

## **Recommendations for Creating Representative and Just Educational Programs within the National Wildlife Federation**

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**Many thanks to the environmental professionals and advocates that kindly shared their wisdom, stories, and time for this research, this report would not have life without you:**

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## Summary

National Wildlife Federation (NWF) is “America’s largest and most trusted conservation organization” with a nearly century-old legacy of advocating for nature. Within NWF’s common agenda for wildlife is a commitment to uplift the next generation of environmentalists. This commitment involves nation-wide goals to provide educational opportunities, outdoor experiences, and career training to millions of US residents. The EcoLeaders and EcoCareers programs of the NWF are two educational programs integral to achieving these national goals. By providing an online community, career center, and other key resources, these programs aim to support and encourage young people looking to enter the environmental field. The NWF has also pledged itself to equity and justice within the organization and the environment. At the intersection of these commitments came the NWF’s request for proposals for a graduate-level EcoLeader Fellow to research and suggest best practices in educational program design to ensure just impacts and benefits for communities of color and low-income communities. Another goal of this research was to identify strategies for building, growing, and enhancing vibrant and diverse virtual communities. This report summarizes the findings of the EcoLeader Fellow, including recommendations informed primarily by a series of 60-minute interviews with underrepresented environmental professionals. A survey of needs and experiences of young environmental professionals and EcoLeaders also provided critical insight for these recommendations.

## Background and Description

People of color represent less than 16% of staff and very rarely occupy leadership positions within environmental organizations in the United States. Yet, BIPOC people represent nearly 40% of the U.S. population, with numbers only projected to increase, and research has reaffirmed many times the disproportionate burden of environmental degradation in the U.S. on these same populations. Environmental organizations are thus presented with a serious challenge to create a truly representative workforce. As the country’s largest conservation organization, the National Wildlife Federation is uniquely positioned to take the lead in the formal environmental field and informal environment movement on uplifting these underrepresented, historically harmed populations. Beyond these demographic indicators are real people with complex experiences relating them to conservation in America. Systemic injustices are sown into the fabric of organizational culture and failing to recognize this reality even passively can serve to actively discriminate against BIPOC and low-income peoples. Exploring the nature of this relationship by investigating relevant histories, research, and human stories will provide the basis for mending it. The EcoLeaders program, a leadership and career development program for high school juniors and seniors, college students, and young professionals, is an important opportunity for the NWF to support the growth of a new generation of environmental advocates by dismantling known structural inequities and implementing just programming. In the summer of 2021, amidst a time of extreme environmental and social injustice as well as a racial reckoning in the United States, the NWF brought on the EcoLeader Fellow to address this challenge with specific focus on the EcoLeader program.

The EcoLeader Fellow completed a four-month research effort through academic literature, field interviews, and surveys to identify best practices for creating just educational and career development programs as well as diverse, vibrant online communities. This work proceeded in three phases:

1. Initial research of literature pertaining to social capital building, career development, environmental justice, the history of the conservation movement, and diversity and discrimination in the environmental field;
2. Conduct interviews of established, underrepresented environmental professionals and advocates in 60-minute conversations, and surveying young environmental professionals and EcoLeader community members;
3. Distillation of common ideas and best practices for advancing equity and justice, particularly in relation to environmental organizations, educational programs, and career services;
4. Review of National Wildlife Federation diversity initiatives and mission as well as EcoLeaders and EcoCareers programs to inform recommendations.

Supplementary research was done to identify relevant environmental professionals to interview and external organizations to publicize the survey efforts. Both efforts utilized the NWF's network, the EcoLeader Fellow's network, and research into networks of underrepresented environmentalists. Nineteen environmental professionals were interviewed through video calls, which were recorded with verbal permission from the interviewees. Collectively, these professionals spoke to years of experiences from each of the Green Career Sectors highlighted in the EcoLeaders community: Architecture and Building, Business and Purchasing, Climate Adaptation and Mitigation, Consumption and Waste, Education and Awareness, Equity and Environmental Justice, Food and Agriculture, Governance and Policy, Habitat and Wildlife, Outdoor Recreation, Sustainable Energy, Transportation, and Water and Wastewater.

## Core Findings

Preliminary research that guided this work focused on the function and development of social capital to better understand key aspects of career success. The economic and sociological forces engrained in our relationships and daily interactions plays a critical role in educational and career success.

*Social Capital:* There are many definitions for social capital available in the literature, but almost all contain a central focus on relationships of reciprocal benefit that foster access to tangible or intangible resources and achievement of shared goals. The dimensions of social capital considered here are those laid out by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998): structural, cognitive, and relational. The structural dimension of social capital is the most conspicuous and refers to the social network that individuals fit into, including the roles, ties, and rules that shape this network. The cognitive dimension involves the shared systems of meaning such as language, values, and goals which provide the foundation for effective communication between parties. The relational dimension of social capital is concerned with the characteristics of personal relationships. This can be examined through histories of interaction and personal traits such as identity, trustworthiness, and expectations. These dimensions do not possess clear boundaries between them and will be treated as highly interconnected. For example, while identity is listed under the relational dimension of social capital, a shared identity often facilitates the shared systems of meaning and connection of people to a community which characterize the cognitive and structural dimensions respectively.

For the purposes of this paper, the two main forms of social capital will also be defined as such:

*Bonding Social Capital* refers to connections between individuals belonging to the same community or social group. This form can influence every dimension of social capital such that strong trust, shared identity, and network closure are associated with bonding forces. Bonding is also characterized by strong relationships such as those with family members, close friends, and neighbors. Members often maintain highly similar network resources, thus limiting the access of individuals to opportunities beyond their own. While bonding can be a critical source of solidarity and support, social exclusion is a common result of networks with excessive bonding. This homogeneity can then facilitate biases that breed racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of outgroup discrimination.

*Bridging Social Capital* describes ties between people that cross societal cleavages such as race or class and acts to connect people of disparate communities. This form also acts across the various dimensions of social capital, where structural holes in networks can be filled by bridges with those who are connected much differently through their own network. Moreover, these connections are often formed between individuals sharing similar interests or goals rather than identities.

This understanding of the details, dimensions, and forms of social capital was used to develop the interview and survey questions as well as code and coalesce the results of these efforts into recommendations.

## Interviews with Underrepresented Environmental Professionals

### Destructive Forces

In interviewing underrepresented environmental professionals, a major barrier that predictably emerged was a lack of representation for people with their identities in the environmental field. This is an important aspect for career success for many reasons, especially considering the forms and dimensions of social capital. Close, bonding relationships are often connections made with those of similar identities, backgrounds, and networks. These are also the connections most likely to be important gaining further education or jobs. If fewer people from communities of color are present in the environmental field, others from their community are also less likely to have points of accessibility located in the field. Interviewees often spoke of the lack of significant network connections to the environmental field as a barrier to their careers. Additionally, many interviewees reported that they did not feel seen, valued, or supported in spaces without people of shared identities, particularly race or ethnicity. As most environmental organizations are predominately white institutions (PWI), it follows that many non-white interviewees spoke of primary support networks outside of their place of work. These were often informal community organizations or shared identity networks and groups such as Environmentalist of Color.

*Systems of Advantage and Oppression:* An overwhelming majority of interviewees reported experiencing and being affected by microaggressions in their work life. Of those who mentioned this, the majority (62.5%) experienced repeated and pervasive microaggressions from their superiors or peers. All who mentioned experiencing microaggressions in the environmental field reported this as a significant barrier to their career success. [Research](#) has reaffirmed the experience of subtle discrimination has equal or greater negative consequences for employees than overt discrimination. Another concern shared among interviewees was a lack of cultural capital, or social assets that facilitate mobility such as manner of speech, educational status, or possessions. In attempts to gain greater cultural capital, many interviewees found themselves attempting to assimilate to a white-dominated culture via code switching or spending beyond their means to be accepted or appear qualified. Moreover, several interviewees felt they were stuck in lower ranks of their organizations because they had not made connections with leadership through cultural capital as their white counterparts were able to. Pay gaps between races and ethnicities with similar qualifications are a metric that interviewees also mentioned to this concern. The white-dominated environmental field was reported to be generally difficult and traumatic to infiltrate by interviewees due to the white supremacist roots of conservation and environmentalism in the United States.

