



THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S

Equity & Justice Journey

A Snapshot from 2016 — 2022

Table of Contents



THANK YOU!

There are more people than can be named here who have contributed to the National Wildlife Federation's equity and justice journey. To each person who has been committed to this work, thank you. You have made the Federation a better place to work and more effective at meeting its mission.

Many individuals have given their time, knowledge, and skills to this resource. Deep gratitude to those who...

Shared their knowledge and contributed to this content:

Chanté Coleman, Anna Brunner, Elizabeth Lillard, Kasandra Richardson, Rachel Flores, Nicole Litwiller, Alyssa Oshiro, Alya Garrison-Ahmed, Andrea Auguiste, Bill Houston, Collin O'Mara, Heather Davis Miller, Kaila Drayton, Les Welsh, Keith Ward, Marisa Sandoval, Samantha Lockhart, Rebeca Villegas, Juliet Slutzker, Tiffany Jones, Manja Holland, Nizhooni St Paul, Lisa Moore, Zach Cockrum, Garrit Voggeser, Breanna Gonzalez, Thomas Cluderay, Ben Kota, Robin Martin, and Jacqueline Colman.

Took all of these words and designed a beautiful, cohesive product: Marissa Specioso, Joan Biddle, and Michelle Collins.

Helped get this report out into the world: Meshal DeSantis, Mike Saccone, Kasandra Richardson, Anna Brunner, and Alyssa Oshiro.

Letter from the President

Following the North Star toward Equity & Justice

The National Wildlife Federation is committed to becoming an anti-racist organization. These words, which I have said and written many times over the past several years, are a commitment to you all and the people we serve. They also are a North Star for us as we continue on this essential journey together.

Our organization has roots in the admittedly racist and white-supremacist vision of the early conservation movement. They saw landscapes and wildlife as apart from people, including and especially Indigenous communities. Our movement also has pursued its goals at the expense of Black, Latinx, and other frontline communities. The story of our founder, Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling, is emblematic of where we’ve come from and the struggles we continue to face today: Darling was a leading advocate for wildlife and used his platform to condemn the racist violence of the KKK and he also harmed communities by drawing political cartoons that often included racist caricatures of Native Americans, Japanese people, and other oppressed peoples.

As a leader in the conservation movement, the National Wildlife Federation needs to learn from our history and do better. In order to save wildlife and ourselves, we need to ensure that all people have access to clean air and water, safe communities, easy and equitable access to nature, and protection from the ravages of climate change.

Our exemplary team has documented our equity and justice journey in the following report, which complements the storytelling in the “Seeds of Culture Change” podcast. We left the rose-colored glasses at home to write this history, embracing the imperfection of a work in progress. You’ll find an honest account of past failures, as well as commitments we’ve made and systems we’ve put in place to facilitate more inclusive and equitable decision-making and investment. We hope this resource inspires you to embark on an equity and justice evolution within your own sphere of influence and guides you in your choices on how to step up and when to step back.

I’m honored to co-create the latest chapter in our shared history and connect my love of nature with my dreams of a more just and equitable society for all.

Sincerely,



Collin O'Mara | *President and CEO*



Message from the Senior Vice President of Equity & Justice

Hello Fellow Justice Activists & Friends

I would like to welcome you to the National Wildlife Federation's Equity and Justice storytelling project. Thank you for joining us on this journey as we tell our story of where we are going and where we have been as we practice becoming an equitable and anti-racist organization. Before I begin, I want to thank every person who has contributed to our equity work over the years and every person who has made this report a reality—you know who you are, thank you for committing to this journey and helping in countless ways.

Equity is like climbing a mountain. When we look down, we see that we have come so far, and when we look up, we see that we still have a long way to go. Depending on which frame of mind you are in, the work can either feel daunting or empowering. My hope is that you will read with an open mind and an open heart, holding the confidence that we have made progress along with the commitment that we each have more work to do together.

The National Wildlife Federation is an 86-year-old organization traditionally known for its work on wildlife and focus on strict conservation issues. However, we have come to understand that in order for wildlife and people to thrive in a rapidly changing world, we must become an organization that actively challenges systemic racism and oppression because these issues are deeply interconnected. We knew when we began this journey that it would fundamentally change who we are, and that is happening.

As you dive into this report, you will read some key themes:

1

Uplifting a variety of stories - we do this because we should all see ourselves in this work. We know we are most successful when this work is co-owned and power is shared. Also, storytelling is a powerful way to share information.

2

Focusing on lessons learned. We are not perfect, in fact, we embrace imperfection and learn from our failures. We talk about what we learned in the spirit of growth and doing better for ourselves and the people around us.

3

Importance of repairing relationships. Again, we all make mistakes and we can't do this work alone, we must be in relationship with one another to persevere.

4

The difficulty of this work. It's difficult because of the harm and continued unequal burden on people of color and other people with marginalized identities. It's not easy because we are doing counter-cultural and counter-structural work in a system where the status quo is upheld and rewarded.

To be successful in building collective liberation, we each have an important role to play. I ask that you sit with your feelings after reading this report; embrace discomfort with curiosity for what comes up; and understand that the road ahead will be hard and meaningful. We urge you to find compassion and grace for your colleagues and other humans, for this work, and make a commitment to keep climbing. We hope you will take this opportunity to commit to the personal work that it takes for each of us to shape the culture, identify and address injustices, and be strong allies at the National Wildlife Federation and in the world.

Sincerely,



Chanté Coleman | *Senior Vice President of Equity and Justice*



Introduction

The creation of this resource began with the desire to tell the story of the National Wildlife Federation’s equity and justice journey.

This resulting document includes four main sections: a timeline, lessons learned, the ongoing journey, and challenges and areas of growth. The timeline provides an overview of the arc of this journey. Readers will notice themes and patterns that have moved the work forward over time. Following the timeline, lessons that have been learned from the journey provide a framing beyond “success and failure” for the reader’s learning and understanding. The ‘Ongoing Journey’ section documents a summary of milestones and ongoing work at the federation, along with staff stories that illuminate the impacts of these shifts. Lastly, considering challenges and areas of growth provides context for some of the current limitations of doing equity and justice work within the context of the National Wildlife Federation. It also identifies current gaps that will be important to consider as the work moves forward.



“Great storytelling is what captures people’s attention and drives them to action... In my mind, equitable storytelling is a must, because we need to cast the net wide to understand whose stories are really important and how those stories connect to others in a way that we may not have known.”

Andrea Auguiste, Director of Philanthropy & Social Innovation

(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 8)



Episode 8
Equitable Storytelling
Seeds of Culture Change

About the Author

My name is Nicole Litwiller and I am the National Wildlife Federation’s Coordinator of Equity and Justice Strategy. I began at this organization in September of 2021 as a Fellow, so I bring a fairly new perspective to the story of National Wildlife Federation’s equity work. This can be both a strength and somewhat limiting, as my experience with this journey comes primarily through others’ stories.



