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Working Towards Equitable Organizations California: A Pilot Workshop Series *Summative Evaluation Report*

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Introduction

From 2018 through 2020, with funding support from the Stephen D. Bechtel, Jr. and Heller Foundations, the Lawrence Hall of Science and Justice Outside (formerly known as Youth Outside) co-designed and implemented a pilot workshop series that aimed to support capacity building in environmental education organizations to position them to advance equity and inclusion in their organizations. As part of this pilot project, the Research Group at the Lawrence Hall of Science conducted an evaluation that aimed to understand the (1) design and development process and (2) the experience and perceived influence of the project activities on participating organizations and individuals. The evaluation aimed to use culturally responsive practices to ensure that the design and execution of the evaluation was responsive to the context, participants and communities. This summative report aims to describe some of the key lessons learned from the evaluation as well as insights and implications for subsequent efforts to replicate the WTEO project nationally. Please note that throughout this report we use a gender-neutral term of “they” to refer to an individual and groups of people.

Working Towards Equitable Organizations

Working Towards Equitable Organizations (WTEO) is a two-year pilot professional learning project led by the Lawrence Hall of Science and Justice Outside. WTEO aims to design and implement a capacity building professional learning model that supports environmental education organizations in centering racial equity, inclusion and cultural relevance in their work environments. The project utilized a two-pronged approach to support capacity building in organizations: 1) WTEO Professional Learning Workshop Series and 2) Capacity Building Institute for Professionals of Color.

The WTEO Professional Learning Workshop Series specifically targeted staff in positions of power, such as an Executive Director, Education Director, or Lead Naturalist. Two staff from each of seven organizations participated in this workshop series. Together, these staff engaged in critical reflection and dialogue, identified policies and practices that perpetuate systems of oppression and marginalization, and developed and executed action plans as a means towards advancing systems-level change aimed at fostering a more equitable, inclusive and culturally relevant work environment for Staff of Color. The project led three in-person workshops, one virtual workshop, and provided technical assistance to each organization.

The Capacity Building Institute for Professionals of Color targeted staff who self-identified as a Person of Color in each of the seven participating organizations. Staff took part in a one-week Institute that aimed to support the development of professional skills to promote the advancement of Staff of Color in leadership pathways within the organizations and the environmental education field, generally. In addition, the Institute aimed to build an intentional community of learning, reflection and self- and community-care.

By the end of the project, the partners aimed to develop a professional learning model that can be replicated nationally.

Evaluation

As part of this pilot, the Research Group at the Lawrence Hall of Science served as evaluators of the project. The evaluation design was formative and summative in its focus. The first phase of the evaluation collected data to provide insights to support the design, development and implementation of project activities. In this approach, the evaluation carefully documented the design and development process through participation in planning meetings. In addition, the evaluation administered a survey and conducted focus groups to examine in what ways environmental education organizations frame and operationalize equity, inclusion and/or diversity in the work environment. Findings informed the design and development of the workshop series as well as provided further evidence to situate the relevance and need for the workshop series. Findings were disseminated in a practitioner brief and in conference presentations, as shared in previous reports.

The second phase of the evaluation, on which this summative report focuses, aimed to determine the extent to which the project met its goals and its overall impact. As a proof of concept, the evaluation gathered evidence of the potential impact of the project on participating organizations, leaders and educators of color that could provide a foundation for future research and design and development efforts. The field of environmental education was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with countless organizations being forced to close, and many staff furloughed or laid off. WTEO continued to engage with program leaders, and with some additional funding from the Pisces Foundation, the project is exploring ways to continue supporting organizations and Staff of Color in the Fall 2021. Because of the current context, the evaluation was not able to conduct some of the planned data collection, such as interviews with all participants. Given this change, the evaluation is limited in sharing the ways in which the Institute supported Staff of Color, in particular, beyond the Institute. In the coming Fall, if it is possible, the evaluation will conduct interviews, particularly with Staff of Color.

For the purpose of this report, we will focus on sharing insights and lessons learned regarding the design and development of the professional learning model and Organizational Leaders' experience. Specifically this report will focus on the following evaluation questions:

Design, Development and Implementation:

- 1) In what ways did partners identify goals and strategically plan for advancing equity and inclusion in environmental education?
- 2) What practitioner tools and resources did the project develop?
- 3) What does the design of the professional learning model look like?

Impact of WTEO

- 1) In what ways does the model support Organizational Leaders' capacity to advance equity and inclusion in their organizations?
- 2) In what ways does the Institute support staff of color capacity building to advance in environmental education?

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- 3) In what ways has the WTEO project influenced how organizations center racial equity in the work environment? What are the points of tension and barriers to enacting systems change?

Project in the Context of COVID-19

- 1) How has COVID-19 impacted the experiences of Professionals of Color in EE?
- 2) How has COVID-19 affected organizations' work towards centering racial equity and enacting systems change within their organizations?

Methods

Approach

Given the explicit focus on equity and inclusion, this project aimed to use culturally responsive evaluation practices to inform the design and execution of the evaluation. As such, the evaluation recognized and leveraged the expertise and contributions of the project team. With input from the project team, the evaluation plan, methods and instruments were co-designed to ensure that guiding questions and instruments were responsive to the project, participants, and the environmental education context. In addition, the evaluator attended and participated in project team meetings and provided memorandums to share key insights and learnings throughout the project. This final report aims to similarly provide learnings as well as additional insights from the evaluation team to foster critical reflection as the project moves forward.

Sample

The evaluation includes all seven organizations that participated in the WTEO project. All organizations were located within California, with the exception of one that has multiple sites throughout the United States. All organizations provided day and/or residential (i.e. overnight) programming for youth. At the onset of the project, there were 15 participants. Due to turnover in organizations, there were changes in participants. As new staff joined the project, they were invited to participate in the evaluation. By the end of the project, 18 individuals participated in the evaluation.

Data Sources

This summative report drew on data sources that aimed to gather Organizational Leaders' perspectives and experiences, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation Data Sources and Constructs

Evaluation Focus	Constructs	Data Sources
Design, Development	Project goals, Partnership Roles	Planning meeting observations, Document Review
	Tools, Content, Dissemination	Document Review
Implementation	Workshop Goals, Program Components, Workshop satisfaction,	Workshop Observations Feedback Surveys Focus groups with organizational strand Participants and Professionals of Color Surveys
Impact	Knowledge, awareness, perceived relevance of issues and strategies related to equity and inclusion, Perceived ability to contribute to change, Changes in organization policies and practices	Interviews with organizational leaders Focus Groups with Professionals of Color Surveys
Impact of COVID-19	Experiences and perceptions of impact of COVID-19	Focus Group interviews with Professionals of Color Interview with organizational strand participants

Planning meeting observations: The evaluator participated in planning meetings to document decision-making and provide real-time feedback.