*Mental Health:* Many interviewees spoke to being affected by the unfortunate experience of imposter syndrome, an intense anxiety where one doubts their very real capabilities in fear of being exposed as a fraud. This is an especially common phenomenon in underrepresented groups in STEM such as women of color. Lack of representation has been directly tied to imposter syndrome both by interviewees and research. Related to this concern was an intense pressure to be the perfect employee, student, or intern. As one interviewee phrased it, they felt underrepresented folk “had to work twice as hard to get half as far” as those with privilege. Looming behind this perceived need was mentions of stereotype threats and discrimination.

Additionally, handling crises, violence, and tragedies within personal lives and the environmental field was greatly taxing to the mental health of interviewees. Within these stories of struggles with traumatic experiences, there was the added concern of keeping up with work or school. Interviewees identified that there is little space in educational and work culture for being a whole individual. Grieving, healing, and growing are not considered relevant or appropriate for the workplace; yet many people are consistently experiencing the weight and complications of these processes. Interviewees that mentioned experiencing imposter syndrome, perfectionism, or trauma in their educational or working career all reported these having significant negative implications for their success.

### Constructive Forces

*Community and Family:* Unsurprisingly, most interviewees identified strong, close bonds as the primary source of support for pursuing their career. This often had less to do with connections to job opportunities or developing hard STEM skills and more with transmission of soft skills, logistical (childcare, housekeeping, etc.) and financial support. Moreover, these were often the people that interviewees mentioned developing their interest and passion for the environment. Family activities outdoors and community relationships with local land were a common theme in this regard, often inspiring professionals to pursue further education in the environmental field. Many interviewees mentioned turning to community settings and organizations for motivation, support, and fulfillment. Several interviewees expressed that community activism for social and environmental justice outside of their work allowed them to heal from marginalization in their career.

*Mentorship:* When asked about the role of mentors in their career success, almost all interviewees attributed significant network connections, job opportunities, or educational success to mentorship from established environmental professionals. All interviewees who did not receive mentorship listed it as a program that would've been helpful in overcoming barriers to their career. Leadership within environmental organizations, professors and teachers, and community elders were cited most often as impactful mentors. Mentors often helped interviewees identify or obtain relevant funding for education, research, or projects. Interviewees also received guidance on project management and academic advising from these mentors. Many interviewees received informal mentorship that was initiated by themselves rather than the mentor. Voluntary matching often resulted in mentors sharing gender and racial identities with interviewees. A few interviewees received formal mentorship through programs that matched mentees with an external professional based on their interests (ex: Young Professionals of Color). Structural mentorship often included regular meetings and professional development trainings. Both groups spoke highly of their mentorship experiences.

*Peers:* Interviewees mentioned peer mentorship and support as a constructive force in their career nearly as often as mentorship from established professionals. Peers were referenced as a key source of connections to job opportunities, information, and emotional support. The strong bonds described between interviewees and peers could also categorize them as friends, but joint membership or interest in the environmental field was distinctly valued among interviewees. Peers were often the people interviewees partnered with to develop the research, presentations, and events that served to further their environmental careers.

*Programs Supporting Underrepresented Environmentalists:* Many interviewees are alumni of programs specifically concerned with providing career building opportunities to populations underrepresented in STEM or the environmental field specifically (ex: Environmental Fellows Program). All interviewees that participated in and mentioned such programs identified these experiences as crucial support for their career in terms of network building, mental health, and skill acquisition. Interviewees often attributed access to further opportunities to their participation in such programs. The cohort model was employed by all programs referenced by interviewees. This focus on peer connection and support was considered very beneficial by interviewees who were often still in close relationships with other cohort members.

*Organizational JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Initiatives:* Within both educational and environmental organizations, interviewees found companionship and advocacy among colleagues participating in JEDI initiatives. Committees and workgroups specifically focused on this topic often gathered individuals with shared values and goals and created a sense of community. Interviewees reported these initiatives, when genuinely invested in, also increased their sense of belonging and support at their institution.

### Environmental Organizations

Interviewees were asked to provide insight on the central question of this research: how should environmental organizations and the educational and career services programming they offer uplift diversity in the environmental field? Common themes will be presented here and best practices or specific recommendations relevant to the NWF and EcoLeaders will be shared in later sections.

*Shared Values and Narratives:* When asked how important it is to work for an organization that shared their values and goals, most interviewees replied that this is critically important to where they decide to work. Of those interviewed, 78.9% responded that they did not believe major environmental organizations like the National Wildlife Federation shared their values and goals. Many pointed to the lack of diversity, lack of environmental justice focus, unreconciled white supremacist history, and problematic donor relationships within such organizations when answering this question.

"The environmental movement has been historically white-washed and there is a false narrative that black people and people of color don't even care about environmental issues...that false narrative is real and reflected in the fact that a lot of traditional environmental organizations like the National Wildlife Federation and the Sierra Club are not diverse in their staff and their work doesn't have a lens that's intersectional and interdisciplinary. In my mind the environmental movement is intersectional in nature. It is important for any organization working on environmental issues to include diverse perspectives intentionally through people of color and people from different backgrounds in their work, but also make sure that they feel included and that the culture of the organization is equitable. Then, think about the work that you do; what impact are you trying to have? Are incorporating environmental justice and equity into your work?"

– **Environmental Professional**

*Investing in Underrepresented Young Environmental Professionals:* Interviewees spoke adamantly about creating a pipeline of education and skill building that connects early childhood experiences through adulthood. A genuine investment will include financial support to these

individuals. Interviewees also heavily emphasized investing in the next generation of environmentalist will also mean investing in their communities and families. As with many of the interviewees, introductions to the environmental field typically begins with relationships to the land fostered by family and community. However, BIPOC and low-income communities are significantly more likely to house polluting industry, environmentally degraded areas, and hazardous waste. Moreover, this same communities also have less access to green spaces and resources to maintain green spaces than white, wealthy communities. Major environmental organizations have the power to invest in community capacity and advocate nationally for change on these fronts. Moreover, young people can be empowered and educated to be the stewards of sustainable and equitable communities. Many more specific programmatic recommendations will be found in the following sections.

## Surveys

The Young Environmental Professionals Needs and Experiences Survey was completed by 96 participants thanks to the distributive efforts of the NWF EcoLeaders community, Black Millennials for Flint, the Children and Nature Network, Powershift Network, the National Association of Environmental Professionals, and University of Michigan's School of Environment and Sustainability. All respondents were able to receive a voucher for a free EcoLeader certification upon completion of the certificate requirements as well as a chance to win one of three copies of "All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis". The full set of survey questions and possible responses is included in Appendix C.

### Demographics

A series of demographic questions were provided by NWF that were developed from an internal group. These questions provided valuable insights into the identities of survey participants and context to their answers.

*Age:* Respondents to the survey fell within an age range of 16 to 73 years old, with an average respondent of about 27.3 years old.

*Ability Status:* Respondents were asked how they describe their ability status. Most (57) did not identify with any impairment, condition, or disability, and 6 people preferred not to answer. 19 respondents identified as having a mental health, behavioral, neurological, and/or emotional condition. 7 people identified as having a vision impairment, 6 with a physical or mobility impairment, and 2 respondents with a hearing impairment. Respondents were able to write in any other impairment, condition, or disability that they did not feel was represented in the previous categories. 6 people identified as immunocompromised, having chronic pain and chronic illness, an unseen disability, borderline personality disorder, and severe attention deficit hyperactive disorder.

*Gender Identity:* 69 respondents to this survey identified as women, 19 identified as men, 6 people preferred not to answer and 2 identified as nonbinary. No respondents who chose to answer identified themselves as transgender.

*LGBTQ:* A third (32) of respondents identified as LGBTQ+ while 58 respondents did not and 6 people preferred not to disclose this information.