As a white, middle class, graduate-level educated woman, I hold a lot of privilege with my identities. I seek to use my privilege in ways that support the dismantling of systems of oppression. I recognize that I have a responsibility to unlearn the ways in which white supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal, ableist, and other oppressive cultures show up within myself. I am drawn to equity and justice work because I believe we all—and I include our other-than-human relatives in that ‘all’—deserve to thrive.

I hope that this resource allows people who have historically been excluded from conservation spaces to feel seen, validated, and valued. I hope that this can be a resource for all National Wildlife Federation staff, affiliates, and other constituents to develop a shared understanding about where we’ve been, how far we’ve come, and where we are going. I hope that change agents from other organizations who may be reading this will feel inspired and supported in their work to create more equitable cultures and systems.

About the Process

1

Story Gathering

Nicole first began by using a snowballing method of reaching out to people across the organization (primarily current staff) to hear their stories about the National Wildlife Federation's equity and justice journey. The questions Nicole asked were:

How did you first come to work at the National Wildlife Federation?

How would you describe your role(s) in the equity and justice change processes?

Where does NWF still have room to grow? (What do you hope to see it become?)

What are some of the changes (in the past or ongoing) that have taken place at NWF in the effort to become more equitable?

What lessons or advice would you like to pass along to other organizations that may be going about a similar process?

2

Developing Themes

Clear patterns began to emerge as Nicole listened to people's stories and sorted through old documentation. She used those themes as a guide for structuring this report.

3

Writing, Re-writing, and Writing some More

After gathering enough information (it was difficult to know where to stop, as the stories are never-ending), Nicole began drafting a report. From September 2021 to Spring 2023, this report has shifted formats until settling on the snapshot in time that is shared here, focused on the years 2016 through 2022.

4

Collaboration and Feedback

Many folks provided thoughts, ideas, and support for this resource. Nicole retrieved feedback from various stakeholders, including Equity and Justice team members, former members of the internal Equity and Justice Steering Committee, representatives from the Environmental Justice team and Tribal Partnerships team, interviewees from the Seeds of Culture Change podcast, and others. The document was reviewed by the Federation's legal team before finalizing.

5

Design

Following multiple rounds of feedback retrieval and edits, the creative team turned the words into a beautifully designed and usable resource.

Defining this Resource

This resource is:

- A snapshot in time.
- A gathering place for stories and insights that have influenced our journey.
- Centered on the experiences and memories of current staff of the National Wildlife Federation.
- An opportunity for ongoing accountability.

This resource is not:

- Covering every detail of the National Wildlife Federation's journey.
- A final, definitive, and perfect narrative of this journey.
- Including input from every person involved in every aspect of the equity change work.
- Framing the National Wildlife Federation through rose-colored glasses.

Limitations:

- The lead on this document is a white woman who holds significant privilege within her identities. This inevitably causes areas of oversight, which can be problematic. The Equity and Justice team (the department behind this project) hopes that by bringing many voices into this resource via interviews and feedback that this limitation can be addressed.
- Interviewees were limited to staff currently employed at the Federation. Therefore, there will be some gaps in the story without the knowledge of folks who have departed from the National Wildlife Federation.
- The primary focus of this document is on the National Wildlife Federation's internal equity and justice work. Much of the programmatic and external work is not highlighted in this resource, even though it is integral to the Federation effectively living into its equity and justice values. Some of the other teams contributing to this externally-facing work include: Environmental Justice; Tribal Partnerships; Education and Engagement; Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO); various affiliates; and many more. This report was led by the Equity and Justice team, so is framed through our lens and familiarity with this work. We did our best to acknowledge the contributions of other groups, and recognize that there are gaps. We are grateful for all the ways that folks across the Federation network have contributed to making the Federation more equitable and just.
- An additional note where this report quotes individual staff: Lived experiences are a form of truth and many stories exist. Therefore, individual views expressed in this report are those of the individual people and do not necessarily reflect those of NWF, or of other organizations and affiliates.

Supplemental Resource

Want to learn even more? Check out the [*Seeds of Culture Change*](#) podcast! It is another way of engaging with these stories in a different format. Join hosts Kaila Drayton, Vice President of Operations, and Nicole Litwiller as they interview staff from across the Federation to hear their vulnerable, funny, and insightful reflections about this equity and justice journey.



In gathering these stories and pulling together this document, a few key themes have emerged:

Conversations look different now than they did five years ago. The baseline knowledge that staff have acquired about equity and justice issues has significantly increased, which allows for more honest, creative, and counter-cultural conversations.

This work at the Federation focuses on making change happen at multiple levels, such as individual, cultural, and structural.

There are moments where this progress has stalled or moved backwards. Being attentive to this ebb and flow of progress can help any organization or individual remain perceptive and committed to equity and justice work.

Who should engage with this resource?

This resource is for anyone who wants to learn more about the National Wildlife Federation's equity and justice journey, whether they are internal staff at the federation, a person leading equity work in another organization, or simply someone who is curious about what this journey can look like. This snapshot in time will provide many insights into the Federation's work thus far that can be meaningful for personal, organizational, and community learning.

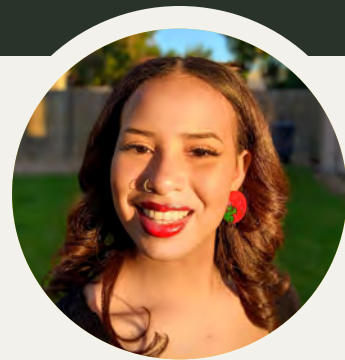
Timeline

Where We've Been

The National Wildlife Federation is an 86-year-old organization that was formed out of the conservation movement. We have a complicated history with the presence of racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression in both the movement and the Federation. We still sometimes struggle with the perception that focusing on social justice issues are partisan and mission drift, but we have come a long way in understanding the deep interconnectedness of people and wildlife. The following timeline outlines some of the major steps in our journey towards becoming a more equitable and just organization.

“The conservation movement, I think, has definitely shifted. And I think that there are more Black and Indigenous people that are included in the conservation movement now. But I would say that there’s still a whole lot of growing that needs to happen.”

Nizhoooni St Paul, Tribal Partnerships Program Coordinator
(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 2)



Episode 2
The Movement We Came From
Seeds of Culture Change

1936

THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION IS FOUNDED

For more information about the early years of the federation, check out *Guardian of the Wild: The Story of the National Wildlife Federation, 1936 - 1987*.

1980-2015

LATE 1980'S

Tribal partnerships work begins.

1997

NWF signs a memorandum of understanding with the Intertribal Buffalo Council to partner on buffalo conservation, the first agreement of its kind between a national non-governmental organization and a tribal organization.

2012

First of three grants from Quixote Foundation, which marks the first funding dedicated to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice at NWF. A nationwide team of staff volunteers is assembled by Dan Chu (Vice President of Affiliate Relations) and Les Welsh (Director of Conservation Partnerships) to begin this work.

1990

Activists of color who are part of the Southwest Organizing Project send a letter asking big green organizations to take environmental justice seriously. NWF never responds.

EARLY 2000'S

Tribal partnerships work is formalized within NWF structure.

