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As outlined in the Green 2.0 report: “The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations: Mainstream NGOs, Foundations& Government Agencies,” “Despite increasing racial diversity in the United States, the racial composition in environmental organizations and agencies has not broken the 12% to 16% “green ceiling” that has been in place for decades. “ In addition to this, according to the study, “ethnic minorities occupied only 11.3% of leadership positions” which is a staggering disparity. In partnership with Environmental Professionals of Color-Seattle and sponsored by Seattle’s Equity and Environment Initiative, the Environmental Leadership Program hosted a facilitated workshop on March 1, 2016 to explore the challenges in professional growth for people of color in the environmental sector as well as generate community-identified solutions. People of color thinking about exploring careers in the environmental sector as well as those who currently have careers in the environmental sector; entry level to senior level positions attended this event and shared their experience and expertise to come up with community based solutions to inspire and make equitable change towards inclusive workplace culture and career pathways for people of color in the environmental field.

Environmental Leadership Program
www.elpnet.org
About the Event

To learn more about the landscape of professional growth or lack thereof for people of color in Seattle’s environmental sector, Environmental Leadership Program (ELP) facilitators spent dedicated time engaging with Seattle’s communities of color, in a facilitated community participatory workshop to discuss:

1. What does success look like for our communities?
2. What support systems do our communities require to grow our careers in this sector?
3. What have historically been the barriers for communities of color in excelling in professional careers within the environmental sector?
4. What are the current barriers that continue to keep a green ceiling on the success of professionals of color?

This workshop was led by professionals who are Senior Fellows of ELP’s Pacific Northwest Fellowship and whom are active members of the Seattle chapter of Environmental Professionals of Color (EPOC) as part of a sustained commitment from both ELP and EPOC to support the leadership development, growth, and success of people of color as agents of change.

The event was sponsored and supported by Seattle’s Equity and Environment Initiative, a partnership of the city, the community and several private foundations to deepen Seattle’s commitment to race and social justice in environmental work. This effort creates new opportunities for those most affected by environmental injustices to lead on the solutions.

This report back information will be used to directly shape ELP’s current fellowship offerings as well as a new fellowship program in partnership with several national conservation organizations in the development of the Roger Arliner Young Marine Conservation Diversity Fellowship Program for recent college graduates of color. In addition, the City of Seattle’s Office of Environment & Sustainability will use this information to share new fellowship opportunities as a result of the Equity and Environment Initiative.
About the Environmental Leadership Program

The mission of the Environmental Leadership Program (ELP) is to support visionary, action-oriented, and diverse leadership for a just and sustainable future. ELP aims to catalyze change by providing emerging leaders with the support and guidance they need to launch new endeavors, achieve new successes, and rise to new leadership positions. Since 2000 we have created a dynamic network of 900 of the country’s top emerging environmental and social change leaders.

Our Vision of Environmental Leadership

Our plan of action is guided by strong convictions about the nature of leadership and the need for it within the environmental community. We believe that:

- Leadership begins with relationships and the personal skills needed to develop them. Our greatest impact will lie in the collective capacity of the network we are creating.
- Diversity is a crucial component of public leadership. Environmental leaders must themselves reflect the diversity of the country and have the skills to work across difference.
- Leadership relies on individuals daring to take calculated professional risks.

Guided by these principles, we are building a diverse community of emerging leaders and creating programs to support their development.

We train a new generation of environmental leaders characterized by diversity, innovation, collaboration, and effective communications. We address the needs of emerging environmental leaders from academia, business, government and non-profits by:

- Providing training and learning opportunities to increase their leadership capacity through our Fellowship Program
- Connecting Fellows with peers through our regional and national networks
- Linking Fellows with experienced environmental leaders through substantive interactions and mentoring opportunities
- Focusing attention on the need for the environmental community to develop the next generation of leaders
About Environmental Professionals of Color

The National Environmental Professionals of Color Network is a growing community of leaders of color across the USA at work on a vast array of critical environmental issues, from habitat conservation to environmental justice to upstream public health. At a time when there are over 100 million people of color living in the U.S.—a number that is projected to more than double by 2050—EPOC is working to build coalitions that address the diversity crisis at the heart of the environmental movement. EPOC is a program of the Center for Diversity and the Environment.