*Racial and Ethnic Identity:* The responses from Figure 1 were received when respondents were asked to choose as many racial and/or ethnic identity/identities that describe them.

96 responses

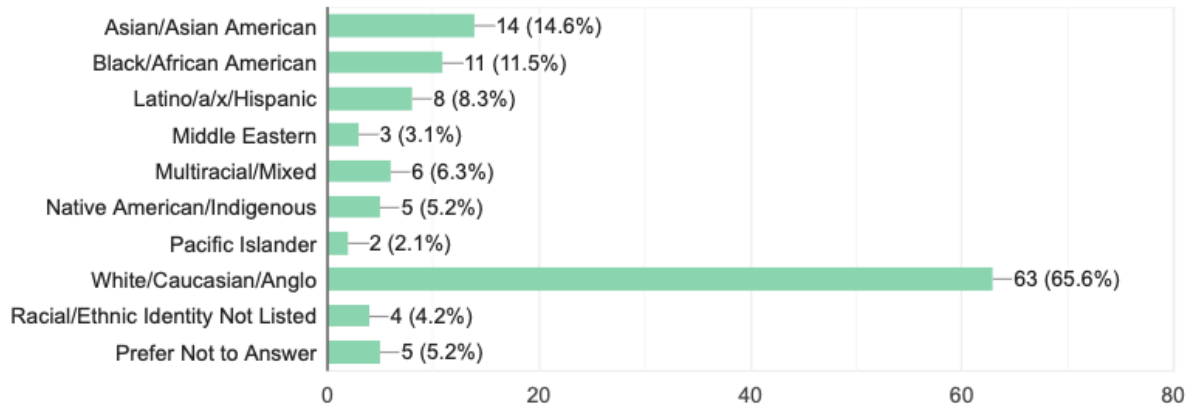


Figure 1. Racial and ethnic identities of survey respondents.

### Needs and Experiences

*What has been the MOST challenging aspect of pursuing an environmental career?*

Participants were able to choose one or two of the prewritten responses or write in their own answer. The most common response chosen by 45 participants was “financial barriers to pursuing careers in the environmental field”. The second and third most common responses were “lack of access to career development opportunities such as internships and research” (36 respondents) and “financial barriers to pursuing education” (30), respectively. Other challenges included health related barriers (9), family related issues (8), lack of support from mentors (7), lack of support from family or close relationships (6), and racism and white supremacy in the environmental field (5). Twelve written answers were submitted with challenges such as lack of available jobs (entry, mid and high level), job openings requiring higher degrees, lack of livable wages, and lack of community knowledge about environmental issues.

*Where do you get the MOST support for furthering your environmental career?* Participants were asked to choose a maximum of three prewritten responses or write in their own answers. Figure 2 depicts the answers obtained with one participant writing in their current job as a support system for their environmental career:

96 responses

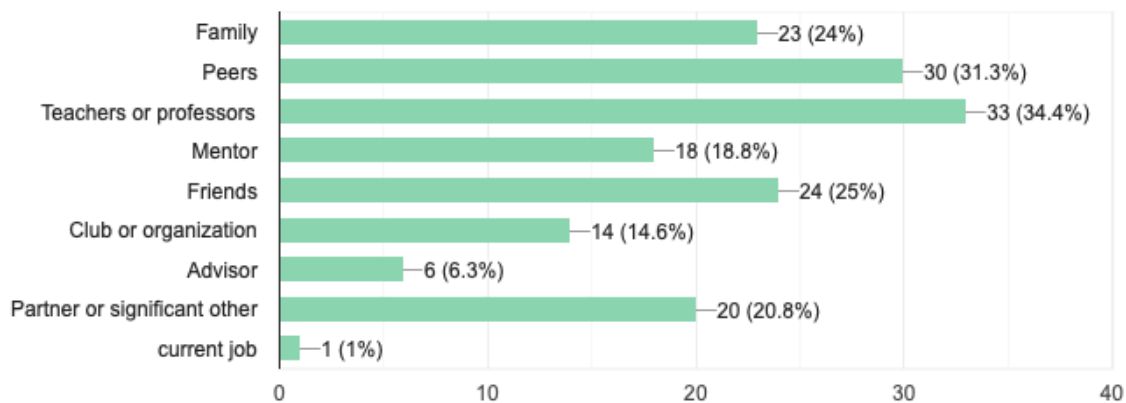


Figure 2. Support systems of survey respondents.

*Do you believe your values are shared by major environmental organizations, such as the National Wildlife Federation or the Nature Conservancy?*

96 responses

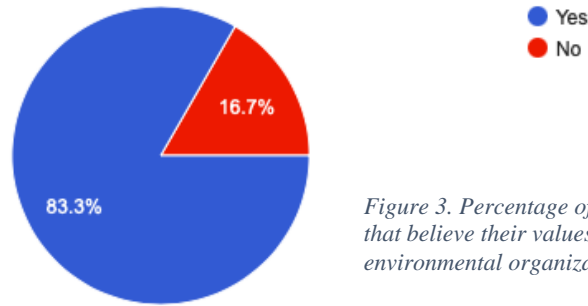


Figure 3. Percentage of survey respondents that believe their values are shared by major environmental organizations.

Sixteen participants responded no to this question and 80 participants responded yes. When participants were asked to explain the reasoning behind their answers, many felt they shared a fundamental value of nature and conservation with organizations like the NWF. Of those who did not feel they shared values with organizations like NWF, they pointed to Eurocentric ideas of conservation, lack of an environmental justice focus, and colonial value systems. One such response is offered below:

“I think some of the older environmental organizations are still in the process of becoming more diverse and justice-focused. It feels like I’m constantly hearing about another instance of racism or sexism or harassment at legacy nonprofits like Audubon. The major organizations in the environmental field are so overwhelmingly white, and at least from my perspective they all seem to focus more on old-school environmentalist efforts like conservation and wildlife protection and less on the people-focused things that matter more to me like climate justice and environmental racism. I think all of the large environmental organizations should be working on diversifying their labor force in meaningful ways, not just symbolic or surface-level ways, and on making sure their work takes environmental justice into account.”  
– **Survey Respondent**

*Do you trust major environmental organizations, such as the National Wildlife Federation or the Nature Conservancy, to address the climate crisis and protect biodiversity as is their mission?*

96 responses

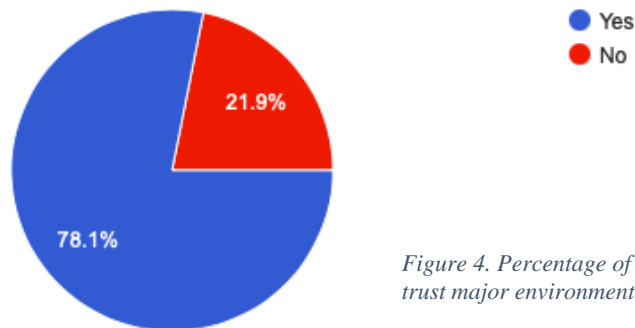


Figure 4. Percentage of survey participants that trust major environmental organizations.

21 participants responded no to this question and 80 participants responded yes. Figure 4 depicts this response. When participants were asked to explain the reasoning behind their answers, many who trusted major organization expressed a shared concern of climate change mitigation, value of biodiversity, and appreciation for their contributions to scientific and political advancement of sustainability. Those who answered no and even some that answered yes expressed concerns that these organization are too heavily influenced by their donors to take the necessary political and organizational actions to achieve such goals such as holding major polluting industries to account. A common comment was about the capability of such organizations to deliver adequate change required by their missions. Participants expressed that the actions of environmental organizations will not be and has not been enough, and that cooperation across society is necessary.