2001

Environmental justice efforts begin at NWF with the Earth Tomorrow Program, an environmental education and leadership development program for high school students.

2014

Release of first Green 2.0 Report calls out big green organizations as lacking racial and gender diversity, specifically in connection to positional power.

2015

Environmental Justice efforts expand with Urban Initiatives and Environmental Justice Program.

2016

The NWF Board creates the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Committee as a standing (permanent) committee codified in NWF's bylaws.

NWF Executive Team, along with support from staff member Les Welsh, begin prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice efforts.

The Raben Group, a Washington, D.C.-based public affairs firm, is engaged to help advance NWF's diversity, equity, and inclusion work and to develop a mission-oriented business case for why it is important that NWF prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion. The financial framing was requested by Federation leadership.

Raben Group holds unconscious bias workshop at an NWF Affiliate Chief Executives Meeting.

2017



For the first time at the Annual Meeting, NWF invites formal welcome, participation, and land acknowledgment from local Indigenous community, Yakama Nation.

Raben Group holds unconscious bias workshops centered on gender and race at the Annual Meeting for affiliates and staff.

Creation of first staff Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Steering Committee with an application process to allow for representation across the organization. Formalization of this group helps to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are meaningfully and practically integrated into NWF's organizational work and mission.

Business Case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is finalized.

Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO, formed in 2013 as an independent organization) becomes a fiscally sponsored project of NWF.



NWF Affiliates pass resolution that supports growing diversity, equity and inclusion in conservation.

[**View Resolution**](#)

2018

NWF establishes a process for recognizing employee resource groups, which help build community among staff. This includes creating space that centers staff of marginalized identities. Process is led by the NWF staff Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Steering Committee in partnership with Human Resources and Office of General Counsel.

Subcommittees are established within the NWF staff's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Steering Committee. These include: Engagement, Membership Selection, Employee Resource Groups, Affiliate Engagement, Statement, Communications, and Visioning.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Engagement Subcommittee begins looking at staff survey data with a demographic frame to identify statistically significant differences by gender and race.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Steering Committee leads the creation and sharing of NWF's first organizational diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice statement.



NWF publicly acknowledges LGBTQ+ Pride Month at the Annual Meeting for the first time.

First equity and justice theories of change are developed, focused on staff competencies, philanthropic efforts, and hiring strategies.

2019

Chanté Coleman hired as Director of Equity and Inclusion, which later changes to Equity and Justice. Marks the beginning of the Equity and Justice Team's formation.

All-staff training on group identity and unconscious bias led by Chanté Coleman and Allen Cooper (Director of Learning).

NWF Affiliate Equity and Justice Working Group formed as an ongoing space for affiliate leaders, board members, and staff to collaborate and share resources around equity and justice priorities.

Organizational leadership competencies developed and inspired by the work of Demos. These competencies are: self-awareness and learning, authentic relationships and community partnerships, open and authentic communication, supervision and power-sharing, human-centered innovation, and equity analysis and action.

Skeo Solutions and Metropolitan Group, social and environmental justice focused consultants, are engaged to conduct a baseline evaluation of how NWF is advancing environmental justice and provide recommendations about how to advance this work.

The NWF staff's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Steering Committee adjusts its name to be called the Equity and Justice Steering Committee to align with the Director of Equity and Justice. Concurrently, a discussion is had about how acronyms are confusing and an accessibility barrier. The committee agrees that diversity and inclusion are prerequisites, while equity and justice are the real (and more difficult) goals.

Drafting begins for an organization-wide equitable hiring toolkit.

Select NWF leaders participate in the Environment and Equity Leadership Cohort (E2LC), a program that aims to support environmental organizations in integrating equity and justice values into their contexts using a cohort model of shared learning and support across organizations. Participating organizations included American Rivers, Conservation Colorado, Conservation Lands Foundation, Earthjustice, League of Conservation Voters, National Audubon Society, Open Space Institute, Trust for Public Land, Vote Solar, and The Wilderness Society.

2020

Equity and Justice Steering Committee subcommittees shift to include Membership, Employee Resource Groups, Affiliate Initiatives, Communications, Learning and Engagement, Hiring, Development, and Integration.

NWF signs on to the Stop Hate for Profit campaign, in which companies pause their ad spending on Facebook and Instagram in July 2020 due to Facebook's inaction to prevent hate speech.

Equity and Justice Steering Committee disbands due to racial harm in the group and a sense that the intent of the space had been met. Minimal work by members of the group has happened to repair the harm. Equity work transitions into a smaller staff group called Momentum.

Chanté Coleman is promoted to Vice President of Equity and Justice.

Partners for Collaborative Change, a consulting agency focused on equitable organizational change, is engaged for strategic guidance.

Roll out of quarterly Equity Learning Lesson Plans, which cover the racist roots of the environmental movement, define the terms 'diversity,' 'equity,' 'inclusion,' and 'justice,' and co-create the organization's community conversation agreements.

Community of Care Staff Committee forms as a result of the turbulent 2020 elections. Committee members recommend internal policy changes and holistic approaches to employee well-being.

NWF engages Inclusive Community Consulting, an equity and inclusion collaborative, to begin Tribal and Indigenous Partnerships Enhancement Strategy (TIPES) report.

Police brutality and racially motivated violence against Black people contribute to a surge in the Black Lives Matter movement, which has major impacts on organizational dynamics, including catalyzing and activating further interest in equity and justice work at NWF.

First Equity and Justice Strategic Plan is developed and publicly released.

Launch of Racial Equity Transformation Team (RETT), which serves as an accountability measure and thought partner for the Executive Team to ensure racial equity is a priority.



NWF releases a statement on the murder of Ahmaud Arbery. While imperfect, it becomes a way for those working towards anti-racism within NWF to hold the organization accountable. [View Statement](#)

Formalization of the Environmental Justice Team with the development of the Environmental Justice, Climate, and Community Revitalization Program, which includes a merger with the Urban Initiatives and Environmental Justice Program.

The Black Employee Resource Group develops a list of recommendations for changes at NWF and shares it with the Executive Team. This list has significantly guided NWF's equity work.

NWF further prioritizes employee wellbeing drawing on recommendations from the Black Employee Resource Group and other NWF stakeholders in the context of their experiences with major events in 2020, including police violence against Black people and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021

Collin O'Mara, President and CEO, disbands the Executive Team, and the Interim Steering Committee (created by the RETT) takes its place to become more representative and expand the team's equity competencies.

Equity and Justice Strategic Plan transitions into a roadmap to guide the work.

Momentum team dissolves, and the internal equity strategy and work is held and driven by the Equity and Justice Team.

Environmental Justice Team (in partnership with Skeo Solutions and Metropolitan Group) leads Federation-wide training to deepen NWF's environmental justice understanding and priorities.

Formation of Black Employee Resource Group Communications Recommendations Working Group to establish more equitable communication pathways, patterns, and coordination between teams who produce external communications.

An organization-wide, equity-centered visioning process is approved by the Board, and will be led by the Board's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Committee.