EPOC members are galvanized by a vision of an inclusive, equitable and relevant environmental movement. The challenge we face today is also a great opportunity: diversifying environmental organizations while effectively connecting people of color to the environmental movement will enrich the work as well as strengthen the movement politically, financially and culturally. Coalition building is by nature uncomfortable, as Bernice Johnson Reagon discusses in Coalition Politics: Turning the Century, but successful coalition-building means taking the step forward together, across cultural, generational and racial lines. EPOC members are thought leaders and passionate change agents who are committed to positively impacting their communities, strengthening the environmental movement, and engaging a broader audience than has been historically invited into the work. Development of the EPOC network helps to ensure that the groundswell of activity across the nation does not happen in isolated pockets, but contributes to a comprehensive and strategic path forward.
The Community: A Snapshot

Attendees of the Breaking the Green Ceiling: Empowering People of Color in the Environmental Sector represent a variety of socioeconomic, ethnic and racial backgrounds, careers within the environmental sector, and diverse levels of experience.

Of the 45 people registered, 31 participants showed up the day of the event. There was representation from students, AmeriCorps placements, interns to mid level managers, coordinators, executive directors, and university/college faculty in public and private sectors. Individuals ranged from having no professional experience working in the environmental field to being exposed to the field all their life and working in the field for 30 years. Throughout the course of the event, participants had the opportunity to get a professional headshot taken by photographer Michael B. Maine.

Women of color led this event with facilitators representing environmental education, leadership development, communications, civic engagement and policy work in both non-profit and for profit sectors. Vendors contracted to support the event include people of color owned business such as Hing Hay Coworks, Kau Kau Grill, Chu Minh Tofu & Vegan Deli, photographer Michael B. Maine, and Top Notch Copy & Print.

Event attendees fill prepare for an icebreaker activity called ‘Sharing the Story of Our Names’.
Root Causes

Prior to the event, participants were asked to share their thoughts anonymously in the online event registration process to the following question: **What do you think are root causes of the current lack of equitable paths to living wage and senior level green jobs for people of color, immigrants and refugees?**

Participants cited institutionalized and structural oppression as the number one root cause for the lack of equitable paths to living wage and senior level green jobs for people of color and immigrant and refugee communities. Additional answers support this root cause through the perpetuation of an uninviting and exclusive culture and systems and lack of access to higher education, jobs, promotions, and career growth.

**Institutionalized and Structural Oppression**

- Historical disparity with regards to access to education, employment and economic stability, growth and wealth.
- Capitalism
  - Corporate takeovers and gentrification that extinguishes small businesses owned by people of color, immigrant and refugees.
- Racism: Individual, Structural, and Institutional.
  - Micro-aggressions and exclusive culture.
- Public school system and higher education’s approach to pedagogy from a colonized, white middle class standpoint excluding the leadership, innovation and accomplishments of communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, and Native American communities.
- Historical lack of access and active exclusion of people of color from public lands and careers in the greater environmental sector.
- The environmental sector has been founded from a white, middle-class to wealthy demographic perpetuating a movement narrative that upholds this dominant social power.
- Exclusive systems that carry implicit bias that keep people of color, immigrant and refugees from getting in the door and being promoted.
- Focus of mainstream environmental organizations work priorities does not include equity. Institutionalized racism within mainstream organizations and agencies make positions less desirable for some people of color, immigrant and refugee would-be applicants.

**Uninviting and Exclusive Culture**

- Prejudice and micro-aggressions incurred by white dominated workplaces
  - This is tiring, demeaning and demoralizing to deal with on a day-to-day basis.
- Intentional and unintentional obstruction to advancement.
  - Citing reasons for not promoting people of color or not hiring for leadership positions such as: Not enough experience, doesn’t have the “right” education or background, not a good “fit”.
• Pervasive dominant culture conceptions of what it means to be an ‘environmentalist’
• Misconceptions about the ability of people of color, immigrant and refugees to be effective in this field and in leadership positions.
• Lack of the prioritization of issues that affect people of color, immigrant and refugee communities by mainstream environmental organizations and agencies.
• Lack of action based investment in culture change and prioritization of racial equity and inclusion within the workplace.
• Lack of capital/policy incentives to incite change on institution-levels.
• People of color absent from the decision making table