“I think the people who work at these organizations generally share my values in protecting the planet and standing up against environmental degradation, which is why I said yes to the first question [about shared values]. However, I think powerful lobbying (like from oil and gas) can pressure these organizations to not call for large enough changes that we need urgently.”  
 – Survey Respondent

*How important is it for you to work for or be affiliated with an environmental organization that shares your values/beliefs?*

96 responses

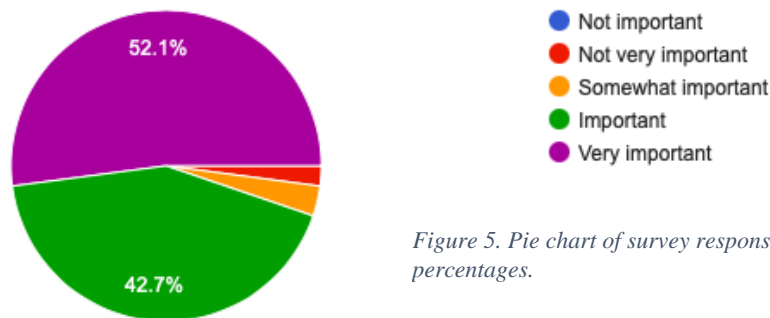


Figure 5. Pie chart of survey responses in percentages.

Fifty participants responded that it is very important for them to work for or be affiliated with an environmental organization that shares their values or beliefs. 41 participants indicated that this is important to them, 3 responded this was somewhat important, and 2 that this is not very important. These results are shown in a pie chart above.

*How has your identity (race/ethnicity, income level, age, gender, sexual orientation, educational background, etc.) influenced your experience within the environmental field or movement?*

“Growing up my family was low-income and struggled with housing and food security, this did not allow the space for conversations about environmental crises to take place because they were not a major concern, more pressing issues were happening within the home. Growing up in this tax bracket also meant that I did not have access to grocery stores or health stores that promoted sustainability (bulk buying, reusable grocery bags, even recycling). I also grew up in an urban area and access to nature was not prevalent or easy to access. As a Black woman, safety has also been a large issue in regard to being in nature, especially alone.”

“As a queer WOC, it has been an incredibly difficult experience to be in such a white space with my values. I find that much the movement that has gained traction continues to discredit black and native movements, instead of uplifting their work.”

“My religion (Islam) is very strong when it comes to protecting the environment, so it leads the way for me to become a better activist and scientist.”

“I’ve been taught since a young age, through ceremony and traditional knowledge, that it is my responsibility to leave this world better than I entered it by doing everything in my power to protect her.”

My privilege has absolutely influenced by experience by way of making it more accessible and a "trusted" voice when advocating for the environment. However, being a guest on the land that is called "United States", I have further realized that despite my low socioeconomic level, I am more privileged than many because I have still been able to enjoy exploring and spending time on land that was stolen.

There were many thoughtful responses to this question and the majority of these reflected on intersecting identities of the respondents. A common theme throughout these responses was the struggle to be seen in or have access to the environmental field for those who have oppressed identities. Moreover, people with privileged identities readily identified themselves as such and spoke to how this has facilitated their environmental careers. Another common theme among these responses was the importance of participants’ backgrounds and identities in connecting them with environmentalism. Examples of these responses can be found above.

*What kind of career development program would be most empowering for your environmental career (select your top three choices):*

96 responses

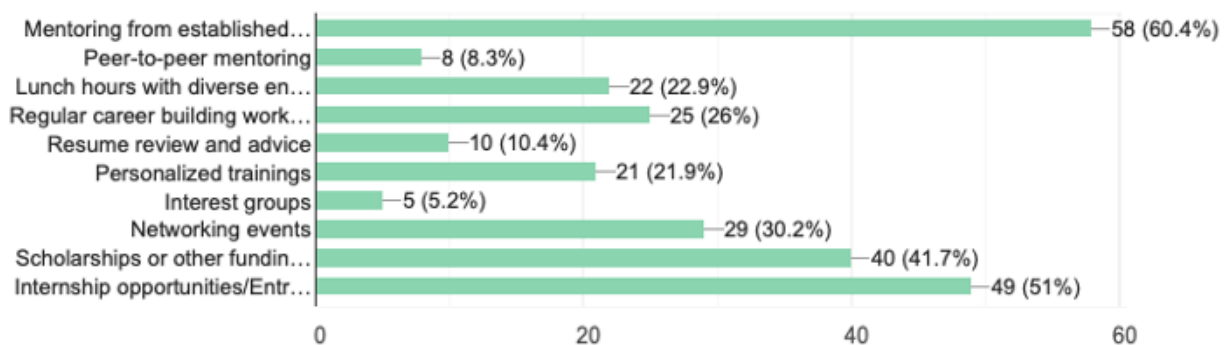


Figure 6. Survey results of career development programs participants are most interested in.

Participants were asked to choose up to three career development programs that would be most empowering for their environmental career from a set of prewritten responses. The most frequent responses were mentoring from established professionals (58 participants), internship opportunities/entry level job listings (49), and scholarships or other funding opportunities (40).

Other popular response were networking events (29), Regular career building workshops (25), lunch hours with diverse environmental professionals (22), personalized trainings (21). Less frequent answers included resume review and advice (10), peer-to-peer mentoring (8), and interest groups (5). Figure 6 depicts these results.

## Best Practices

### Environmental Organizations

To engage the people who have been historically excluded and harmed by the American environmentalism movement today, there must be a shift in how social capital is gained and expressed at major environmental organizations. Meaningful change is required at each dimension of social capital, where organizations redefine the nature of their relationships, shared understandings, and social network to center environmental justice. These efforts, of course, will reinforce each other; for example, genuinely supporting narratives and goals such as the white supremacist roots of the conservation movement and the need for returning stolen land will work to build trust among those whose communities have held these beliefs for generations. Moreover, these bridging activities provide opportunities to broaden and diversify the network ties of environmental organizations.

#### JEDI: Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

These best practices are mainly informed by [Green 2.0's Beyond Diversity: A Roadmap to Building an Inclusive Organization](#), the input of those interviewed and surveyed, and literature review of diversity and discrimination in the environmental field. A best practice would be to read in full and evaluate the relevance of the Beyond Diversity JEDI recommendations for the organization in question.

*Diversity in Leadership:* From research and interviews, it is apparent that people of color and women in environmental organizations encounter a glass ceiling that often results in their overrepresentation in the lowest ranks of such institutions. Environmental organizations are presented with the challenge to create representative leadership teams including senior staff and board members. Setting data-driven goals for the level of diversity increase for senior staff and board members to be representative was an action supported by both research and interviews. As shown in the Beyond Diversity report, organizations with diverse senior personnel are associated with other important organizational and JEDI indicators such as increased customers and market share as well as greater diversity in staff hires. Other relevant practices include creating a diversity manager position or diversity committee at the senior level of the organization. Additionally, Environmental NGO's and particularly foundations are encouraged to participate in [Green 2.0's annual transparency report cards](#). By tracking and providing data on the diversity of full-time and senior staff as well as board members, organizations make it plain for the public to judge what their value for diversity is. Thus, these metrics can also serve to attract diverse applicants. Most foundations which are key to funding conservation and environmental initiatives in the United States do not report such data to Green 2.0, while major NGOs tend to report.

*Truth and Reconciliation:* Strong, valued relationships maintain key elements of relational social capital such as trustworthiness and respect. Both qualities hinge upon truth-telling and good-faith between parties. Thus, for environmental organizations to create diverse and inclusive coalitions,

it is important to begin where such organizations began. Many historians trace the roots of the American environmental movement to mid-to-late 1800's romantic-transcendental conservation ethic developed by figures such as Emerson, Muir, and Pinchot. These men wrote and dreamed of virgin landscapes, unsullied by human hand or settlement. This essential idea, of protecting 'wilderness' from humans by segregating them, sparked the further removal of Indigenous peoples from their land to make way for the national parks system - an effort that earned Theodore Roosevelt the title of "the conservationist president". The history of exclusionary conservation is not one that recognizes the intimate relationships of humans with plants, animals, and other non-human beings. Instead, it provides insight on the origins of our current systems of oppression that inflict violence upon both the environment and those without privilege. We cannot begin to fix a problem without fully understanding it. Researching and communicating the history of legacy environmental organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation through the lens of the othered (BIPOC and low-income peoples) is critical for building trust with these communities. However, efforts cannot end here. Reconciliation will look different for every organization, as one interviewee put it: "know your history, own it, and reciprocate whatever harm has been done in greater good".