Document Review: The evaluator obtained artifacts from the project activities including tools, materials, PowerPoint slides, agendas, and documents to gain insight into the evolution of the project and dissemination.

Focus groups: The evaluation team hosted focus group interviews with participants in the middle and towards the end of the project to document their perspectives on and experiences in the project, including what was working well and what additional resources or services would be needed to continue to support organizations. To tend to power dynamics, focus groups were divided intentionally to ensure that supervisors or management level staff were not in the same groups as other staff. In addition we hosted separate focus groups for participants in the organizational strand and the Professionals of Color strand.

Interviews: The evaluation team invited participants in the organizational strand to take part in an end of pilot interview. These retrospective interviews invited participants to reflect on their goals, priorities, successes and challenges.

Participant survey: Participants were invited to complete a series of surveys after each workshop experience. The surveys incorporated questions regarding overall satisfaction and perceptions related to identified goals and objectives for each workshop. These items were primarily intended for formative purposes and so were included in memorandums to the project team. In addition, the survey contained 12 statements related to individual dispositions about advancing equity and inclusion. Participants rated their level of agreement with each of these statements at the end of each workshop. These statements are summarized in Table 2. Participants in the organizational strand were also invited to complete an end of pilot survey to share reflections on enacting systems change, including successes and challenges.

Table 2. Workshop Survey Constructs and Statements

Construct	Items (This workshop...)
Professional Learning Community	...provided opportunities to build a community with other environmental education professionals ... fostered a professional learning community through which individuals learn from each other's lived and professional experiences
Reflecting on Equity, Inclusion and Cultural Relevance	...increased my awareness of the historical inequities and marginalization in environmental education ... deepened my understanding of the intersectionality of equity, inclusion and cultural relevance ... increased my awareness of some of the factors that influence the lived experiences of staff from historically marginalized communities
Examining Organizational Practices and Policies	... increased my awareness of the policies and practices within my organization that may reinforce inequitable and marginalizing environments ... increased my awareness of how my own practices may reinforce inequitable and marginalizing environments ... provided me with tools to examine organizational policies and practices ... helped me to identify actionable steps to address a specific issue at my organization
Engaging Staff in Conversations	... prepared me to engage my staff in reflective conversations about equity, inclusion and cultural relevance ... prepared me to encourage a learning culture amongst my staff ... prepared me to lead capacity building conversations at my program

Analytical Approach

We did a descriptive analysis of the survey data (e.g., frequencies of responses, means, standard deviations, ranges) to understand what aspects of the professional learning model participants found helpful. Across the project, survey data included participant evaluations of the workshop's impact on dispositions (preparation, capacities) to advance equity and inclusion. A mean score was calculated and compared across data points. Open-ended questions were analyzed using an emergent thematic approach to extract key insights about the impact of the professional learning experience on organizations and participants. Interview data were also analyzed using an emergent thematic approach to identify ways in which the project included participants' development and implementation of action plans.

Limitations

Findings from this evaluation aim to share reflections and key insights from participants. This evaluation includes a small sample size, and therefore the learnings we share represent the experiences and perspectives of evaluation participants. We are not making any generalizable claims beyond these participants.

Design and Development of WTEO

The evaluation for this project aimed to understand how partners identified goals and plans for advancing the decision-making process and how products were developed. The Working Towards Equitable Organizations California (WTEO) pilot is a collaborative partnership between Justice Outside and the Lawrence Hall of Science. At the onset of the project, the team convened five partner organizations to provide direction and insights that would inform the design and development. These organizations included the Lawrence Hall of Science, Justice Outside, Crissy Field Center, YES Nature to Neighborhoods and Jose Gonzalez, founder of Latino Outdoors. The charge of this partnership was to identify tools and resources that would support environmental education organizations in centering and advancing equity in the work environment. During this process, the five partner organizations shared their experiences, expertise, and resources as a means of identifying the gaps and opportunities in the field. In addition, the evaluation administered a survey and conducted a series of focus groups to gain insight into the landscape of equity and inclusion in the environmental education field¹. Through this process, the partners identified a few key design principles that influenced the decision-making process. They are summarized below:

Leading with equity and inclusion. The project partners all approached this work with an explicit commitment to equity and inclusion. Through reflections on their own experiences and

¹ Romero, V., Foreman, J., Strang, C., Rodriguez, L., Payan, R., & Moore Bailey, K. (2019). Examining equitable and inclusive work environments in environmental education: Perspectives from the field and implications for organizations. Berkeley, CA. Available at <http://beetlesproject.org/resources/equitable-and-inclusive-work-environments/>

the findings from the initial landscape study, the project team recognized that for many organizations, equity and inclusion initiatives were most often beginning and ending with diversity. That is, organizations were often focusing efforts on diversifying staff (and learners) without tending to the distribution of resources or how inclusive the organization was. The project team felt that leading with equity and inclusion would encourage organizations to think critically about what systems-level change was needed to redistribute resources and foster inclusion.

Centering race. The partners collectively agreed that one of the goals of this work was to foster systems-level change (i.e., structures, policies, practices) that would cultivate more inclusive and equitable pathways for Black and brown individuals in environmental education. By naming, Black and brown people as the community of interest, the project team recognized the ways in which racism and colorism disproportionately impact the experiences of Black and brown people, particularly in white spaces like environmental education (EE). By centering race, the project team designed the workshop series to engage organizations in critical reflection about structures of power and privilege, and the history of oppression in EE as means towards unpacking and problematizing the current context of the EE field. This also pushed organizations to think about the intersections of structures of power and how those intersections materialize into the experiences of Black and brown professionals.

Residential outdoor science programs. By definition, the field of environmental education comprises a wide range of organizations that have diverse structures and needs. As a pilot project, the partners recognized that by starting with residential outdoor science organizations, the project could leverage the existing BEETLES (Better Environmental Education, Teaching, Learning & Expertise Sharing) network, another project led by the Lawrence Hall of Science partner. In addition, the residential outdoor science sector is, in some ways, an “extreme example of isolated programs with high majority white/middle class staff... and offer an extreme living situation with all staff frequently living in close quarters, sharing meals, which distinguishes it from other workplaces” (Meeting notes 9/11/2017). In this way, residential outdoor science programs offer a unique space of learning that can extend into other environmental education organizations. Subsequently, within the context of this pilot, the partners agreed to start with residential programs in mind and the intent to eventually build out to other types of organizations.

Over the course of six-months the partners recognized that Justice Outside was doing a lot of organizational capacity building work with grant makers and organizations that could be adapted in this context. In addition, the partners realized that each partner had a journey of advancing equity and inclusion that could be useful to share with other organizations. Subsequently, the partners identify two key products that would be developed:

1. **Organizational Capacity Building Model:** a workshop series that would support environmental education organizations in developing and implementing strategies to foster a more equitable and inclusive work environment. The key partners that would lead this work were the Lawrence Hall of Science and Justice Outside.