Lack of Access

• Misperception that people of color, immigrant and refugees don't utilize outdoor spaces
• Lack of focused recruiting efforts
  o This must involve intentional relationship building that is mutually beneficial and sustained.
• Obstructive hiring process
• Hiring from within which can suspend the advancement of people of color within organizations and externally.
• Youth of color not exposed to role models of color or the vast array of green jobs that exist
• Lack of access to career information and little navigational support
  o Mentors, positions, networks, interview skills, financial literacy, etc.
• Closed or absent networks
• Many including a need to legitimize pathways and to dispel barriers between a wide range of grassroots activism and establishment job structures
• Knowledge of what "green jobs" are
• Antiquated structure of hiring
  o Aversion to risk in hiring young, 'unproven' candidates
  o Lack of understanding of transferrable skills
  o Confusion around how to interact with hiring systems within government jobs.
  o Hiring and interview committees made up of just white people
• Very few living wage positions
• Absence of sustained engagement and pathways for youth to foster interest in green jobs.
• Limited mentors in these fields and encouragement to pursue jobs in these areas
Results from Un-facilitated Activity: What is a Green Job?

Facilitators encouraged participants to post answers on a large sheet of paper to answer the question “What is a Green Job?” Below are their answers.

- A job that invests in the neighborhoods with the workforce in that neighborhood
- A position/opportunity that promotes sustainability in our world
- A green job is a healthy one.
- WE are part of the environment. So a green job=jobs helping people.
- Explicitly promotes environmental stewardship
- Benefits the community!
- Sustainable gardening.
Breakout Session Insights

Attendees broke out into three groups and were self divided by the amount of experience that they have as people of color in green jobs or with jobs within the greater environmental sector. There were 2 groups of people who identified as students, individuals interested in working in the environmental sector and individuals starting their careers within the environmental sector. The third group was made up of people who identified as holding mid-level or senior level positions.

Wisdom from the session was organized in three different sections:

• Success: What does it look like for our communities?
• Obstacles: What are obstacles to our success?
• Equitable Pathways: How can we create equitable pathways to success with regards to careers in the environmental sector/green jobs?

Facilitator Vera Hoang leads a group dialogue during the break out session.
What does success look like for our community as it relates to professional growth within environmental careers?

**Student/Entry Level**

- Incorporating a lens of intersectionality when it comes to addressing environmental issues and recognizing the diversity of identities the community holds.
- Organizations having a clearly stated mission statement on their value of equity, ensuring that it is a priority with action based strategic visioning incorporated in ALL aspects of the organizations. This must be visible to external constituents and not just internal.
- Representation of communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities in media. Social justice and environmental justice issues must be recognized and highlighted by mainstream organizations. Communities want to see that their issues are recognized and seen as important. This helps build credibility for mainstream organizations but also works towards building trust and intentional relationships.
- Increase organizational awareness around diversity, equity, and inclusion with trainings for staff, incorporating values of equity and inclusion into organizational strategy and operations on every level.
- A successful environmental sector is one that demonstrates a close-knit network for everyone cross-sector. One that is open to recognizing, supporting, and empowering the diversity of the human experience so we all are comfortable in sharing advice, experiences, and networks.
- Success is intentional representation! We want to not only be represented in the environmental movement but we want it to be empowered to lead and not be tokenized and unheard.
- We want to be able to be our whole selves in the workplace and not conform to the dominant middle-upper class culture that persists in the environmental sector now. We want to create our own systems and approaches. We want to leverage our own innovation and ideas.
- We want mentorship opportunities across all levels of career (entry, mid, and senior level) set up in workplaces. We want this to be the norm not the exception.
- Success for our communities means more social capital from mainstream organizations.
- We want mainstream organizations to be able to articulate success of equity and inclusion through story and data, not merely look to people of color to articulate and measure our own success and value. This is everyone’s responsibility and shouldn’t lie on the shoulders of people of color to justify for ourselves why equity is important.
- We want the professional growth of our communities to be valued and cultivated not obstructed.
- Women and people of color owned business are prioritized, supported, and frequented by organizations. Don’t just hire or do business with the “usual suspects”. Support and invest in the growth of our communities.
• The perspective of people of color, immigrant, and refugees is valued and respected. We are innovative and can broaden the conversation.
• Intentional and sustained relationships with communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities that are mutually beneficial. Take the time to get to know our cultures, our perspectives and us. Don’t assume that you know best and do not treat interactions with our communities as transactional.