*Create a Shared Understanding:* The foundations of communication and cognitive social capital are language and narrative that are held in common. Many of the environmental organizations that have pledged themselves to value and increase diversity in their institution do not have a definition of diversity they utilize (Beyond Diversity). This should not be a moving target; internal and external partners should be able to clearly identify what the organization understands and values to effectively communicate on this important subject. Moreover, teasing apart the nuances present between justice and equity and diversity and inclusion allows for nuanced efforts to achieve these values.

*Culture of Care:* Organizations should be mindful that JEDI initiatives confront systems of violence and oppression which can weigh heavily on the wellbeing of their staff, particularly BIPOC people. Several interviewees reflected on the trauma inflicted or conjured by their organizations inconsiderate JEDI attempts. Therefore, it is important that these efforts come with boundaries. Firstly, BIPOC staff are not representatives for their race or ethnicity and should not be expected to act as such. This also means that they should not be exploited as tokens to diversify JEDI committees or workgroups. If such staff are able and want to do this work, they must be compensated fairly and not expected to donate their time. While many interviewees spoke of mental health as a significant challenge to their environmental career and of them, none could cite mental health resources offered to them through their organization. Creating a culture of care begins by recognizing and valuing employees as humans and community members. The health of employees should be a central tenant of organizational culture and expressed through initiatives for work-life balance, fair wages, health benefits and free mental health resources. Moreover, several interviewees recommended that organizations employ trauma-informed trainers (ex: [Aorta](#)) to facilitate relevant JEDI initiatives.

#### Utilize Organization Platform to Uplift JEDI in the Environmental Field and Movement

Major environmental organizations yield not only power in the form of funds, but also influence in terms of public opinion and attention. These organizations should be consistently utilizing their platform to uplift the work of BIPOC environmental professionals, organizations, and

activists. This may be through social media, conferences, partnerships, or research. Moreover, major environmental organizations hold sway among other major organizations in the environmental space; this influence can be used to demand representation and JEDI initiatives as a necessary standard for the legitimacy of such institutions.

#### Create Strong and Equitable Partnerships with Community Organizations

There are many community-based organizations which directly address intersectional environmental issues at the local level. A list of relevant organizations which arose out of this research and in interviews with environmental professionals can be found in Appendix A. Such partnerships ground the actions of large, national organizations within the local communities where they operate. Supporting and guiding initiatives based off local expertise and needs should be foundational to community-based conservation goals. Community organizations are already positioned and conducting such work. Large conservation organizations are known to extract the work and knowledge of communities or excluded local people from decision making for conservation projects on their land. Partnerships which are equitable must empower local people's conservation culture and fairly compensate their work.

#### Advocate for Equitable Environmental and STEM Education Nationally

Major environmental organizations have been in the business of advocating for changes in government policies and spending for generations. Utilize organizational networks, resources, and platform to advocate for increased spending on environmental and STEM education in low-income communities and communities of color. The current administration's Justice40 Initiative indicates a willingness to target resources to disadvantaged communities. This is an opportunity to uplift the next generations of U.S. students by investing in their education. These programs can also act to increase community capacity and sustainability by partnering with local environmental groups. Moreover, environmental organizations should take seriously the barrier of unaffordable higher education in the United States. This was the third most prominent challenge survey respondents encountered when pursuing their environmental career. For the majority low-to moderate income people, this barrier effectively blocks a key career development pathway which would facilitate their entry into the environmental workforce.

#### Create Paid Career Building Opportunities for Young Professionals

Overwhelmingly, young and established environmental professionals have indicated that a lack of access to career building opportunities like internships and research is the greatest challenge to pursuing an environmental career. Major environmental organizations can play a critical role in expanding the availability and accessibility of such opportunities. Creating more entry-level (internship, fellowship, and research) positions across all levels of operation would certainly address this issue. Investing in the next generation of environmental leaders may simply look like *paying* them. It is not equitable nor accessible to offer unpaid internships. Many low-income people simply do not have the same qualifications as their privileged counterparts because they cannot afford to work for free. Moreover, all entry level positions must provide a truly livable wage with respect to the local cost of living. Another major insight from the participants of this research was a high level of frustration and discouragement in pursuing an environmental career due to the low wages that characterize the field.

#### Environmental Justice in All Programs

Environmental Justice (EJ) is often understood in its absence, where people of color and low-income communities disproportionately experience the environmental hazards associated with development. EJ recognizes the need to disrupt structural environmental racism, classism, and sexism to promote both public and environmental health. The principles of environmental justice, established at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, emphasize such interconnected rights, responsibilities, and needs of people and the land. Protecting the environment and people is a value shared by many humans across societal cleavages, and thus a concept ripe for bridging. Yet throughout its evolution, the environmental movement has been continuously criticized for excluding and upholding the oppression of non-White and low-income peoples. In *The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations*, Dr. Dorceta Taylor finds from her analysis of nearly 300 environmental institutions in the US that people of color never comprised more than 16% of staff while representing nearly 38% of the U.S. population and were less likely to occupy leadership positions. Contrastingly, many of these participating organizations expressed a desire to diversify their staff, board, and partners; this disconnect was sharply felt by professionals interviewed from these organizations who pointed to the alienating dominant culture and mission of their institutions working against any push for progress (Taylor, 2014). The question emerges: how can these environmental organization build meaningful bridges with the BIPOC and low-income populations they wish to engage? In both the literature review and interviews for this research, there was a consistent call to integrate EJ into the mission of major environmental organizations. Due to the highly intersectional, political, and participatory nature of EJ, genuine integration requires a radical reimagining of all operations of an institution. Critical to an organizational value of EJ are the JEDI initiatives in this section, but these are not sufficient. It was expressed many times in research and in interviews that including BIPOC people in an environmental field that is formulated from and recreating systems of oppression cannot be the goal of conservation institutions. This is a symbolic and ultimately ineffective form of valuing justice in the environmental movement. Environmental organizations should perform assessments of their built and social infrastructure as well as the impact of their operations through the lens of the 17 EJ principals and Jemez principals. As mentioned by interviewees, this understanding of environmental work goes far beyond the current conception of conservation.

### Education Programs and Career Services for YEP

These recommendations, even for major environmental organizations, will likely require increased capacity and staffing to carry out. Recognize this need as an opportunity to employ the other recommendations present in this report; organizations should be partnering both internally and externally as well as hiring diverse staff and leadership to create additional programming and resources. At the end of this report is a list of organizations and networks mentioned during the interview phase or captured during research that would serve as relevant partners in this work.

#### Create Consistent Networking Opportunities

*Established Professionals:* The network of major environmental organizations is broad and would be very helpful to young environmental professionals, especially from underrepresented communities. Inviting established professionals diverse in their identities and specializations to answer questions, provide guidance, and get to know small groups of young environmental professions could jumpstart important connections in the field.



*Peers:* There are many creative ways to engage young environmental professionals with each other (virtual study or writing groups, peer-to-peer mentoring, game nights for interest groups, local volunteering events, and many more). Most importantly, these programs should be consistent to allow for deeper bonding relationships to form.

#### Provide Financial Support for Career Building Activities

A major barrier to pursuing an environmental career is the currently exorbitant cost of higher education. There are several interventions major environmental organizations can offer to young students and low-income people pursuing other tracks in the environmental field. One interviewee had the fortunate experience of having access to an annual career development fund as a staff member of an environmental organization. They were able to attend conferences and trainings that would've been otherwise inaccessible to them. This kind of fund or microgrant to pursue career building activities, gain skills, fund unpaid internship, pay for transportation or childcare or otherwise remove barriers for YEP would certainly change lives. Several interviewees recommended such a program and specified that little restrictions or requirements should be placed on these funds, simply a description of the need and how this money would remove barriers for the applicant. Another direct relief effort would be to provide scholarships to students pursuing an environmental career with preference for underrepresented populations.