2. Exemplar briefs: the partners would develop a series of briefs that would highlight specific strategies organizations took to shift their structures and policies. The key partners that would lead this work were the Lawrence Hall of Science, Crissy Field Center and YES Nature to Neighborhoods. These briefs have been published and disseminated via conferences, EE networks and the WTEO workshops.² Currently, the evaluation team is also collaborating with participants from the Professionals of Color Capacity Building Institute to write a brief that calls for organizations to center equity and community building as they rebuild the work environment following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Working Towards Equitable Organizations Program Model

The pilot of the WTEO model comprised two strands of work:

- 1) Working Towards Equitable Organizations Workshop series for organizational leaders of residential outdoor science programs
- 2) Professionals of Color Capacity Building Institute for individuals who self-identified as a Person of Color and worked in one of the participating residential outdoor science programs.

Herein we briefly describe some of the key features of each strand.

The *Working Towards Equitable Organizations Workshop Series* consisted of six workshops that were implemented from November 2018 through April 2021. It is important to note that initially the workshop series was designed to be four workshops over the course of 18 months, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the last workshop series was divided into two virtual workshops. The workshops were designed to build a shared language and understanding of the intersection of race, power, privilege and oppression in the field of environmental education. Through this emphasis, organizations were asked to center the experiences and perspectives of Professionals of Color in examining their organization's structures, policies and practices. In addition, participants were charged with developing an action plan that outlined goals and strategies that would guide systems-level change within their organizations. To support organizations, each organization was provided with tools and resources in the workshops and technical assistance hours provided by the Lawrence Hall of Science and Justice Outside. How each organization used the technical assistance was determined in consultation between each organization and the project team. In addition, the project team hosted a series of community of practice meet-ups. In these meet-ups, the project team facilitated conversations about current events (e.g., COVID-19) and facilitated a book club. In the book club, participants read and discussed *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo and *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections*

² Hernández, B., Romero, V., Foreman, J., & Aaholm, E. (2020). Building Towards an Inclusive Organizational Culture: Insights and Lessons Learned from YES Nature to Neighborhoods. Berkeley, CA. Available at <http://beetlesproject.org/resources/lessons-learned-from-yes-nature-to-neighborhoods/>
Romero, V., Foreman, J., Strang, C., Maybury, C., Pepito, E., & Rocca, C. (2019). Intentional hiring and recruitment through the lens of equity and inclusion: Insights and lessons learned from Crissy Field Center, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Berkeley, CA. Available at <http://beetlesproject.org/resources/intentional-hiring-and-recruitment/>

from Social Justice Educators, an edited book by Lisa M. Landreman. The meet-ups were designed as a space for organizational leaders to continue engaging in critical reflection and dialogue about their organizations and be a source of support for each other.

The Professionals of Color Capacity Building Institute series was comprised of a five-day Institute, two virtual workshops, and community of practice meet-ups. The content of the Institute, workshops, and meet-ups were designed to facilitate a community of learning, reflection, and self- and community-care. In addition, the series aimed to support the development of professional skills to support the advancement of professionals of color in leadership pathways within the organization and in EE more generally. Notably, the project team believed that the goal of the Capacity Building Institutes series was not to place the burden of change on Professionals of Color. At one point the project team had planned to bring the two strands together, however due to the COVID-19 pandemic many organizations had to make difficult decisions that resulted in furloughs and lay-offs of staff, that included Professionals of Color. Due to these circumstances, the project team decided not to bring the two strands together in order to keep Professionals of Color safe. .

Over the course of the evaluation, participants were asked to share some of the key components of the experience they found valuable and/or useful. Based on these reflections and programmatic observations, we describe some of the key programmatic features of the model that were consistent across both strands below.

Key Features of Working Towards Equitable Organizations Model

The following describes some of the key features of the model:

Increased access to a community of practice and larger professional networks

The WTEO model promoted developing a community of practice wherein participants (i.e., organizational leaders and Professionals of Color) would learn with and from each other. Participants shared that they particularly valued the opportunity to network, especially with individuals who share a similar commitment to equity. Professionals of Color in particular, lauded the model for providing access to a network of professionals to which People of Color had previously been excluded. They valued the ability to build and grow these networks that catered specifically to Professionals of Color having shared experiences and identities in an otherwise white-dominated field. In addition, across both strands, the project team recognized the importance of uplifting the expertise and experiences of participants. Through peer-consultancies and open-space forums participants were able to raise issues that were relevant to their own experiences and engage in dialogue—at times as a means towards creating a space of affinity and healing, and at times as a means towards finding solutions. Participants also shared that they valued having colleagues and a staff of “experts” to guide them in this process.

Critical Reflection and Spaces of Affinity

Within each strand, the project team carefully facilitated the co-construction of a space of collective learning for participants. Through practices like co-developing community agreements, focusing on creating brave spaces, holding space for self- and group-reflection, and holding affinity spaces, the project team cultivated a culture that supported critical reflection and upheld spaces of affinity and healing. Professionals of Color recognized the intentional work in fostering a community that uplifted their voices and disrupted power dynamics. Unlike their white work spaces, participants felt that the experience was more meaningful to them due to the fact that the group was composed of people who identified as Black, Indigenous or a Person of Color. This, in particular, fostered a deep sense of community. In focus group interviews, participants also called out the power dynamics in this space that supported their learning and ability to “show up fully and react” as their true selves without having to “walk on eggshells” around their primarily white coworkers or supervisors.

Organizational Leaders echoed a parallel sentiment, finding that the purposeful creation of spaces and times for critical reflection around equity and inclusion in their work appeared to be a key factor in the effectiveness of the professional learning model. The content of the presentations, affinity spaces, coaching with peers, and opportunities that guided participants to reflect on those ideas were considered particularly valuable. Leaders felt that this preparation enabled them to create plans of action to apply those ideas in concrete ways in their own organizations.

Continuing support through technical assistance

Participants in the Organization Strand were provided with technical assistance hours. How organizations used these hours were determined by each organization in consultation with the project team. Participants noted that this was a key element of the professional learning model. Participants found the ability to check in with the facilitators from BEETLES and Justice Outside through discussions and webinars with questions that arose over the period of their participation, as well as the pressure it maintained on programs to be accountable to their plans, to be especially important. Some of the ways organizations used the technical assistance included: co-developing and administering a staff work climate survey to inform decision-making and planning; facilitating workshops for upper management to support shared commitment and buy-in to organizational transformation; reviewing and providing feedback on guiding document such as mission or vision statements, strategic plans, hiring guides, job descriptions; being a thought partner in how to navigate organizational barriers or how to facilitate internal workshops. It is important to note that some participants reflected that in retrospect they wished they had used their technical assistance hours differently, pointing to a need for more clear guidance on how technical assistance could be used in a meaningful way. Continuing technical assistance was one of the most requested ways in which WTEO could support their programs moving forward, by both the Organizational Leaders, and Professionals of Color.