**Mid-Senior Level**
• Leadership that reflects the communities served
• We want to “be our whole self at work”.
• More formal mentorship programs!
  o For and by people of color, ex) investing and utilizing the EPOC Seattle network
• Professional vertical integration
  o Intentionally build diverse applicant pools, hire from them, invest in your POC hires and support their growth in leadership.
• Not giving up when you don’t have a diverse applicant pool.
  o Keep recruiting and building a candidate pool to actively hire from. Don’t just hire a white candidate because you don’t “have enough interest from people of color, immigrants, and refugees”; put in the time!
• Shared power with people of color, immigrants and refugees.
• Productive co-conspirators/allies. We want allies to be responsible for their own learning. We want white people to stand up for racial justice without being prompted to. We want white people to utilize their power to change the power dynamic and deeply understand that racial inequities affect all of us.
• Inclusive organizational culture
• Priority local hire. Hire people from the community to do work within our communities.
What are the obstacles to our success?

**Student/Entry Level**

- Organizations that say that they prioritize equity and inclusion but do not hire people of color, immigrant and refugee applicants in the end. This conveys that they don’t actually want to hire people from our communities, which causes potential applicants of color to distrust the organization and discourages folks from applying for future positions.
- Internalized oppression and the reinforcement of that by dominant society
  - Many times we don’t apply for positions that we don’t think we qualify for when in actuality we have transferrable skills and could be qualified or more than qualified.
  - We have grown up with cultural differences that affect the way that we perceive our own ability to be successful in any given position.
- Ageism within organizations and the lack of value of youth of color.
  - Youth serving organizations with no youth board or youth board positions. Youth serving organizations that do not ask their youth for input or follow through with implementing youth input.
  - Devaluation of ideas from younger employees. Not asking younger employees for input or asking for input and not implementing it or implementing it and having senior level employees co-opt or take credit for ideas.
- Not prioritizing our health and subsistence.
  - We need living wage jobs, health insurance and benefits
- Lack of professional development opportunities and investment in growth
  - Internal and external to workplace
  - Desire for access to financial literacy classes, resume and cover letter writing workshops, writing workshops, etc.
- Lack of mentors
- Non-community driven action
  - We want to feel invested in the work that our organizations are doing. We want an investment in our communities and we want our communities to be valued and lead this work.
- Non-holistic employee assessments
  - Looking at leadership growth and development from a non-dominant framework. Ex) honoring the value of quiet leadership or behind the scenes leadership not just assertive and aggressive displays of leadership.
- The concept of being “colorblind”
- Tokenism
- Misconceptions of the difference between being an expert and having expertise.
- Only hiring people of color, immigrant and refugees for entry-level positions that have no pathway to career growth within the organization.
- Devaluation of life experience vs. education
• The educational setting within colleges/universities can be hostile environments for people of color, immigrant and refugee communities generally but especially within natural resources, environmental studies, forestry, etc.
  o There is also a lack of access to higher education; it’s costly to attend college and can be detrimental to the health of the family if you are responsible for contributing income, childcare for siblings, taking care of elderly or sick parents, etc.

**Mid-Senior Level**
• Organizational resistance to change
  o Doing things the same old way and expecting different or diverse results.”
• Isolation and exclusion; lack of community of peers within the workplace
• Lack of a comprehensive “vehicle of support”.
  o Poor wages/inequitable wage gap, benefits, lack of flexibility, and lack of organizational support in professional growth for people of color and lack of mentors.
• White privilege
• Tokenism
• Racism
• Outright discrimination
  o Abuse with impunity from white colleagues/supervisors
• Fear of working with people of color, especially black people.
• General apathy for culture change from mainstream organizations
• Lack of funding and support for social entrepreneurs of color
• Dominant society’s fear of giving up or losing power
• Inflexibility for working parents and working single parents
• Lack of access and support for POC living with visible and invisible disabilities
• Lack of affordable, high quality childcare
• Lack of job share options for working parents
• Disinterest from organizational leadership in supporting staff trainings and participation in dismantling racism trainings
  o “I don’t see how this applies to our work.”
  o “This is added work that we don’t have time for.”
• Feedback that we don’t possess the “right” kind of leadership
  o Reprimanded if we step into our leadership in an assertive way or in a quiet way
• POC work not being valued the way that dominant society values hard work
  o Being passed up for promotions
  o Not having the opportunity to be considered/apply for a promotion or a lateral move within the company
  o Being promised increased pay/benefits but that promise never materializes.
How can we create equitable pathways to success with regards to careers in the environmental sector/green jobs?