#### Build Interdisciplinary and Systems Thinking Skills

Traditional job sectors within the environmental field do not fully encompass the range of opportunities and needs for skilled professionals to address urgent sustainability needs. All jobs can contribute towards environmental justice, sustainable communities, and protecting biodiversity. However, this requires a fundamental shift in the imagining of young professionals. By training youth to approach issues in the environment from an interdisciplinary approach with systems thinking, they will be better prepared to handle the wicked problems of our time. This will likely include soft skill development, which employers often expect candidates to bring with them into a job. Examples interviewees mentioned include negotiation, science communication, critical thinking, community engagement, and intersectionality.

#### Develop Programs That Fulfill Underrepresented Environmentalists' Needs

To create educational and career building programs which genuinely address the needs of underrepresented YEP, organizations should understand the challenges and support systems of the communities they serve.

*Tailored Mentorship:* The most common response among YEP surveyed on what kind of career development program would be most empowering for their environmental career was mentoring from established professionals. Furthermore, the recommendation of the Beyond Diversity report is to create a formal mentoring program targeted specifically at upper levels and at people of color. This means that there is a concerted communication effort to invite relevant people of color to join this program and mentors are in senior or leadership positions. Ideally, mentees would be given profiles of professionals with shared career interests to select a mentor from. There should also be a clearly communicated and required standard and frequency of meeting to ensure mentees received effective guidance. This program model was also suggested to be used between staff of an environmental organization.

*Cohort Model:* Nearly a third of survey respondents identified peers as the group providing the most support for their environmental career, making this the second most frequent answer. Moreover, most interviewees identified their peers as critical support systems for resiliency and advancement in the environmental field. Those who had participated in or lead career development programs that employed cohorts highly recommended this model for engagement. Such arrangements, where a group of participants move through the various aspects of a program, allow for experiences and interests to be shared across different identities; thus, creating a scenario where bridging social capital can form strong network connections for unrepresented environmentalists to peers in their field. The cohort model must be designed with JEDI as goals of the group which are clearly understood and practiced being effective in empowering underrepresented environmentalists. Underrepresented professionals often spoke highly of participating in diversity-in-STEM focused cohorts. These groups provided interviewees a sense of belonging and value within their field as well as deep bonding and bridging relationships. Conversely, when interviewees found themselves as distinct minorities within white-dominated cohorts there were consistent mentions of exclusion, tokenism, and discrimination.

## **Recommendations**

### **National Wildlife Federation**

The NWF is one of the United States' largest conservation organizations and therefore bears a large responsibility to pursue a healthy and just environment for all residents. To do so, there are many systems of oppression that must be confronted such as patriarchy, racial capitalism, and colonialism. While all the above best practices apply to the work of the NWF, these recommendations address specific efforts the organization should consider.

### Truth and Reconciliation

If it is true that NWF believes “America’s experience with cherished landscapes and wildlife has helped define and shape our national character and identity for generations”, there is urgent need for the organization to recognize our true “conservation heritage” as referenced from its mission. The conservation movement is intimately tied to the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people as well as slavery and racial capitalism. However, at the heart of NWF’s branding is the protection of wildlife, not people. This persistent myth of the nature-cultural binary is a distinctly European idea. One that has been used to justify such violence. The Common Agenda for Wildlife measures success in terms of dollars donated, “acres of public and tribal land” preserved, and evoked the heroism of America’s “conservation army”. These goals perpetuate problematic economies, land formations, and glorification of institutions of violence. Thus, it is not surprising that current narrative that the NWF shares with the public about conservation can be distinctly alienating to BIPOC communities. The NWF must reckon with the history of conservation in the United States and its place within this legacy. [Such efforts demonstrated by the Sierra club](#) represent a serious step forward for environmentalism in the US. Moreover, this truth-telling must be connected with significant efforts to reconcile with the past. This should look like substantial support for anti-racist and decolonial movements such as reparations, Land Back, and BIPOC sovereignty.

*Environmental Education:* The NWF’s goal to engage “25 million young people across 20,000 schools in environmental education and recurring outdoor experiences” has the potential to

empower many environmental justice communities. In such communities, STEM education has experienced significant disinvestment and green spaces are generally inaccessible. Environmental justice communities should be preferentially chosen as sites for environmental education investments. Several interviewees emphasized that environmental education programs from the NWF should be focused on teaching skills for community sustainability. Topics recommended included diverse farming systems, food sovereignty, Indigenous sustainability, environmental remediation, watershed conservation, and creating green spaces.

*Establish a SWOP Commission:* The demands of the 1990 letter from South West Organizing Project and signees to NWF were clear and there is still critical need for these to be met. The environmental injustices outlined in this letter continue to be perpetrated by large conservation organizations such as the NWF. Establishing a SWOP commission that helps guide the mission and operations of the NWF would be an essential paradigm-shift towards accountability and environmental justice in all programs. This group should be mainly comprised of and actively engage environmental justice community advocates and organizations. The NWF can hold other major environmental organizations that received a copy of the SWOP letter accountable by calling for them

*Build a Representative Workforce at all Levels:* As shown in Figure 7 below, the NWF has been committed to transparently increasing the people of color in its workforce. Yet, there is still a distinct overrepresentation of White people in the NWF workforce. The 2020 United States Census estimates the “White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent” of the national population to be at [60.1%](#). The National Wildlife Federation should set targeted goals in its JEDI plan for increasing the number of BIPOC people among staff. It is crucial that gains in BIPOC workers be done across all levels of the organization, namely leadership, for reasons listed in the best practices sections of this report.

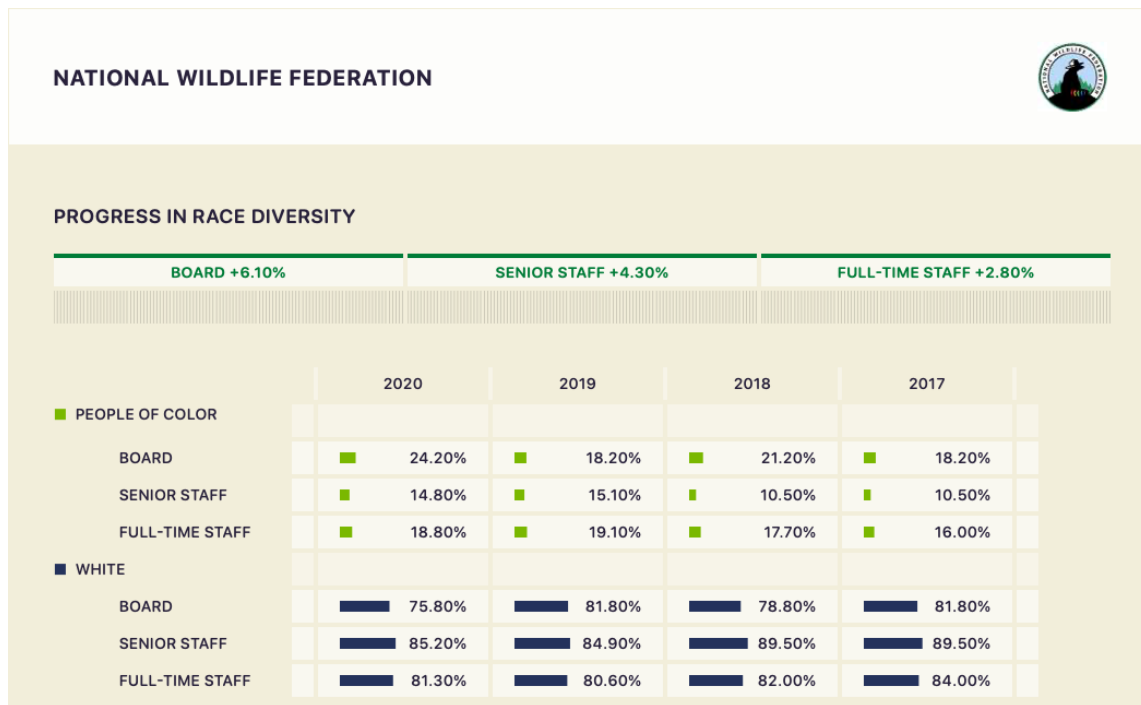


Figure 7. The National Wildlife Federation’s 2020 Transparency Report Card from Green 2.0

## EcoLeaders and EcoCareers

### Continual Needs and Equity Assessments

The design of these programs should ultimately be informed by the needs and experiences of the people that it serves. Moreover, an equity assessment should evaluate the structure and impact of these programs. A recommendation that emerged from interviews was to perform continual needs and equity assessments of EcoLeaders and EcoCareers. This [list of JEDI focused consultants](#) was shared and includes many groups that are capable of doing such assessments.

