and facilitating hands on environmental science programs and curriculum										
Program coordination- experience with scheduling, logistics, working in a team, program documentation										
College degree or equivalent experience in environmental science or env. studies										
Experience mentoring and supervising youth interns and adult staff										
Youth development- understanding and experience with different age groups, developmental stages, asset (versus deficit) thinking, scaffolding										
Understanding of challenges of urban communities, especially those in San Francisco Bay Area										
Experience or demonstrated interest in equity, inclusion and justice										
Experience working with racial, ethnic, socio-economic diverse groups of people. Experience working with and in specific community groups: black community; muslim; trans...										
Experience or demonstrated interest in integrating social justice and science into lessons and learning										
Interest in the outdoors, National Parks, open spaces										
Bilingual speaker (Cantonese, Spanish, Tagalog, Russian, Vietnamese, Mandarin) <b>(Check Mark and Indicate Language)</b>										
Driver's license? <b>(Check Mark)</b>										
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>										
<b>Notes</b>										

## APPENDIX B:



The Crissy Field Center is looking for an **Environmental Education Specialist**, whose primary responsibilities are to develop, coordinate, and deliver relevant and rigorous environmental education programs to youth. Programs are delivered in the national park, other public spaces, and in our participants' home communities.

This position specializes in delivering environmental science and environmental justice curriculum through the lens of youth development. Creativity, flexibility, a passion for the environment, and the ability to work with a diversity of groups and individuals are the foundations of this position. The programs implemented by this position will meet the mission of the Crissy Field Center and take advantage of the rich natural and cultural resources in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and participants' home communities.

This is a full-time benefitted position with a Tuesday-Saturday or Monday-Friday schedule, depending on program needs. This position also staffs several overnight programs throughout the year.

### Key Duties and Responsibilities

**Curriculum Development and Delivery:** Develops and delivers multicultural environmental science curriculum. Develops and delivers programs that address social and environmental issues for all Crissy Field Center programs areas, including Youth Leadership, School Programs, Summer Camp, and Community Programs. Works within a team setting to facilitate programs in a variety of settings. Facilitates outdoor activities such as hiking, field investigations, and overnight camping trips, using the national parks as a powerful outdoor classroom.

**Program Coordination:** Coordinates education programs, including communications with staff and partners, scheduling, logistics, and staffing. Collaborates with teachers, students, National Park Service staff, interns and community partners to create programs. Tracks program statistics and writes reports. Assists with evaluations.

**Maintenance of Urban Ecology Lab:** Manage the Crissy Field Center urban ecology lab including maintenance of educational supplies and technical equipment.

**Supervision:** Supervises, trains and mentors seasonal staff, summer interns, and volunteers at varying times. Responsible for driving youth in 15 passenger vans.



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