New investment process introduced with the leadership of Kaila Drayton, Vice President of Operations, which allows for greater transparency and equity.

2022

JANUARY

Release of first impact report that is centered on equity and justice and environmental justice. The report provides a summary of the overall impact of the organization from the past year.

JUNE

Skeo Solutions and Metropolitan Group complete contract deliverables, including an NWF Environmental Justice Primer. Results in the call for all departments to create Environmental Justice Action Plans – clear intentions and goals that prioritize the needs of vulnerable communities.

SEPTEMBER

Release of Seeds of Culture Change Podcast, which helps tell the story of NWF's equity and justice journey.

OCTOBER

Roll out of Tribal and Indigenous Partnerships Strategy, accompanied by training for all staff.

Lessons Learned Along the Way

This list is built on the wisdom of people, scholars, employees, and colleagues who came before us. It is also a result of reflecting on our learnings as we practice equity and justice work. We know that it is crucial to consider what we have learned so that we can move forward in more grounded, informed, effective, and authentic ways. This list will continue to grow as we learn from our successes and missteps.

Trust and center those who have been most impacted or harmed

by systems of oppression in processes, solutions, and strategy.

(This is described with more detail in the [**Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing**](#).)

Be curious and open to questions.

Many structures, cultural norms, and policies are rooted in white supremacy culture and other forms of oppression. Being willing to question these norms can help unearth what is working well and what is ineffective or inequitable. A valuable starting point can be to consider who has power, who doesn't, and why. (Thank you to Kaila Drayton for this framing.)



Day two of the 2020 Women in Conservation Leadership (WCL) Summit was originally supposed to begin with a presentation around the history of racism in the conservation movement. At the last minute, the planning team realized that much of the history centered on the erasure and violence against Indigenous peoples and there were no Indigenous voices included as part of the presentation or planning team. This was extremely problematic and didn't feel we could proceed.

We asked a breakout session panel of Indigenous women if they would speak as a plenary in place of the history session. This was an embarrassing request because it clearly revealed our biases and put a considerable burden on these women. They agreed to speak, and as part of the opening we shared our mistake with the entire group.

We were reminded of an important equity practice: avoid speaking on behalf of people, and allow folks to tell their own stories from their perspective.

Elizabeth Lillard, Senior Manager of
Equity & Justice Strategies

National Wildlife Federation is no longer hosting WCL summits. Leaders of WCL determined it was time to move on to the next, more intersectional strategy for dismantling oppression, which includes supporting the organization's internal strategy for equity and justice culture change.

Diversity and inclusion are outcomes of creating an equitable and just culture.

Initially, diversity was the focal point of this work. After numerous learning opportunities, including from the Equity and Environment Leadership Cohort led by Angela Park, those leading equity work at the Federation now understand that creating an equitable culture can result in greater retention and recruitment of staff of color and other staff with marginalized identities. Getting people in the door is not enough; there must also be a safe and welcoming culture in place to greet them.

Relationships are central.

As interconnected beings, this work is not done in isolation. Cultivating authentic relationships with one another is crucial.

One-time fixes and performative actions are not sufficient.

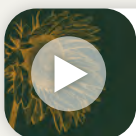
Steady resistance and re-evaluation are essential to avoid falling back into norms of white supremacy culture and other cultures of oppression. Feedback and listening are key to moving beyond performance and towards authentically living out values.

Equity and justice work deserves adequate compensation and staffing.

Organizations cannot authentically claim to be committed to equity and justice work until it is funded.

“A lot of organizations think they can just put some people as volunteers behind this, and that it’ll happen magically. And the reality is, you have to put your money where your mouth is... I think when it comes down to money, that’s when you really know [the commitment is there].”

Chanté Coleman, Senior Vice President of Equity and Justice
(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 4)



Episode 4
Equitable Storytelling
Seeds of Culture Change

Employees will still show up to work, even when given unlimited wellbeing leave.

Some people feared that employees would start taking excessive time off with the transition to unlimited wellbeing days. Overall, this has not been the case. Instead, now employees have the ability to take wellbeing time and other forms of leave under NWF's policies, which can allow them to show up more fully and enthusiastically both at work and in other parts of life.

Being over capacity can make some employees practically feel as though they cannot fully utilize their leave and wellness benefits

such as unlimited Wellbeing, Religious, & Cultural Leave or Half-Day Fridays under NWF's leave policies. Providing these benefits that allow people to take time away from work is a valuable step. The next challenge is to investigate and address capacity concerns to ensure that staff have the time, ability, and permission to step away.

Process matters.

The process for how goals are met is as important as the end results. Unjust and unhealthy structures cannot be dismantled with those same unjust and unhealthy structures. As Audre Lorde says, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

Laughter and joy can be present even in work that feels heavy.

Equity work can be challenging, heavy, and overwhelming. Finding joy along the journey is one way to feel rejuvenated and able to remain committed for the long haul.

Self and community care are crucial.

The Equity and Justice Team has learned about the importance of finding balance and ways to care for ourselves and one another in this work. Prioritizing wellness is a step the Equity and Justice team has taken to focus on mental health, strengthen retention, and push back against white supremacy culture and capitalism. These systems tell us that our work and what we produce are more important than our wellbeing; our work defines our worth. They do not take into account the realities of how mental health, systems of oppression, and global events impact our abilities to be productive. By prioritizing well-being, the National Wildlife Federation is declaring that the humanity of its staff is more important than their work outputs. This work, at its core, is about liberation. We are not liberated if we are exhausted all the time.

Saying no and slowing down opens up new possibilities.

It is important to let go of perfection and be able to say no. There are many pathways to this knowledge and growth.

Feelings matter and are valid.

When a person experiences harm, their feelings are important, valid, and do not need to be questioned. Also, learning to reflect, notice, and honor feelings before reacting is a valuable skill that can prevent causing harm. Understanding one's own feelings can help individuals in identifying their own needs and deciding how to engage or respond.

Equity and justice work is best held by many hands.

Equity and justice work will be most effective when each person and team across the Federation understands their responsibility and takes ownership in this work.

Equity work is iterative.

Moving equity work forward will often uncover problems that were not initially obvious, but that are necessary to address. Therefore, the initially-imagined process will often need to shift to meet the goals.

Everyone has something to contribute and something to learn.

People's roles in equity and justice work vary, and the work is most effective when everyone can be their most authentic selves.

Equity and justice skills come from a combination of self-motivation, learning resources, and practicing new things.

Staff have expressed that baseline training on equity issues is needed and wanted. A series of workshops will never be adequate on their own, as this is an ongoing journey. Workshops and trainings are one tool of many that can increase individual competency around issues of power, privilege, and oppression.

Be bold and adaptable.

Creating equitable and just cultures will not come from doing things the way they have always been done. Therefore, be bold and creative in trying new things, and be open to adjusting the course based on the lessons learned.

The Ongoing Journey

The National Wildlife Federation is committed to embedding equity and justice into everything we do. This will allow us to more effectively meet our goals of saving wildlife and ourselves, because:

The climate crisis and systemic oppression stem from the same root causes.