Toolkit of Shared Language and Resources

Most participants explicitly called out the model’s focus on learning, co-creating and practicing research-based shared language around difficult-to-communicate concepts, as one of the key

aspects that equipped them with the ability to engage in meaningful and critical discourse, not just with each other, but also with other staff in their organizations. Over the course of the workshops, in both strands, the project team leveraged a multitude of resources that aimed to present critical frameworks and insights that were relevant to the field of environmental education. For instance, at the onset of the Workshop Series and Institute, the project team facilitated an activity called the History of Oppression in Environmental Education. This activity was designed to engage participants in reflection about how structures of racism and white supremacy have systematically oppressed Black and brown bodies, and how the field of environmental education has upheld those systems. In addition, participants were presented with frameworks like Intersectionality (by Kimberlé Crenshaw) and The “Problem” Women of Color in the Workplace (by Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence) to consider the ways in which systems and practices exclude and marginalize Staff of Color. In addition, participants were provided tools, like non-violent communication, organizational assessments and reflection tools, values-based leadership, and asset-based language to support participants in reflecting on their own practice and their organizational systems.

Two-Year Commitment

The project team and participants equally recognized that the journey to organizational transformation is a long one. Participants noted that by the end of the two years, they felt that they were just getting started. Overall, they really valued that this model acknowledged the time required by having a two-year commitment with a variety of touch-points (e.g., workshops, technical assistance, community of practice meet-ups). Participants observed that the length and distribution of professional learning elements over the course of two years provided sustained long-term contact between program participants and their peers as well as facilitators. This allowed for follow up actions in their organizations and provided an impetus for accountability on Organizational Leaders, which appeared to be critical to the success of the model. As the project team moves forward this will be an interesting point of examination given that the project team has adapted the model to a workshop intensive series that will span over the course of 18 months. This decision was primarily driven by funding constraints, though the project team hopes to integrate some of the lessons learned from the California pilot to position organizations and participants in setting up long-standing structures and systems that will support ongoing transformation.

Impact of Working Towards Equitable Organizations

Organizational Goals and Priorities to Center Equity and Inclusion

Over the course of the two-year pilot, each organization identified and refined goals and action plans towards advancing equity and inclusion. In the first four-day workshop series, participants engaged in a series of activities in which they examined historical and contemporary narratives of oppression, marginalization and exclusion in environmental education. Through the activities, participants were asked to reflect on the ways in which the policies and practices in their

respective organizations were perpetuating similar experiences and subsequently began to identify strategies that might disrupt and shift those policies and practices.

At the onset of the project, organizations specified between two and five goals (with a mean of three goals) to advance equity and inclusion in their respective organizations. Thematic coding of goals revealed seven themes related to four categories, summarized in Table 3. Participants described accomplishments and challenges in working toward meeting these goals in the end-of-pilot survey. In this summary we highlight three overarching themes, described below, to situate the ways in which organizations were enacting change within their organizations.

Table 3. Organizational Goals for Advancing Equity and Inclusion

Theme	Stated Goal	Number of Programs
Centering Equity in Guiding Values and Beliefs	Mission, Vision	4
	Strategic Plan	2
	Decision-Making	2
	Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Committee	1
Engaging in Critical Reflection	Training	4
	Leadership	1
Hiring & Staffing	Hiring	6
	Professional Learning	1

Centering Equity in Guiding Values and Beliefs

Six organizations specified goals that were related to centering equity in their guiding values and beliefs. In this regard, organizations identified a goal that aimed to critically examine and refine internal (strategic planning, policies) and external facing documents (e.g., mission, core value statements) to include an explicit statement and/or goals related to equity. Four organizations indicated a goal of refining their internal guiding documents to include more asset based language and address equity, inclusion and cultural relevance more explicitly. In a similar vein, two organizations stated a goal of establishing an equity, inclusion and diversity committee, which appeared to be in support of strategic planning efforts. Two organizations included a goal of creating a strategic plan that would support the organization in understanding its context and identifying specific and measurable goals to guide the organization moving forward. Two organizations also specified goals related to reviewing decision-making practices and policies to cultivate a more inclusive process.

By the end of the two year project, five of the six organizations had reported achieving these goals. Two of these organizations revised their mission statement and four developed an equity and inclusion plan to support guiding the organization. One organization, that had not initially reported a goal in this category, conveyed that they created a long-term equity and inclusion plan.

Among these organizations, participants reported that they had led a collaborative process which included staff, stakeholders and/or board members. In these processes, participants shared that one of the critical aspects was engaging individuals in conversations to develop shared, clear language and discussed what it meant for their learners and staff. One participant shared the following about the mission statement rewriting process:

We successfully rewrote the Mission & Vision statements and Core Values. This was done collaboratively with all program staff involved. Staff was introduced to the process of writing a mission and vision statement first, then they looked at statements from other organizations to see examples of how to include equity, inclusion, and cultural relevance, and finally rewrote the program's statements (2-3 iterations). We elaborated on phrases of our Mission and Vision statements to define what we meant by our words (what it looked like in practice).

Of organizations who went through a strategic planning process, one organization reported that Justice Outside supported this process, and another organization reported that they planned to get support from Justice Outside as part of their next steps.

Engaging in Critical Reflection and Dialogue

Four organizations specified a goal to lead internal workshops or discussions with staff focused on equity, inclusion, and cultural relevance. Participants described leading conversations where they would talk about implicit bias, microaggressions and develop shared understanding and language related to equity and inclusion. While only four organizations shared an explicit goal to lead these types of conversations, all reported shifts in their organizations related to this category. Through these conversations, organizations shared that they had begun to develop shared language that supported ongoing meaningful dialogue.

In addition, organizations shared that they had similar conversations with leadership, such as board members and upper management. Participants noted that engaging in these conversations demonstrated that equity and inclusion was a priority within the organization. One participant elaborated on this sentiment, saying:

It's helpful to our department's goal of focusing on DEI, that there are several who have some experience and can share the load. We are building shared language, and as I stated above, prioritizing the time for it. It's a little early to say, but it is looking like the larger organization is noticing that our department might be a resource for others on this work.

In addition, two organizations shared that the project had pushed them to pause and listen to their staff. One organization reported that now staff were more “comfortable approaching/calling out leadership when they see inequities across the organization.”