### Expand Career Services

From this study, it is clear that there are many barriers between young environmental professionals and their career goals. EcoCareers is well positioned to generate programming aimed at removing these barriers with specific attention to challenges that persist due to structural inequities. While the EcoLeaders and EcoCareers programs are currently geared towards young people planning to attend or currently attending universities, many potential environmentalists are missing in this approach. Moreover, those who cannot afford to attend high education are often not able to access affordable career services. EcoCareers Services can fill this gap by offering career services akin to university career centers for free.

*External Funding:* A major barrier that has been established by survey and interview participants is a lack of funding for career advancement opportunities (education, training, attending conferences, etc.). However, sorting through relevant and current funding opportunities related to fields of interest can take a significant amount of time and energy. Moreover, EcoLeaders who are not attending a university may not have ready access to broader funding lists at all. Thus, sending out a monthly list of funding opportunities relevant to careers in the environmental field alongside the Green Jobs Network Newsletter is recommended. These lists should be shared to the NWF's social media network to reach a broader audience. Consistent funding opportunities tied to specific EcoTopics could be researched and displayed on these pages.

*Internal Funding:* Establishing a career development fund is a direct way in which NWF EcoLeaders could invest in removing barriers to their community. This fund should prioritize underrepresented environmentalists and have very few requirements for eligibility. For example, the application could include demographics questions and a statement of need. Moreover, a financial hardship waiver for the EcoLeader certifications and career consultations should be offered to allow low-income people equal access to NWF opportunities.

*Training:* The Professional Development Offerings includes some webinars geared towards providing useful guidance to young professionals. A significant amount of survey participants (21.9%) were interested in personalized trainings as a career development program. A best practice would be to guide training development based off the recommended needs assessment. Moreover, a training specific to each EcoCareer Sector that includes underrepresented environmental professionals and specific environmental justice considerations in that field would provide a useful baseline for community members.

*Academic Advising and Resources for First Generation Students:* Many interviewees were able to speak to the disorienting, isolating, and anxiety-ridden experience of navigating universities as

a first-generation college student. Interviewees that claimed this identity often cited a lack of information or a supportive structure as major barriers to their success.

*Networking:* The EcoLeaders community has a great amount of potential to foster bridging relationships that can serve to create a more representative environmental field. However, the current level of interpersonal engagement in the virtual community does not reflect this potential. Building vibrancy within the community will require greater connectivity and relationship building opportunities. There are several interventions which can be had within the current community structure to provide such interactions. One being an introduction system. As EcoLeaders join the community, they can enroll in an introduction system which matches them with other EcoLeaders with shared interests or randomly. Moreover, regular networking events based on EcoCareer interests could be advertised broadly beyond the EcoLeaders community. Other efforts to increase interpersonal interactions should be built into the infrastructure of the EcoLeaders community. This will also likely require utilizing the virtual setting to organize in-person networking events. Several interviewees reflected after a year and a half of virtual networking events due to COVID-19, these efforts can only go so far. EcoLeaders are located nationally but the EcoLeaders community space could be a hub for regional and local event organizing. NWF's regional offices have the capacity to host networking nights, socials for YEP, sustainability events, or career fairs with the EcoLeaders community as the driving force. These are the spaces which meaningful bridging connections can be formed and have positive impacts on career outcomes.

*EcoMentors:* As previously explored in this report, mentors can have transformative effects for the career outcomes of young professionals. Moreover, a mentorship program was highly desired by EcoLeaders and YEP generally. The EcoMentors program should follow recommendations from Beyond Diversity's "Provide Mentoring Programs with Careful Matching and Monitoring" section. These would need to be adapted to connect mentors and mentees over regular virtual meetings. Recognizing a personalized program could not be offered to all EcoLeaders, to prioritize equity within the community would require a model similar to the NWF-supported Young Professionals of Color (YPC) Mentorship Program.

#### Collaborations with Internal and External Partners

##### *Detroit Leadership and Environmental Education Program (D-LEEP):*

D-LEEP has an extraordinary potential to collaborate with and bolster the EcoLeaders community. D-LEEP offers a starkly place-based, anti-racist, and anti-colonial approach to environmental education which EcoLeaders does not currently have the capacity to offer. However, this is precisely the kind of work and education that is needed to steward a more representative and just environmental field. Thus, the D-LEEP leadership should be engaged to identify points of intersection and potential collaboration with the EcoLeaders community. Presently, the EcoLeaders community can provide a forum for participants of D-LEEP to connect and showcase their work. The D-LEEP curriculum includes creating a sustainability project which is eligible for an EcoLeaders certification and should be supported as such. More broadly, NWF should engage the D-LEEP leadership to scope the potential for creating such curriculum in other regions.

*Earth Tomorrow:* There is important overlap in the target audience of Earth Tomorrow, EcoLeaders, and the many other educational programs of the NWF. In total, these programs are aimed at serving youth at nearly every age and could create a pathway for continued support through and beyond primary education. As the Earth Tomorrow program shifts to national virtual meetings, EcoLeaders and ET as national programs are uniquely positioned within NWF to form connections between these many educational efforts.

*Young Environmental Professionals Organizations:* Throughout this research, the EcoLeader Fellow encountered and recorded many different organizations serving young environmentalists. These organizations were contacted to share the YEP Needs and Experiences Survey and an email list can be found in Appendix D. Such organizations are ideal partners for growing and supporting the EcoLeaders community.

### EcoLeaders Certifications

This is a far underutilized program within the EcoLeaders community that currently has little opportunity for relationship building. Adopting a cohort model for this program may address both issues. As recommended by interviewees, the cohort model allows for peers to network, support each other's work, and gain valuable experience in the field. Each semester or academic year, the NWF could support a group of EcoLeaders hoping to work towards their certification. Cohorts could meet monthly, discuss progress and challenges, and receive support from the EcoLeaders community. This could look like providing or helping secure funding for sustainability projects.

### Environmental Justice in All Programs

While stated above, it is worth baring this point out within the specific context of the EcoLeaders and EcoCareers programs. Equity and Environmental Justice is offered as a green career sector and Justice as an EcoTopic, however these concepts cannot be substantially separated from the other endeavors in environmentalism. This kind of paradigm can allow for an interested EcoLeader to explore a career in Climate Adaptation and Mitigation per say, another green career sector, without ever confronting the disproportionate contributions of the Global North to greenhouse gas emissions. Incorporating the intersections of environmental justice within all aspects of the potential futures in the environmental field EcoLeaders are exposed to is an important narrative shift for the NWF.

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## **APPENDIX A - Organizational Partnership Opportunities**

Throughout the interview and research process, many organizations and networks were mentioned and recommended to engage with for further information and potential partnership development. Below are some of those entities with their own mission or description:

- **Black Millennials For Flint (#BM4F):** A grassroots, environmental justice and civil rights organization with the purpose of bringing like-minded organizations together to collectively take action and advocate against the crisis of lead exposure specifically in African American & Latino communities throughout the nation.