Staff can function better in their roles when they are treated equitably.

Our relationships with one another internally will be strengthened.

Our partnerships with frontline communities will be more authentic and impactful.

Our ongoing equity and justice work is divided into four main categories. The following pages provide context and details about milestones and where we plan to go in the years ahead.

Community of Care

Organizational Culture of Learning

**Accountability & Capacity
Around Competencies**

**Accountable & Transparent
Internal Systems**

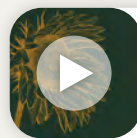
Community of Care

What We're Creating

The National Wildlife Federation will build a culture of wellness and a community of care across the organization with improvements in policies and practices that center and support people. We will support the health and well-being of our team members with a priority focus on equitable compensation, staff engagement, learning, leadership development, and wellness.

“For me, wellness is an active journey of finding people, place, things that help rejuvenate and fill my cup with holistic strength, courage, grounding, and joy to be able to serve and pour into myself and others.”

Tiffany Jones, Education and Engagement Manager, Great Lakes Region
(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 7)



Episode 7
Wellness is Counter-Cultural
Seeds of Culture Change

Milestones

Creation and funding of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

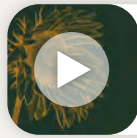
The current ERGs at the organization are the Black ERG; the Indigenous People's ERG; the Latinx, Hispanic, & Multicultural ERG; the Jewish Heritage ERG; Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) ERG; and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) ERG.

The Employee Resource Groups have had a significant impact on moving the organization forward with equity and justice. The Black ERG in particular has made recommendations on how NWF can further prioritize and modernize approaches to wellness, compensation, and communications strategies in view of its equity and justice commitments.

ERGs now receive funding from the organization to support the work they do. This is an important step, and there are still many questions to consider around how ERG funding is allocated under NWF's policies and operations.

“I would say that the biggest impact the [Latinx, Hispanic, and Multicultural Employee Resource Group] has had on me is showing me that there is space for my culture in this work, and providing me a pathway to build community in the National Wildlife Federation.”

Bianca McGrath-Martinez, HECHO Program Manager
(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 6)



Episode 6
Employee Resource Groups
Seeds of Culture Change

Creation of Community of Care Staff Committee

Recognizing that the entire National Wildlife Federation team (and projects) can only thrive with the backing of a supportive, equitable, open-hearted community, the Community of Care Committee centers well-being, psychological safety, and practices of care to promote a culture that listens to, values, and celebrates staff.

Began offering tEquitable as a staff resource

This independent ombuds service allows staff to explore options for navigating various types of work dynamics and conflict anonymously and offers tools for personal learning and growth. This is a resource offered to staff in addition to the standard grievance process.

Adopted unlimited Wellbeing, Religious, and Cultural (WRC) Leave days

This action encourages employees to prioritize well-being and lets them know that they are valued as full human beings, not just for the work they do. When considering whether to use WRC Leave or Vacation, HR has encouraged staff to consider the reasoning for the time away, not necessarily how they will be spending their time.

Meeting Restrictive Days

NWF implemented meeting restrictive days recognizing that not all cultural or religious holidays fall within the holidays that the Federation formally observes. Certain cultural or religious holidays require those observing to not participate in work for that day. Calendar holds are placed on all employees' calendars for awareness of these holidays. Staff are expected to refrain from scheduling meetings on these days out of respect for colleagues observing those holidays.



Distributing \$300 in wellness Forma funds for all staff once or twice a year

This originated out of a recommendation from the Black ERG, who noted that NWF's benefits packages only covered westernized medicine practices. **Forma funding** was provided as a way to address this needs gap, providing funds that can be spent in any way staff choose in support of their wellbeing.

Implemented half-day Fridays

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization began implementing half-day Fridays. In addition, some teams encourage no meetings on Fridays.

Approved funding for People of the Global Majority (PGM) Retreat

This retreat will resource PGM staff and facilitate their ability to connect and collaborate with one another.

Ongoing and Future Work

- Address capacity needs so that staff regularly report their task list is manageable and are able to make use of well-being benefits.

Staff Story Highlight

The Impact of tEQuitable

Written by Jacqueline Colman, HR Business Partner, in collaboration with Robin Martin, Senior Vice President of People, and Thomas Cluderay, Deputy General Counsel

In July of 2021, National Wildlife Federation started offering as a staff resource tEQuitable, an independent and confidential sounding board when our staff need support or advice about how to navigate various workplace dynamics or conflicts. Human Resources overviews tEQuitable during new staff orientations so staff are familiar with the resource when they first join the Federation, and includes it among its standing list of resources for colleagues thereafter. Since launch, NWF's tEQuitable site has had several hundred staff visits with approximately 10% of NWF staff visiting at least once, either to learn more or utilize it to address a specific need or matter. Having so many staff members visiting or engaging with tEQuitable underscores its ongoing value to our workplace.

Along with visit and utilization data, tEQuitable broadly tracks topics or themes colleagues in the aggregate are looking to learn about, or get help with. From that aggregated data, along with tEQuitable recommendations, the HR team then is able to identify places for further study and improvements based on our staff's general needs. Some of the most searched topics are ways to de-stress, how to be a better ally, and how to assign work more equitably.

Additionally, the response from staff has been overwhelmingly positive. Not only do colleagues consistently provide feedback that the information is relevant to what they are looking for, they are also sharing that they feel more confident in how to move forward after engaging with the platform.

Organizational Culture of Learning

What We're Creating

The National Wildlife Federation will achieve self-transformation through continued learning and growth with a specific focus on understanding power, privilege, and oppression. We demonstrate commitment to ongoing learning to deepen understanding of oppression in all its forms, with an initial focus on racism, anti-Black racism, and white supremacy. We model open conversation about these topics and encourage inquiry and learning within the organization.

“In order for us to transform in a way that’s more real, we need to be able to talk about issues like race, class, privilege, oppression, and how those intersect with wildlife and people thriving.. The amount of spaces where that [conversation] has become more accepted and more of a norm feels encouraging to me.”

Anna Brunner, Director of Equity and Justice
(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 3)



Episode 3
Then & Now: From Founding to Present
Seeds of Culture Change

Milestones

Developed and shared Equity Learning Lesson Plan

These lesson plans, developed in 2019 by an Equity and Justice Steering Committee subcommittee led by Heather Davis Miller, provided several rounds of assignments, activities, and reflection questions to regional centers and teams. Teams were expected to engage with the resource and discuss as a group, then report back their learnings. More lesson plans were expected but were cut short due to COVID-19.

Participation in Environment and Equity Leadership Cohort (E2LC)

The goal of this program is to support environmental organizations in clarifying and integrating equity and justice values into their contexts, working in a cohort model with other organizations. NWF leaders participated in this program, which influenced equity and justice priorities.

Mandatory identity and unconscious bias trainings for all staff

Led by Allen Cooper and Chanté Coleman, these trainings were part of the on-boarding process in 2019 and 2020. This promoted growth and shared understanding of language for staff.