Hiring and Staffing

One of the most prominent goals that nearly all organizations initially specified was related to hiring. Six organizations stated a goal of reviewing their hiring practices, including their recruitment process and job descriptions, through an equity lens. Participants described that they aimed to examine the type of language being used (e.g., deficit vs. asset-based) and the ways in which they can shift practices as a means towards diversifying staff. By the end of the project, all six organizations had reported accomplishments in this area. For example, several shared that they had revised job descriptions and hiring materials, such as interview questions, to center equity and inclusion. One organization noted that through the project, they had become more intentional about revising their recruitment processes to be more inclusive by reaching out in the local community. Observations revealed that in some cases where organizations started with initiatives to diversify their staff, it shed light on the ways in which they were not positioned to foster an equitable and inclusive work environment. For example, part-time positions may not come with benefits like health insurance or compensation wages may not be responsive to the local cost-of-living. In these cases, organizations were pushed to consider the ways they could address such systemic barriers. It will be critical to further explore in interviews how organizations actually tried to mitigate these barriers, if at all.

Three organizations also shared accomplishments related to staffing, specifically how their participation had resulted in shifts in leadership. One organization noted that they increased representation of staff who identified as People of Color and LGBTQ+. Another organization reported they had hired someone to lead equity and inclusion work. Shifts in staffing and leadership were expected to continue for one organization even though they recognized that such shifts were challenging

Another organization indicated an intent to prioritize professional learning among staff to build capacities to support learner experiences and curricula. In this regard, staff would develop skills to design curriculum, or grow pedagogical practices. It is not, however, evident whether these initial goals were a means towards supporting advancement or leadership development. Nonetheless the goal prioritizes the professional learning of staff.

Impact of Model on Individual Perceptions of Equity and Inclusion

Organizational Leaders

A key goal of this project was to examine and shift organizational practices and policies to foster systems change towards equity and inclusion. One of the underlying assumptions here was that systems change begins with the personal. End-of-pilot survey responses indicated that the project pushed participants to reflect on their own power and privilege, and the biases they hold. One participant shared:

*[I realized] how much I have to learn about the lived experiences of others,
and how white-centered my own experiences and views have been.*

Participants also described how the project enabled them to gain more nuanced perspectives of equity, inclusion and cultural relevance. Some of the themes participants noted included:

Understanding the interconnectedness of equity and inclusion

Recognizing the ways in which organizations can perpetuate inequities

The importance of listening and exemplifying the voices of Staff of Color

Following each workshop, participants were asked to rate how much the session and activities influenced their comfort and preparation related to fostering equity and inclusion at their respective organizations. These statements (as previously described in Table 2) fall into three categories:

- (1) *Reflecting on Equity, Inclusion and Diversity*: refers to the extent to which the workshop series supported organizational leaders in gaining more awareness of factors that influence equity, inclusion, and diversity (or lack thereof) in environmental education.
- (2) *Examining Organizational Practices and Policies*: refers to the extent to which the workshop series influenced organizational leaders' awareness of organizational policies and practices that perpetuate the marginalization, exclusion and oppression of Staff of Color.
- (3) *Engaging Staff in Conversations*: refers to the extent to which the workshop series influenced organizational leaders' perceived preparation to facilitate and engage in dialogue with their staff about issues related to equity and inclusion.

Table 4 shows the mean score in each of the categories. Due to the small sample size, we cannot examine statistical change. However, Table 4 clearly illustrates that participants, overall, felt that the workshop positively impacted their dispositions. Open ended responses echo these sentiments, which may contribute to the ways in which organizations are able to enact changes within their organizations. We further explore components of the professional learning model that supported organizational and individual change in an upcoming section of this summary.

Table 4. Participant Comfort and Level of Preparation Ratings

Categories		T1 (N=15)	T2 (N=14)	T3 (N=13)	T4 (N=13)
Reflecting on EID	Mean	4.5778	4.3333	4.4615	4.7436
	SD	0.56997	0.67937	0.70104	0.51197
Examining Organizational Practices and Policies	Mean	4.4333	4.6429	4.6731	4.5385
	SD	0.50415	0.30562	0.42555	0.36581
Engaging Staff in Conversations	Mean	4.4444	4.3571	4.4615	4.3333
	SD	0.39171	0.47975	0.46225	0.40825

Rating: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Somewhat Disagree; 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4=Somewhat Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Professionals of Color

Professionals of Color participated in a week-long Capacity Building Institute that was designed to bolster the development of professional skills to support the advancement of professionals of color in leadership pathways within the organization and the environmental education field, generally. In addition, the Institute aimed to build an intentional community of learning, reflection and self- and community-care. Overall, participants shared that the Institute was a valuable experience, as illustrated in Table 5. Participants felt that the Institute provided them with the space to build a community and reflect on their personal and work experiences. Participants also shared how the Institute helped them to reflect on their own leadership within their organizations, and in the field at large. A number of participants reported that at the time of the survey they were still continuing to process and think about what their next steps might be.

Table 5. Perceived Influence, Mean Ratings

This Institute...	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
...provided me with tools to support my leadership development	20	4	5	4.75	0.444
...provided opportunities to build a community with other environmental education professionals	20	5	5	5.00	0.000
... fostered a professional learning community through which individuals learn from each other's lived and professional experiences	20	5	5	5.00	0.000
...increased my awareness of the historical inequities and marginalization in environmental education	20	3	5	4.75	0.550
... deepened my understanding of the intersectionality of equity, inclusion and cultural relevance	20	3	5	4.70	0.571
... increased my awareness of some of the factors that influence the lived experiences of staff from historically marginalized communities	20	4	5	4.90	0.308
... increased my awareness of the policies and practices within my organization that may reinforce inequitable and marginalizing environments	20	5	5	5.00	0.000
... increased my awareness of how my own practices may reinforce inequitable and marginalizing environments	20	4	5	4.85	0.366

5-point scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither Disagree or Agree, 4=Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Focus group interviews, conducted a year later, revealed that participants recognized the value of the space that WTEO had cultivated. Professionals of Color often called out that within the field there are very few spaces intentionally created for Professionals of Color. For them, it was particularly valuable because they could share experiences with each other and not feel alone, as they often did in the predominant white space of environmental education. Further, because the WTEO Capacity Building Institute was designed to be an affinity space, Professionals of Color did not have to navigate white fragility or the power dynamics that are typically present in the institutes in which they work.

Over the duration of the project, the program team also invited the Professionals of Color to provide input on what additional supports they would like. In response, the program team held two workshops—one on building a resume and one on how to interview with organizations. Participants appreciated these workshops, particularly because they took place during the pandemic when many folks had been laid off or furloughed.

Factors that Influence Organizational Change

This evaluation has largely focused on trying to understand the ways in which participation in this program has influenced priorities and practices within organizations. Here we explore different factors that can enable or serve as barriers to institutional change.

