

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) discussion group: Responses to written questions

At the 2019 Cal-IPC Symposium, we held a discussion group to delve into issues of equity, diversity and inclusion in the conservation field. Thank you to all that attended! As we went over the allotted time, several attendees wrote down questions for follow up. We have some brief responses here.

Cal-IPC and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy staff are more than happy to expand on this conversation. Our contacts are provided below. Thank you!

Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy staff contacts:

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### **1. How do you do EDI work in orgs that don't pick it up so quickly, or have some resistance?**

It is important to be mindful that this work is slow moving, emotionally laborious and requires continuous investment. Whether your organization "picks it up" easily or not requires a long-term investment and patience. Beginning the journey in your organization can take many different paths, including an intentional conversation, sharing an article or video, or asking a single question. This understanding can take away some of the pressure to have a specific goal and timeline for what EDI work looks like at your unique organization. But ongoing attention is important, so work to keep it on the table at all times.

### **2. How do you not lose steam as a member of a minority group trying to do this work?**

It is common to have an undue burden of leadership placed on the shoulders of folks who identify as minority groups, marginalized groups, people of color, LGBTQIA, and those who share any combination of these identities. Finding community in this work that is within and outside of your organization provides critical support to continue driving this work forward. Knowing that you are not alone, and seeking resources, insight, and space to share from community outside of your work environment can add fuel to continue this work. Identify allies from more advantaged backgrounds and cultivate their sense of responsibility for integrating an EDI lens into their work.

### **3. How do you communicate these ideas to people who haven't "done the work" and don't know the lingo?**

It is important to recognize we are all showing up to this work from vastly different backgrounds and experiences. Consider framing this work and the learning and growth it requires as a way to make our work and community a more just and inclusive space to coexist. This sets a foundation that is easy to understand, that is not steeped in jargon and does not require that folks have "done the work." Meeting people where they are at in the language we choose creates much more opportunity to work together rather than engage in a hierarchical exchange of those who know and those who don't know. Simple concepts of fairness can be a good place to start. We all have something to bring to the table and being cognizant of the potential value of what each person you engage in this work has to share creates a more open and understanding flow of communication.

**4. How do you convince people who say, “I don’t see the problem. I don’t know why we should do anything about it.” or “These questions are too complicated and I don’t know anything about it”?**

Convincing people to change is an uphill battle. Remembering to meet people where they are at alleviates you from feeling solely responsible to change minds. Sharing resources, reports, articles, and the stories and voices of people directly and actively impacted can be places to begin working with people who may not have the same values and experiences that they bring to the conversation as you do. Bringing voices and stories of folks who are disenfranchised, marginalized, or directly harmed into conversations can have a meaningful impact in helping others understand why these issues are a problem. Also bringing in stories and voices of organizations, communities, and individuals who are benefiting from their EDI journey can also address the preconceived notion that “these questions are too complicated.” Lived experiences and stories can help people begin to think and reflect on their own behaviors, biases, and consider taking a step towards engaging more in this journey.

**5. Do you think that in your organization people now truly acknowledge the necessity of EDI?**

As an organization, Cal-IPC has identified our EDI work as a necessary element of our mission. There are still varying levels of engagement across our board, staff, and membership in this journey. We have taken active steps and made financial commitments to this work. There is still more to be done to reach full consensus on the critical nature of this work to our organization’s success, community, and sustainability, but there is strong forward motion.

**6. Does Cal-IPC have key messages or responses that can help answer the following comment: “You’re removing plants that aren’t native, so what about people who aren’t native?”**

This can be a tricky analogy and can be the basis of a lot of misunderstanding. Much of our terminology is problematic because it leads to misperceptions that ecological dynamics and cultural dynamics are equivalent. They are not. Cal-IPC is about protecting biodiversity, and we honor cultural diversity. We are not against all non-native plants in California, just the few that can expand widely and damage native communities. Plants that have evolved here are integrated into a web of life that we are trying to preserve to the extent possible.

GGNPC posted an [article on their website about the distinction between biological and cultural diversity in our communities](#). A selection of snippets gets to the heart of the matter: “Having a diversity of plants means that no matter what change comes to the ecosystem, the ecosystem can adapt while still providing clean air, clean water, and habitat for animals... Our comparison with humans and biodiversity immediately fails because humans are all one species. This is important to point out and celebrate. We are all connected together as humankind... We are the human family no matter where you are born in this world. Remembering this can help us fight against racism. Yet, we need to remember that we do have differences that are important to us. These differences are expressed through culture... The cultural diversity of the Bay Area is a source of strength. Many different backgrounds and histories mean there are many different people with different perspectives. These perspectives bring new ideas and ways of solving challenges.”

As we lead training workshops or field days, it is also important to recognize the unique history of the land we are standing on. We acknowledge the Native Americans who lived on this land and their stewardship practices which predate the arrival of European settlers. We sometimes find it helpful to offer some history of the plants, how and when certain invasive species arrived, and share some scientific data.

## 7. How can I bring up wanting EDI training while trying not to be singled out in a small organization?

Whether seeking training for yourself or your organization, consider starting the conversation in a one-on-one meeting with a supervisor, or perhaps at a small departmental meeting, depending on comfort. If there is an opportunity for employees to share programmatic or field updates in a meeting, you can share your experience at this (or other) discussion groups or webinars around this topic. Begin by expressing your interest in learning more and consider asking coworkers to share their level of interest. This discussion can provide a natural window to requesting training opportunities. If coworkers need evidence that this is a major issue being tackled in the conservation field, share some of the [resources for EDI in conservation posted on Cal-IPC's website](#).

Trainings can bring a wealth of knowledge to the team, even if you are the only one attending. By framing it as a team investment, it is a commitment to the journey of the whole organization rather than just you as a staff member who has an isolated interest.

Also, remember that numbers are on your side. Here are some findings from the [Green Diversity Initiative report](#): “People of color are 36% of the U.S. population, and comprise 29% of the science and engineering workforce, but they do not exceed 16% of the staff in any of the environmental organizations surveyed. For decades, environmental organizations have stressed the value of diversity. However, the diversity composition has not broken the 16% green ceiling. People of color support environmental protection at a higher rate than whites. However, environmental organizations are not adequately reaching out to organizations representing people of color communities.” From these findings, it is clear that we must reach out to diverse communities. To fail in making this attempt means leaving dedicated supporters and friends behind – and, potentially, leaving donor/member dollars on the table. It is in our best interest to engage ALL our constituents in this work.

Good luck!