Formation of the Equity and Justice Team as a funded and staffed department

The team's theory of change is: "When staff have the tools, incentives, skills, and structures to apply justice in their work, then the work itself will be transformed. Our role is to advise other teams on tools, incentives, skills, and structures and to model these changes on our own team."

Shifts in the National Wildlife Magazine

This has included in-depth training from Storytellers for Change, among other strategies to more deeply prioritize and embed equity and justice into their work.

"The principles are about representation: Being intentional about elevating underrepresented stories and groups; equity and justice infusing everything that we do; asset framing, not going in with a deficit mindset, but looking at what can be celebrated and the agency of communities and the people whose stories we're telling; partnerships; sharing the creative process; not going in, as we have done in the past, with a set idea of what the story is going to be told... It's much more collaborative now, the approach that we're taking."



Lisa Moore, Editorial Director of Wildlife Magazines ([Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 8](#))



Episode 8
Equitable Storytelling
Seeds of Culture Change

Ongoing and Future Work

- Black Employee Resource Group Communications Recommendations Working Group: The Black ERG provided the recommendation, “Shift language around how we talk about BIPOC communities. Change from a focus on helplessness (communities we need to serve) to a focus on the richness/value/benefits of these communities (communities we work with/partner with). Philanthropy, digital, and magazine teams should be educated on how to talk about our BIPOC-led programs. Share more stories/successes from BIPOC-led programs internally, on social media, in the magazine, etc. Hiring and partnering with more BIPOC writers, content creators, and contractors.” A group with representatives from Digital, Philanthropy, Equity and Justice, Ranger Rick, National Wildlife Magazine, Education, Branding + Marketing, and Traditional Communications has formed and is working to implement the recommendations.
- Strategic engagement with each team and region around equity.
- Integrate equity and justice into organizational vision, mission, and strategic plan.
- Develop an equitable strategy to grow the Federation’s external audience.
- Offer staff anti-racism trainings through Partners for Collaborative Change.



Staff Story Highlight

Reflecting on E2LC

A conversation between Chanté Coleman, Senior Vice President of Equity and Justice, and Anna Brunner, Director of Equity and Justice

Chanté: It’s hard to believe the Environment and Equity Leadership Cohort was three years ago!

Anna: Yeah, it has been awhile!

Chanté: E2LC definitely strengthened our equity and justice work in many ways. I know we often point to a realization [the Federation’s president] Collin had that NWF had been too focused on hiring for diversity and needed to shift to focus on retention and culture change. We learned in the cohort that if we are not creating an inclusive and equitable culture, then the folks we recruit won’t be interested in staying. And this led to an intentional shift in our strategies.

It was also one of the first spaces where we were able to build relationships with NWF board members, since the cohort involved executive staff, equity officers, and a handful of board members. We could build that relationship through this shared experience and also have some shared terminology to talk about why equity and justice need to be interwoven into the Federation’s work.

Anna: That’s a great point. Up until that meeting, I really hadn’t spent significant time with any members of the Federation’s Board. And the relationships we built at E2LC have just continued on the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Committee of the Board where we are now working to develop our first-ever organization vision statement that centers equity and justice.

Chanté: Yes! Those relationships have really accelerated our work to integrate equity into all we do. Another very helpful component of E2LC was being able to connect with other folks who lead equity work at other organizations. We spent time building relationships, sharing information, and supporting one another. Angela Park, our facilitator, asked us to build consensus on our job as “equity officers”. And we determined that our job is to advise on equity issues, not to do all of the work. This really stuck with me because it’s easy to see all of the problems and want to fix everything. But first, that is not sustainable, and second it doesn’t make room for others who need to hold this work. This work must be co-owned and co-shared to be successful.

Anna: Ah yes, those conversations were really helpful to have with people in similar roles. And because we were in the space with other folks at NWF in key roles—such as the head of philanthropy and the head of HR—we also got the opportunity to build a shared understanding of terminology and the history of the conservation movement broadly. These shared experiences have continued to be helpful to build on and return to as we work on culture change.

Chanté: It's also interesting to reflect on being in a space for multiple days to talk about equity with people in high positional power roles. Angela did a wonderful job building the container for us to do this work, where we prioritized direct communication and being in solidarity with one another, which led to less fear of power and repercussions. In fact, one of the days it became clear that not all equity officers in the room controlled their own budgets, which is just a way for others to control the work and to disempower the person who is leading equity, who is oftentimes a person of color. When this became clear, I felt very safe speaking out to the group and raising this as a point that the CEOs needed to discuss. If only we could always operate with that level of safety, it would make this work much less tiring.

Anna: That is such a great point. Perhaps folks who are reading this can think through how to increase psychological safety at their organization. This model of peer-to-peer learning also makes me reflect on the importance of NWF embracing a culture of learning. Angela would often say this work is counter-cultural and counter-structural, which means we have a lot to consistently be learning from. The peer-to-peer model and building a strong container of trust made it more possible for us to practice that culture of learning throughout E2LC. Thanks for reminiscing with me!

Accountability & Capacity Around Competencies

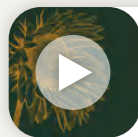
What We're Creating

To build an organization that centers equity and justice, we are committed to embodying the following leadership competencies: self-awareness and learning, authentic relationships and community partnerships, open and authentic communication, supervision, power-sharing, human-centered innovation, and equity analysis and action.

Managers have added responsibility to embody these competencies due to their positional power.

“All of the structure and process in the world isn't going to do anything if we don't have individual change... I think we have to do both. We have to look at systems and processes and how they reinforce inequality and inequity and organization. But we all have to continue to be committed to our own personal growth and change.”

Zach Cockrum, Senior Director of Sustainable Oceans
(*Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 9*)



Episode 9
The Personal Journal
Seeds of Culture Change

Milestones

Adopting leadership competencies centering equity and justice

NWF's leadership competencies were a result of feedback from two regional centers and based on Demos' racial equity competencies (see appendix for their full report). These competencies are incorporated into the job descriptions of all Executive Team members and have been rippling out to additional job descriptions. Continuing the rollout of these competencies is ongoing.

Development of an agreed-upon list of Community Conversation Agreements

These agreements guide how staff engage together. They are displayed at the beginning of meetings, such as all-staff spaces. These agreements are useful to ground conversation and as an accountability mechanism.

Ongoing and Future Work

- All job descriptions updated explicitly to include Leadership Competencies.
- Link career advancement, hiring, and promotion to equity competencies and antiracist practice.
- Improve performance management systems to hold supervisors accountable for shifting white supremacy culture.
- Expand authentic community partnerships and pathways to inform internal policies.