**Student/Entry Level**

- Mentorship
- Change the dominant narrative.
  - Communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities have been environmentally and socially responsible before it was cool. Don’t repackage our culture and traditions then try to re-sell it to us.
- Investment in youth from communities of color and immigrant, refugee communities.
- Equitable and competitive pay
  - Honor our experience and invest in our success, as it is an investment in our collective success.
- Public transportation subsidies
- Invest in professional development.
  - Taking classes and workshops, attending leadership institutes and programs, attending conferences, presenting at conferences.
- Organizations and agencies must incite culture change and commit.
  - Organizations can’t simply expect to hire a person of color and think this in itself will change culture, make the workplace more “diverse”, or display inclusivity. It is imperative to have investment and participation on all levels (board, senior management, middle management, entry level). Organizations need to commit to an organizational change strategy with metrics and commit to personal growth and learning by attending workshops, training and actively changing workplace culture.
- Provide incentives when asking for community input and participation.
- Provide opportunities for employees of color to organize and discuss issues that that uniquely affect us.
  - The Nature Conservancy has internal employee resource groups. Other organizations can use this model to create people of color employee resource groups internally.
- Work to decrease poverty and not perpetuate inequities

**Mid-Senior Level**

- Equitable wages with NO disparity pay gap based on gender, race, or perceived lack of experience
- Mentorship
- Equitable healthcare insurance and benefits
- Flexible schedule
- Creation of job share options for working parents
- Childcare
• Public transportation subsidies
• Value of community and self care
• Supportive, inclusive, and equitable organizational culture
• Professional vertical pathways
• Clear pipeline for professional growth and into leadership positions
• Emphasis and investment in the retention of people of color on staff
• Equitable hiring practices
• Investment in time spent for employees to reflect individually as well as organizationally.
• Access to professional networks
• Investment in education, resources, and professional development
• Affirmation, constructive and thoughtful feedback and reinforcement.
• Prioritize the institution of a culture of learning. Make time to assess and reframe. If something isn’t working or the approach is wrong, support the time that we need to assess, learn, and reframe approach.
• Provide employees with the resources to do their job well and intentionally with a framework of equity.
• Invest in and support people of color owned businesses, non-profits, and collectives.

**Next Steps and Action Items**
At the end of the event, participants shared the ways in which they plan to share knowledge learned from their peers. Attendees of the event were also eager to continue to have dialogue with each other and shared interest in having dedicated time to develop additional action items in community to incite change towards equity within the environmental sector in a coordinated effort.

**Follow Up Actions for Participants**
• Present and share information at workplaces, volunteer boards and committees, peer groups & networking groups
• Apply to Environmental Professionals of Color (EPOC) Seattle event planning
• Share with EPOC National chapters

**Follow Up Actions for ELP**
• Apply feedback to RAY Marine Conservation Diversity Fellowship
• Share report back with ELP staff, board, People of Color Senior Fellow affinity group, and Senior Fellow Network at large.

**Recommended Follow Up Actions for Mainstream Environmental Organizations**
• Commit and take action in allyship by seeking continued growth and education on topics of equity and dismantling institutionalized, systemic racism and oppressions.
• Apply feedback from the ‘Breaking the Green Ceiling’ event to paid fellowships, paid apprenticeships, paid internships, staff positions, and organizational culture.
• Share report with staff and constituents.
• Support and empower people of color led groups and organizations who are advocating for equitable pathways into green jobs and the environmental sector such as Environmental Professionals of Color Seattle and Got Green
• Sponsor community led dialogues and events to keep the momentum going on these community-identified recommendations.

Thank you to the Seattle Equity and Environment Initiative for sponsoring this event, the vendors, facilitators, and the beautiful, thoughtful, and passionate insights of the attendees.