Distributed Leadership

One of the features of the WTEO program model focused on distributing leadership as a means towards encouraging more inclusive decision-making processes. For instance, within each organization, participants were required to have at least one person who had decision-making power such as an executive director or CEO, and one person who oversaw programming (e.g., educator director, senior naturalist). In this way, each organizational team was composed of members who held different positions of power within the organization and held different perspectives. Throughout the workshop series, participants reflected on their own power and privilege, reflected on the concept of leadership, and were encouraged to consider in what ways they were engaging and centering the experiences of Staff of Color in their planning and execution of their goals. End-of-participation interviews and focus groups revealed varied effectiveness of different approaches to enacting distributed leadership (and decision-making)—highlighting the complexity of embodying this practice.

Two organizations reported that over the duration of their participation they had developed systems to support more inclusive and shared decision-making. For instance, one organization shared that for any, and all, decisions (e.g., new project, grant) they bring together anyone who will be directly impacted. Collectively, they discuss the issue and create space for everyone to voice their perspectives. The program leaders reflected that this was a big shift for their organization wherein decisions previously were a “top down” approach. One of the program leaders noted that this shift was particularly challenging for them because they had spent most of their career being exposed to leadership and management training that was hierarchical. Within the second organization, program leaders reflected on how they aimed to foster more transparent and inclusive decision-making. One participant shared:

I was thinking about [how] we are in the midst of considering five key, pretty significant shifts for the organization. And the fact that I think a small group of people who are closest to know ...the facts around that decision are involved with the decision. But they have also created staff listening sessions, and Q and A, and conversations [to] bring more people on board, and that people are participating in [those meetings].

In this example, the program leader describes an intent to make decision-making more transparent. However, one of the key distinctions between these two examples is the stage in which staff are invited to provide input. In the first example, organizational leaders describe a process in which all staff who are directly impacted have access to shared information and have an opportunity to contribute to decision-making. In the second example, it's not clear to what extent staff had an opportunity to directly impact decision-making or whether listening sessions functioned as a way to justify decisions that had already been made. Professionals of Color highlighted in focus group interviews that during the pandemic, for many, organizations held listening sessions but had already made decisions. In these instances, organizations' efforts to be "transparent" reified harmful practices that further marginalized staff and resulted in feelings of mistrust and hurt.

As another example, organizational leaders shared a range in which they were able to engage multiple voices and perspectives in decision-making around what priorities and goals each organization would focus on. While end-of-participation interviews and focus group interviews revealed that some organizations made efforts to create inclusive processes, many of the decisions at the onset were driven by the organizational leaders based on their own experiences and knowledge of the organizations. Professionals of Color overwhelmingly shared that they were not aware of what organizations were doing as part of their participation. One organizational leader reflected that in retrospect, they realized that this lack of communication had resulted in some level of mistrust. It is important to note that one organization specifically reported that they were unclear how to engage Staff of Color in the process:

There was a disconnect between POC and branch leadership regarding the work of the cohort so that staff of color arrived at the February session without having been brought into the goal setting and accountability process.

On the other hand, there were a few program leaders who highlighted examples of how they attempted to engage Professionals of Color. Two program leaders reported that to revise their mission and vision statements, they held meetings during already scheduled staff meetings. One program leader shared that it was important to them to engage all staff in this process—including facilities, kitchen, administrative and instructional staff. Further, this program leader reflected that it was imperative that they step back and empower others, so that over time they asked staff members to rotate in as facilitators, and also provided opportunities for multiple ways of engaging in the process (e.g., individual reflection, small group discussions). By engaging all staff, the leader came to recognize and value the expertise and knowledge of all staff members, and ultimately co-developed a mission and value statement that everyone was invested in.

We highlight these examples to demonstrate the complexity of distributed decision-making, and the difficulty of providing generative opportunities for organizations to reflect on the varying ways they engage staff. How organizations approach decision-making has the potential to reinforce hierarchical distributions of power and paternalism, and can reify the exclusion and marginalization of Professionals of Color. In addition, within the WTEO project, the call for

distributed leadership creates purposeful ways to disrupt structures of power and decision-making that have historically centered and amplified the perspectives of white leadership. As WTEO continues to work with organizations, it is critical to support organizations in continuous reflection in how, in what ways, and at what times they are authentically engaging the voices, expertise and perspectives of staff, specifically Professionals of Color. Within the next phase of the project, the WTEO program team has already adjusted to more explicitly support organizations in this way by requiring distributed leadership teams that encompass individuals who hold different roles, responsibilities and positions of power throughout the organization. Within this strategy, there is the potential for participants to see, and experience, how to enact distributed leadership models, and receive coaching along the way.

Organizational Structures

Participating organizations represented a wide range of organizational structures. For instance, two organizations were affiliated with a local education agency (i.e., county office of education); one was a national, multi-site organization; one organization was affiliated with a large non-profit science center; one organization was a multi-site organization, with sites located within a couple hours drive of each other; and lastly one site was a small organization. The structure of each organization brought a unique level of complexity and shaped the extent to which organizations felt they were able to enact systems change. Here we explore some of these experiences.

Small non-profit. One of the participating organizations was small, non-profit, community-based, and primarily run by a single program director. Over the duration of the project, the organization had several co-participants, wherein the program director would bring in a community partner to serve as a thought partner. One of the challenges that the leader shared was that because of the small staff size there were limitations in their capacity to enact systems change, due to the fact that almost all of their efforts were focused on developing partnerships, and designing and implementing programs for youth. In addition, in observations, it seemed that when the organizational leader brought in new thought partners, it disrupted the extent to which there was a shared understanding around goals and priorities. This has the potential to impact the extent to which organizations can enact sustainable change. One of the challenges from a program design perspective, is that the project was not well positioned to support organizations like this. In addition, it raised a question as to what indicators of “success” should look like. While the organization may not have been able to enact a wide breadth of changes within the organization, the program leader did provide several reflections of how their participation greatly influenced the ways in which they thought about equity and inclusion. For instance, at the onset of the program, the organizational leader was often focused on the learner experience; over time they developed a heightened awareness of the importance of reflecting on the work environment.

Local educational institutions. Two of the participating organizations were affiliated with a county office of education. In their end-of-participation interviews, both organizational leaders shared that while they were able to enact changes within their sites, the extent to which they were able to make broader systems-level changes was challenging. One of the organizations noted that at the onset of their participation, they were in a department that did not pay much attention to

what they were doing. Eventually they were moved into the STEM department, which impacted how much control they had to make organizational changes. For instance, when they were working on their mission and vision statements, they realized they would not be able to get approval to formally change their statements, so ultimately adapted their revised statements in internal documents only. This has significant implications for the extent to which these guiding documents hold value and can impact other systems. The program leaders shared a concern that the “vision and mission is going to get lost.” In this way, the bureaucracy of the county office of education created a barrier to the organization being able to enact sustainable change.