Staff Story Highlight

Community Conversation Agreements

*Written by Breanna González, Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO)
Colorado Field Coordinator*


In my position at NWF, particularly within HECHO, I have come to appreciate the value of Community Conversation Agreements. They allow me to feel personally invested in a project or campaign while also recognizing that certain aspects may not be mine to share outright. My daily responsibilities involve reaching out to Latinx communities throughout Colorado and collaborating with them on conservation issues that impact us all. The agreements have taught me that, despite sharing an ethnic identity with these communities as a Latina/Chicana, my experiences and perspectives may not be identical to theirs. HECHO has established policy priorities that we encourage communities across the Western US to support, and at times, I must serve as a spokesperson to explain these issues. However, it is equally important to assume a listening role and defer to the expertise of fifth and sixth-generation Latinx ranchers who possess a wealth of knowledge I lack. In the field, feedback and a growth mindset are paramount, transcending metrics and deliverables. For example, while a pressing deadline may necessitate securing the support of a set group of leaders for a federal bill, they may view this as non-priority due to pressing water scarcity concerns in their backyards. Community leaders, elders, and elected officials introduce new and innovative ideas that may not resolve immediate challenges but offer opportunities for collaboration and ensure that Latinx communities can enjoy outdoor activities, such as fishing, hiking, hunting, and camping, for generations to come.

I have also experienced the positive impact of Community Conversation Agreements firsthand when engaging internally at NWF. I had the opportunity to meet many colleagues for the first time during the NWF West Wide Gathering in January, 2023 in Arizona, many of whom were from diverse parts of the US, different areas of the organization, and various aspects of conservation and wildlife work. The agreements helped me stay engaged, consider my impact, and respect others' vulnerability in sharing their truths. NWF as a whole embraced these agreements, and I was able to discuss HECHO's goals and my own inquiries about NWF's campaigns in a safe way while also learning from others and collaborating effectively.



The Community Conversation Agreements also helped us learn and grow in a balanced way, with the understanding that non-closure was a big part of why we gathered in the first place. For example, the Western drought crisis is not going to be solved in a few days, and we all accepted that with the proper energy and diligence to move forward in this work. I would also be remiss if I did not mention the importance of safe spaces for those of us within the organization that come from marginalized backgrounds or groups that have been historically excluded from NWF. Recognizing the burden that people with marginalized identities face, NWF provided safe spaces and allocated time for us to collaborate professionally and personally. While there is still much work to be done to ensure that marginalized perspectives are taken seriously and acted upon, the Community Conversation Agreements promote accountability and help us move towards actionable steps.

Members of the HECHO, Policy, IT, Partnerships, Education, and other departments of NWF all have a critical commitment to center equity as a top priority for both our daily work and our long-term goals. Over the years, NWF has achieved significant successes in preserving wildlife and conserving nature. However, these wins would not have been possible without the people and communities who have long advocated for them even before NWF was established. Unfortunately, certain communities have been prioritized over others, not only by NWF, and we are now experiencing the environmental injustices and consequences of this. Tribal communities are being displaced from their homelands, Black communities are at the forefront of air and water quality disasters, and Latinx communities are being denied opportunities to engage with wildlife and public lands. As a conservation organization, we



cannot exist without prioritizing these people and the issues they face. By centering equity and justice through initiatives such as the Community Conversation Agreements, we can better consider our impact as an organization and as individuals before making decisions that affect communities. Taking a moment to think before acting allows us to seek guidance from trusted colleagues or partners and share our knowledge and experience more effectively. By putting people first, we can always learn responsibly about how to prioritize the issues that need advocacy. Our work may seem simple, but with accountability and capacity-building around staff competencies and centering equity and justice, we come to understand that it is about something much bigger than ourselves: stewardship, accountability, and humanity.

Accountable & Transparent Internal Systems

What We're Creating

The National Wildlife Federation will intentionally build new and equitable systems that are transparent and reflect power-sharing with a specific focus on budget/finances, decision-making, and leadership structures. We establish and follow through on shared commitments regarding transparent communication and processes for decision-making, consultation, and evaluation.

Milestones

Creation of Racial Equity Transformation Team (RETT)

The RETT makes recommendations to leadership focused on racially equitable systems and structures.

Dismantling of Executive Team and creation of Interim Steering Committee

The intention was that the Interim Steering Committee could have more healthy, transparent, and equitable decision-making processes. The development of what will replace the Interim Steering Committee is still underway and has not yet been communicated with all staff.

Proactively analyze compensation for pay equity

The Federation began an effort to proactively analyze compensation to look for where pay inequities might exist and assess factors that may be contributing to them, to ensure that similarly situated employees are earning similar pay. Corrective actions were taken where staff were out of lockstep with grade, roles and responsibilities. This is an ongoing effort leading to a broader look at pay equity within the Federation. The Federation also signed on to ***Green 2.0's Pay Equity Pledge***, a campaign that seeks to expand pay equity for people of color—especially women of color—in environmental organizations, as a sign of our commitment and way to remain accountable.

More frequent organizational financial updates

These allow for greater financial transparency, with the goal to provide quarterly updates and clarity on how financial decisions are made.

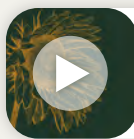
Implementing new Programmatic Investment Request Process

This process aims to make the budget process more transparent and collaborative to ensure resources are available to address identified operational gaps and better support staff, environmental justice, and equity and justice program goals.



“I look at the investment process as kind of a step towards something bigger... I would love an NWF where an investment process doesn’t exist because we don’t need it. Because the way that we budget, and the way that we look at funds, and the way that we look at our structures across the organization are all grounded in equity.”

Kaila Drayton, Senior Vice President of Equity and Justice
(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 10)



Episode 10
What’s You Dream NWF?
Seeds of Culture Change

Implementation of employee-centric intranet

Named Field Notes, the intranet has increased transparent communication across the Federation.

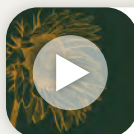
Developing an affiliate equity and justice strategy

This strategy seeks to improve equity understanding and skills among affiliates. This includes gathering data, providing trainings for groups most interested in equity and justice learnings, and inviting affiliates who have gone through those trainings to be part of leadership for future affiliate trainings.



“Eighty-seven percent of our affiliates are currently working on DEIJ actively. So in that way, it’s kind of one of the most cross-cutting topics across the Federation. So that’s really exciting, and something that we’re happy to keep working with them on.”

Juliet Slutzker, Director Conservation Partnerships, Northeast Region
(Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 5)



Episode 5
It's All Connected
Seeds of Culture Change

Use of the DARCcl tool to enhance collaboration, transparency, and accountability in projects and decision-making processes

DARCcl clarifies who will fill the roles of being Decider, Accountable, Responsible, Consulted, consulted (invited to provide input, which is held with less leverage than those in the “big C Consulted” category, who have recourse to object to the decision and have a formal pathway for their concerns to be heard and considered), and Informed.

Ongoing Work

- Continue to review and take steps to ensure the Federation’s executive leadership structure effectively optimizes power sharing.
- With HR and Legal’s thought partnership, further develop a comprehensive set of best practices to support equitable hiring.
- Establish a process for including ERGs as stakeholders in organizational decision-making.
- Where opportunities exist, explore with the Board ways to develop and strengthen relationships between National Wildlife Federation Board members and staff, especially BIPOC staff.
- With HR and Legal, review and consider updates to organizational personnel policies to further align with equity and justice values.
- Explore ways to share the organization’s equity and justice values with the National Wildlife Federation’s affiliates and partners and discuss how those might be a resource for their own work.
- With HR, review the Federation’s current exit interview process for updates and how that process can inform ongoing improvements to NWF workplace culture.

Staff Story Highlight

The Impact of Internal Investment

Written by Tiffany Jones (Education and Engagement Manager) in collaboration with Manja Holland (Director of Regional Education & Community Engagement)

Our Great Lakes Education and Community Engagement team strives to design and implement equity and justice-centered, community-based programs and a community engagement model that is transferable both throughout the Great Lakes region and nationally. Since 2019, our team has been highly successful at building out regional programs (e.g., Sacred Grounds, Early Childhood



Health Outdoors), raising our salaries, connecting across internal NWF departments/teams, and building local partnerships while also implementing and expanding our programmatic reach. However, due to systemic time and financial inequity, our team's ability to have the time and space needed to do strategic planning for the success of current work has been greatly limited.

Our rationale in submitting a request for internal investment was to utilize unrestricted funding and time to solidify and strengthen new, transferrable models and paradigms for our on-the-ground communities work at NWF in Detroit, MI, and beyond.

Since our award notification in June (2022), we've been able to:

- Add capacity to our team, hiring a Community Engagement Coordinator
- Join and contribute regularly to the Natural Infrastructure Center for Environmental Justice and Resilience Working Group
- Work closely with NWF Magazine, Fall 2023 Issue Community Connections
- Begin collaboration on a North Carolina place-based project with the Environmental Justice, Climate, and Community Revitalization team.
- Host our first Sacred Grounds Gathering with 87 houses of worship across the Great Lakes
- Craft our communications strategy for our program work throughout the year
- Develop a new program – Healing Over Habitats – based on lessons learned from Sacred Grounds and needs/interests expressed by communities
- More time to attend professional development trainings and workshops, including several with an equity and justice focus

Challenges & Areas of Growth

The National Wildlife Federation, like other organizations committed to equity and justice, sometimes finds itself operating at the frontiers of this work, pushing up against existing boundaries in order to make a meaningful difference. At the same time, the Federation is committed to **complying with applicable laws**, even if they may not be fully adequate, always equitable, or caught up to this moment in history. Navigating that reality sometimes can hold up our work, requiring us to spend more time tailoring or reconfiguring a proposed approach or strategy.

The Federation often claims the value of **bipartisanship**. Sometimes bipartisanship can feel more like the goal rather than the strategy used to reach a goal. This means that it can be challenging to advocate for equity and justice because these issues have become partisan. It is critical to figure out how to work across the political aisle while centering the people who are most impacted by climate change and systems of oppression.

Staff with less positional power often feel out of the loop about how decisions are made or what is happening across the federation. The organization has room to grow regarding **transparent communication**, particularly from leadership.

The National Wildlife Federation's equity and justice work has been centered on race. Strategizing through an **intersectional lens** is crucial to success in this work, and is a priority for ongoing work. This is recognized as a growing edge for the Federation's equity journey.

Many staff have noted desired improvements to **accountability** at the organization. Staff have sometimes experienced harm (often in the form of microaggressions) without accountability or repair. Creating structures that allow for reparative (rather than punitive) accountability is essential for moving this work forward. The Federation will continue to look at its reporting channels for periodic updates in an effort to make sure staff feel empowered to raise any concerns they may have.

White staff have ongoing work to do around **white fragility**. Sometimes white folks use equity incompetency as a shield because they don't want to say the wrong thing. White fragility and fear of doing the wrong thing can prevent deepening equity-related growth, and lead to additional challenges in pushing the equity strategy forward across the organization.

The National Wildlife Federation's current **values and mission** do not adequately speak to the connection between people and wildlife. This can sometimes hinder equity and justice work due to claims of "mission drift." Changing the values and mission of this organization to align with our stated desire for equity and justice would be a valuable step to more authentically articulate our commitments and where we're going.



“One of our amazing affiliate leaders actually put it so well recently... Wildlife don't make up our membership. People do. So what we do as organizations is for the benefit of wildlife, but it's also for the benefit of people - so that everyone can enjoy wildlife and wild places, and feel welcome and safe while doing so.”

Juliet Slutzker, Director of Conservation Partnerships, Northwest Region (*Seeds of Culture Change, Episode 5*)



Episode 5
It's All Connected
Seeds of Culture Change

The National Wildlife Federation has caused **harm throughout its history**, particularly to Black communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color. (An example of this is the passing of a 1975 resolution that questioned Native American knowledge of and rights to fish and wildlife. The resolution encouraged Federal Government involvement to review treaties with tribes, and to make changes to treaties deemed problematic for fish and wildlife.) The Federation must acknowledge this history and commit to doing better. The Federation must also amend its narrative to be more truthful about the entirety of its history: good, bad, and everything in between.

The issue of being **siloe**d comes up frequently at the organization. Work is often duplicated or unclear because current structures do not support synergy between different parts of the organization. Power-hoarding can more easily happen in silos, while collaboration is more difficult.

Retention of employees of color is one result of effective equitable culture change. This remains a challenge, as employees of color depart the organization at a faster rate than white employees. Investigation into these patterns can help to identify where the next phases of equity and justice culture change work should be focused.

Conclusion

Choosing to commit to equity and justice is a decision that must be made daily. Embarking on this journey has been a considerable shift for us at the National Wildlife Federation. We have learned from our successes and missteps. We have embraced various strategies and methods over the years, which fall into the four main categories of Community of Care, Organizational Culture of Learning, Accountability and Capacity around Competencies, and Accountable and Transparent Internal Systems. We continue to bump up against ongoing challenges and areas of growth. The work has shifted significantly over the years, from the language we use to our approaches. We can see that we have come a long way, and know that the journey is ongoing.

This work is not easy. Consistently challenging norms can be exhausting. And, it can be meaningful and filled with joy. We each individually understand ourselves better with each step in the journey and come closer to liberation for ourselves, our communities, and the earth. We are committed to the ongoing work and hope to continue capturing our story more regularly going forward. We invite accountability from those engaging with this resource to ensure we are staying on track to promote healing, justice, and liberation.

Contact the Equity and Justice Team: EquityComms@nwf.org

Appendix Documents



SouthWest Organizing Project Letter to Environmental Organizations

[View Letter](#)



National Wildlife Federation: The Business Case for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

[View Case](#)



First Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee Charter

[View Charter](#)



National Wildlife Federation's First Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Statement

[View Statement](#)



2020 Equity and Justice Strategic Plan

[View Plan](#)



2021 Impact Report

[View Report](#)



National Wildlife Federation Framework for Establishing and Maintaining Employee Resource Groups

[View Framework](#)



Demos' Racial Equity Transformation: Key Components, Process & Lessons

[View Document](#)



DARCcl for Enhanced Collaboration & Accountability, with Redress Process

[View Document](#)



Guidance for Developing Community Conversation Agreements

[View Agreements](#)



National Wildlife Federation's Community Conversation Agreements

[View Agreements](#)



Programmatic Investment Request Process

[View Process](#)