In addition, both organizations reported that, with regards to increasing equity, they focused a lot of effort on their hiring processes. One of the organizations shared that they are one of the lowest paying sites in the area, and had no control over adjusting wages for staff. In their site, because they were an intern program, staff were classified as part-time, were paid minimum wage and did not have benefits. This forced the organizational leader to be creative in how they recruited and supported staff. In one interview, the organizational leader reflected on how they had to find local resources to support staff in having access to food stamps, health care and mental health services. Another organization shared that they put in effort to change their job descriptions for their naturalist positions, which the county office of education permitted. The organizational leader wanted to add additional language in recruitment tools, but the county office resisted, noting they already had language that was similar in effect. The organizational leader shared frustration that this resistance would impact how much they could influence change throughout the entire county office of education.

In both of these examples, the organizations’ overarching agency created structural barriers that impacted how effective they felt in implementing sustainable, meaningful change. One of the organizational leaders reflected that if they had leveraged the relationship with the superintendent they may have been able to enact more change. The other leader similarly concluded that if they had had someone who was affiliated with the county office of education earlier on, they may have been able to enact more change. Both of these organizations point to the importance of having buy-in from overarching organizations. This, in part, could be addressed by having distributed leadership teams, as described above. In addition, it would be useful to include the identification of potential barriers (or risks) related to the structure of the organizations as part of the workshops, and thus identify strategies early on to mitigate those barriers.

Multi-site organizations. Two of the participating organizations were multi-site organizations—one at a national level and the other at a regional level. Within both of these organizations, each team included the executive director, at the request of the WTEO project team. In this way, the team collectively had access to the person in a position of power, subsequently yielding decision-making power to the collective. For the national organization, they had an additional team member, which greatly supported being able to imagine what kinds of systems would support the organization in making an institutional commitment. While this is important for all organizations, it can be particularly critical for larger organizations that have more complex leadership structures.

In addition, one of the challenges that can arise from being a multi-site organization is the specificity of each site's needs and contexts, that can impact the ways in which organizations integrate systems change. In the end-of-participation interview, one of the organizational leaders acknowledged that in this process, it's important to recognize that there is not a universal approach, and while organizations may have overarching guiding values and practices, how they are implemented at each site might look slightly different.

Building Trust and Community

One of the common themes that emerged in interviews was how imperative it is to build trust and community throughout this process. This can be very complicated with organizations when we consider the intersections of power. Throughout the WTEO workshop series, organizational leaders were consistently pushed to reflect on their own power and privilege—connected both to their roles within organizations and their social identities. In end-of-year interviews, many of the leaders shared that this reflection was imperative in order for them to identify ways to disrupt power dynamics in their organizations. One organization reported that at the onset of the process, they spent a series of staff meetings reflecting on their own experiences and perspectives related to equity and inclusion. A couple organizational leaders also shared that they asked staff to rotate meeting facilitation, so that they would not always be taking up space. In this way, at least according to the organizational leaders, they felt these strategies helped them in building trust and community that ultimately supported them in cultivating more inclusive processes.

Clarity of Goals

While not a prominent challenge identified across organizations, one organization shared that it was challenging for them to identify goals and name what types of support the project could provide early on. For this organization, they felt that much of the early work was learning where the organization was by gathering a pulse on staff experiences and how the organization had been (or not) tending to issues of equity and inclusion. By the end of the project, one participant from this organization shared that they weren't sure they had fully utilized the resources in a way that pushed the organization, and reflected that having more coaching or guidance on identifying goals early on in that project would have been helpful.

Impact of COVID-19

During the summer of 2020, four organizations noted challenges related to navigating moments of crises. Among these organizations, three specifically named COVID-19 as a challenge. In this regard, organizations shared that they had experienced their programs shutting down and therefore their plans had been halted. One organization, however, shared that they had started to identify strategies which included working with Justice Outside to continue centering equity and inclusion in their planning towards reopening. While not all organizations named COVID-19 as a challenge at the time, we anecdotally discerned that all organizations were facing dire circumstances coupled with financial hardships and layoffs.

Moreover, due to COVID-19, data collection was halted in the summer of 2020, and planned interviews with the Professionals of Color were not conducted. Therefore, focus groups were subsequently conducted during the fall of 2020, in order to amplify the voices of the Professionals of Color and their experiences. These conversations, along with end-of-project interviews with a subset of Organizational Leaders in the Spring of 2021, gave us a better understanding of the points of tension that were wrought or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year.

As estimated, the impact of the pandemic and the resulting actions taken by organizations was severe on the field of environmental education, and particularly so on the Professionals of Color in this project. At the time, out of the 11 Professionals of Color that participated in the focus groups, nine either no longer worked with the organization they were affiliated with at the start of the program, or had been temporarily furloughed. Some of these participants had gone on to find work with other organizations, while others were still looking for work.

The focus groups aimed to explore participants' perspectives on how their organizations had been working towards centering equity. It became evident that the organization's responses in the pandemic was a critical point of tension in participants' experiences and reflections. That is, participants shared remarkably adverse experiences and outlooks towards their (current or former) organizations' approaches towards centering equity.

Most of the participants shared that they felt that their organizations' commitment to equity was performative. Participants felt that while many organizations said they valued equity-oriented work, their actions during the pandemic conveyed otherwise. For instance, one participant described how they had been roped into facilitating equity-oriented training at their organization with little notice and without being compensated for the added responsibilities. Professionals of Color also felt that their organizations unfairly used funding as an excuse for not prioritizing work centering equity and inclusion, as well as other programming decisions. That is, because many organizations were losing funding or revenue through the pandemic, equity and inclusion work was set aside, implying that this work was expendable. For some participants, they felt that the (big) organizations they were affiliated with made enough profit in previous years to offset some of the losses they incurred during the pandemic. Other participants felt that they were aware that their organization had reserve funds, but there was no transparency around what happened to those funds. Dissatisfaction with their organizations' transparency and communication regarding key decisions was a common sentiment, particularly with regards to decisions made about staffing during the course of the pandemic. Another participant elaborated on their discontent with their former organization:

Obviously, we are on two different sides of that sword (when) that cutoff came...I think for some of us... I'll speak for myself... (it was) some of the biggest eye-openers... It goes back to the white supremacy thing, right? We're a family when it benefits you. And when it doesn't benefit you, we're no longer family (and) being cut on that side.

Many resonated with the feeling that, ultimately, the organizations were not listening to them. One provided the following sentiment, which appeared to be shared by others in the group:

They're just kind of waiting for [Justice] Outside to come and tell them what to do. But we've been telling them what to do. They're just not listening. They're just kind of following this trend of, we're saying we're doing it because everyone is doing it...

These findings in particular highlight the ways in which moments of crisis can greatly influence an organization's approach to centering equity. Further, it highlights the harm and trauma organizations can have when they do not center racial equity, inclusion and transparency in decision-making. We recognize this is a fine line to walk—what and when to share information, how to engage those directly impacted—and yet in not doing so, organizations continue to uphold practices of white supremacy (e.g. power hoarding, perfectionism).

On the other end of the spectrum, end-of-project interviews with Organizational Leaders unearthed key challenges and points of failure that were exacerbated by the pandemic. One key point of tension, across most organizations, was turnover. Most organizations saw a change in leadership, as well as turnover in participants over the course of the year – more rapidly than in previous years. Consequently, a resulting lack of ownership over continuing to move this work forward, or lack of systematized processes and information about where things were left off by those previously involved in said work, allowed equity-oriented work to fall by the wayside. Transitions in staffing are inevitable within many organizations, and yet when working towards enacting systems change, such transitions can impact the capacity of organizations to achieve their goals. Consequently, it is important from a project design standpoint to consider how it supports participants and organizations to establish systems that can weather such transitions, if and when they do take place.

Relatedly, this brings up another point of tension – that of concentrated or hierarchical leadership. Organizations that did not, or were unable, to systematize processes of shared ownership over continuing this work, outside of the leader(s) that participated in this project, saw big setbacks in their work towards centering equity in their workplace. Organizations where distributed leadership was enacted saw relatively greater success in keeping the momentum going for centering racial equity in their organizations even during the pandemic. In these institutions multiple members of staff, occupying varying positions in the organization, saw themselves as leaders and owners of this work. As a result, there was shared buy-in to keep discourse around equity alive through intentional time set aside for the periodic and systematic tackling of this work. The project recognizes the significance of models of leadership that contribute to the advancement and continuance of engaging organizations in such work, and consequently plans to involve participants in vertical leadership teams as a core component of the upcoming AISL Working Towards Racial Equity model that builds from this pilot.

Conclusion and Implications for Program Design

Overall, evaluation findings suggest that the WTEO has been effective in supporting participating organizations in advancing equity and inclusion. Findings also point to the complexity of this work, and the ways in which the WTEO project holistically aims to support organizations in critical reflection and planning as a means towards enacting systems change. Through the evaluation, we saw that organizations had varying degrees of perceived success related to identified goals. Factors like organizational structure, distributed leadership, clarity of goals, and an ability to cultivate trust and community are some of the factors that influenced and shaped how organizations are able to move forward. With that said, findings also highlight that this work is a long journey that requires substantial investment of resources and a commitment from the organization and individuals.

Evaluation findings also highlighted the negative ways in which Professionals of Color were disproportionately impacted during the pandemic. Through the sharing of their experiences, we call on organizations to think carefully and critically about the varying ways their decisions—while possibly well-intentioned—may have caused harm to their Staff of Color. In addition, we hope that these findings inspire organizations to identify ways to minimize and repair harm in the future.

Lastly, the reflections of Organizational Leaders and Professionals of Color participants have revealed some key implications for the improvement of the design for future iterations of the program. Note that these recommendations build on recommendations that were included in the interim summative report.

Technical Assistance

The access to Technical Assistance through the course of the program was touted as being particularly valuable to participants, especially Organizational Leaders. Maintaining and increasing this support, including the continued coaching and access to the facilitators between in-person sessions, and potentially including participants from the pilot to act as additional support in the form of advisors to new cohorts were offered as some suggestions to enhance the program in the future. One Leader emphasized the importance of using Technical Assistance in intentional and strategic ways, saying the following:

Having the Technical Assistance at first seemed confusing and challenging, and we were trying to use it to offset budgeted items like paying for DEI training. I'm glad the facilitation team stuck to their guns and helped us wait until the right time to use this as it was transformative. Given the newness of Technical Assistance to our organization, I might suggest telling participants to hold off even thinking about how to use it until they've got a few of these sessions under their belt so it can be used for something strategic.

Accountability teams

Future iterations of the program could prioritize the creation of “accountability teams,” that emphasize the importance of a cycle of feedback and communication throughout the length of

the program, and not just during in-person sessions. Accountability teams would thus keep the impetus on program staff and leaders to keep momentum going in continuing their work towards tangible goals in their pursuit of equity, inclusion and diversity in their programs. One Organization Leader offered the following rationale for implementing such an element to the program:

I would give more home (org) work and add greater accountability between in-person sessions. This would encourage participating organizations to accomplish more. Since the commitment to change is already there, asking for deeper work should be viewed as desirable. This accountability could be more conference calls, zoom meetings, submitting written progress reports, etc.

Engagement with the broader community

While most participants recognized the importance of this work within their own field and among their own peers, there was an acknowledgment that environmental education organizations do not exist and operate in isolation. The broader community is both affected by and a contributor to what happens in the sphere of equity and inclusion work within the field of environmental education and their workplaces. The program can consider the deliberate interweaving of the broader community into their work, by networking with and sharing their learning with not just the field of environmental education, but also with interconnected communities. Some examples mentioned by participants included the building of equity and inclusion specific networks across institutions of formal and informal education (including schools and the Department of Education), as well as law enforcement agencies for discourse on issues like racial profiling.

Resources – “Real World” Examples

Many participants echoed the importance of having empirical examples of work to contextualize their more abstract learning. The incorporation of more real world exemplars and case studies, where participants can grasp tangible challenges in similar organizations, and think through the strategies which were employed in those contexts, would be beneficial. Real world exemplars are one avenue to provide more actionable guidance to programs needing such support. This could also include the pilot cohort as mentors or guest speakers to provide assistance to newer cohorts.

Targeted recruitment and grouping

One area in which the program could consider making changes is in recruiting and pairing organizations of similar sizes together. Some participants raised the issue that being grouped with organizations of varying sizes proved to be somewhat of a barrier in effectively communicating challenges and brainstorming ideas and strategies to support each other. Participants felt unfamiliar with the contexts of each other's organizations in part because they felt that smaller organizations faced some very different challenges than did bigger organizations. Thus, future iterations of the program should provide opportunities for more productive peer support by grouping organizations of similar sizes together, and/or recruiting organizations with size as a determining factor.

Amplifying the Voices of People of Color

As the program continues to refine its model, it is essential that the voices of people of color are sought, heard and amplified throughout the experience. The voices, perspectives and ideas of Staff of Color must be solicited and engaged with on a recurring basis, and especially at critical moments and in critical spaces. Some suggestions to improve upon this aspect for the next cohort included the idea of bringing Staff of Color into sessions with leadership early, as well as having the program reflect that diversity within their facilitators.

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