- **Black to the Land:** A coalition of Black, Indigenous and People of Color nature enthusiasts, intent on helping fellow BIPOC actively engage in meaningful outdoor adventures.
- **Blacks In Green (BIG™):** Serves as a bridge and catalyst among communities and their stakeholders in the design and development of green, self-sustaining, mixed-income, walkable-villages in communities owned and populated by African Americans. In these places, every household can walk-to-work, walk-to-shop, walk-to-learn, walk-to-play, and neighbor dollars circulate to reduce greenhouse gases.
- **Breakthrough Central Texas (BCT):** BCT creates a path to and through college for students who will become the first in their families to earn a college degree. At the core of our model are three main pillars. Each pillar provides students skills and experiences that address the three critical factors that limit academic success and persistence: unequal out-of-school academic opportunities, the lack of a knowledgeable personal advocate and the development of non-cognitive skills. Our model fills these gaps, leveling the education playing field.
- **Center for Diversity & the Environment (CDE) - National Environmental Professionals of Color Network:** 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. EPOC chapters are currently active in Atlanta, Seattle, Portland, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., with chapters under development in San Francisco, Denver, Boston, and in multiple cities in North Carolina.
- **Children & Nature Network:** We believe that the well-being of children and the wild places we love are inextricably linked. And while research tells us that regular time outdoors is essential for children's healthy development, today's kids are less connected to nature than ever before. We support and mobilize leaders, educators, activists, practitioners, and parents working to turn the trend of an indoor childhood back out to the benefits of nature—and to increase safe and equitable access to the natural world for all.
- **College Greenlight:** Resources and community for Community Based Organizations, counselors and colleges working to support first-generation, low income and underrepresented students.
- **Earth Corps:** building a global community of young leaders trained in ecological restoration. Each year we bring together passionate and hardworking young adults — who we call corps members — from the United States and across the globe for an environmental leadership development and green-jobs training program where we care for the lands and waters of Puget Sound.
- **Environmental Fellows Program (EFP):** EFP at the Yale School of the Environment (YSE), in partnership with the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA), is a 12-week summer fellowship opportunity that seeks to diversify the environmental field by cultivating the career aspirations of master's and doctoral students from historically underrepresented groups by connecting students to work opportunities in environmental nonprofits, grant makers, and government sectors.
- **Environmentalists of Color Network:** Environmentalists of Color is a Chicago-based member driven catalyst for racial equity in the environmental field addressing the current and historical exclusion of BIPOC folks. We hold a safe space to amplify, connect and support members in this network to be leaders and thrive in this field. The network uses

an asset-based approach to inclusion and equity by centering and celebrating its members. EOC connects members of various disciplines, builds resiliency, and cultivates future leaders.

- **Feminist Agenda for a Green New Deal:** Feminism demands collective action. This global coalition consists of individuals and organizations working towards justice at all the intersections that the climate crisis touches - migrant justice, racial justice, economic justice, labor justice, reproductive justice, and gender justice.
- **Health Care Without Harm:** HCWH seeks to transform health care worldwide so that it reduces its environmental footprint, becomes a community anchor for sustainability and a leader in the global movement for environmental health and justice
- **Healthcare Anchor Network:** HAN exists to incubate and scale strategies that establish the anchor mission as a healthcare sector priority and to lead innovation in anchor mission implementation, both internally and in partnership with community. We seek to address root causes: economic and racial inequities that create barriers to health and thriving for people and communities. We value equity, community well-being, and sustainability as core principles of healthy communities.
- **Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN):** IEN was formed by grassroots Indigenous peoples and individuals to address environmental and economic justice issues (EJ). IEN's activities include building the capacity of Indigenous communities and tribal governments to develop mechanisms to protect our sacred sites, land, water, air, natural resources, health of both our people and all living things, and to build economically sustainable communities.
- **Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP):** ITEP was created to act as a catalyst among tribal governments, research, and technical resources at Northern Arizona University (NAU), various federal, state and local governments, and the private sector, in support of environmental protection of Native American natural resources.
- **Minorities Striving and Pursuing Higher Degrees of Success in Earth System Science (MS PHD'S®):** MS PHD'S was established with a goal of providing professional development experiences to facilitate the advancement of minorities committed to achieving outstanding Earth system science careers. The program provides students with professional development opportunities, science exposure, networking opportunities, and mentoring relationships. For mentors, the program offers on-going mentoring activities with a highly talented group of minority students who are committed to achieving successful science careers.
- **National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE):** NSBE is one of the largest student-governed organizations based in the United States. NSBE, founded in 1975, supports and promotes the aspirations of collegiate and pre-collegiate students and technical professionals in engineering and technology.
- **Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network:** A non-profit organization in Washington, DC, dedicated to improving education from underrepresented students throughout the nation. QEM continues to be the premier organization for improving the quality of education for minorities, by providing technical assistance to MSIs, funding internship opportunities for underrepresented students, and advocating for college and career readiness in STEM.
- **Redeem Detroit:** a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that aims to revitalize neighborhoods in the city of Detroit. Our goal is to take vacant properties and rehabilitate them and then



use them to help the citizens in the neighborhood where they are located. We train at-risk youth (teen parents), homeless veterans, and returning citizens in vocational and job readiness skills, and with these skills we help them become entrepreneurs or provide job placement as well as connect them to the resources they need. In return they help us clean up the neighborhood and eliminate blight.

- **Significant Opportunities in Atmospheric Research and Science (SOARS):** an undergraduate-to-graduate bridge program designed to broaden participation of historically underrepresented communities in the atmospheric and related sciences.
- **SMASH:** This organization empowers dedicated students of color with an intensive science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education, culturally relevant coursework and access to resources and social capital that allow them to be successful in college and in their careers.
- **The Emerald Cities Collaborative (ECC):** ECC pursues a high-road approach to greening our cities, building resilient regional economies, and strengthening our democracy. By building cross-sector collaborations, acutely focused on those historically left out of the economic and community development process, we help communities unleash their capacity to build high-road economies that are more sustainable, economically just, and democratic.
- **The Greening Youth Foundation (GYF):** GYF's mission is to engage under-represented youth and young adults, while connecting them to the outdoors and careers in conservation. GYF's culturally based environmental education programing engages children from local communities and exposes them to healthy lifestyle choices in order to create an overall healthy community. GYF believes that youth and young adults from diverse backgrounds can greatly benefit from the career opportunities presented within the state and federal land management sectors. Accordingly, GYF continues to develop and strengthen partnerships with land management agencies to provide service and internship opportunities for youth and young adults thereby creating pathways to conservation careers.
- **The Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice:** The Hive raises funds and makes grants to organizations that have historically lacked access to funding and are essential to addressing intersecting climate, gender, and racial justice crises in the U.S.
- **UPROSE:** We are an intergenerational, multi-racial, nationally recognized, women of color led, grassroots organization that promotes sustainability and resiliency through community organizing, education, leadership development and cultural/artistic expression in Brooklyn, NY.
- **WE ACT for Environmental Justice:** WE ACT's mission is to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low-income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices.
- **Women's Earth Alliance (WEA):** WEA's model provides leadership, strategy, and technical training for women leaders to scale their climate and environmental initiatives while connecting them to a global alliance of peers, mentors, and funders.
- **Youth Vs. Apocalypse:** A diverse group of young climate justice activists working together to lift the voices of youth, in particular youth of color and working class youth. Their collective action aims to fight for a livable climate and an equitable, sustainable, and just world.

## **APPENDIX B - Preparing for Interviews: Purpose, Participants, and Questions**

### **Interview Participants**

The target interview participants are underrepresented environmental professionals whose work aligns with the EcoCareer sectors. Professionals are diverse in their race, gender, educational background, expertise, and age. If professionals are unavailable for a formal interview they may be reached out to through email to respond to a series of questions.

### **Interview Purpose**

The purpose of the interviews is two-fold:

- 1) Goal: Understand what aspects of the forms and dimensions of social capital have been constructive or destructive in the career success of the diverse cast of environmental professionals:
  - a) How bonding and bridging efforts in the environmental field, at the organizational and personal level, can serve to promote success of underrepresented professionals
  - b) How the structural, cognitive, and relational social capital of the National Wildlife Federation can be reimaged to promote success of underrepresented professionals
- 2) Goal: Understand how the educational and career development activities of the NWF EcoLeaders community can center JEDI and improve the experience of underrepresented young professionals navigating the environmental field.

**Interview Questions:** These interviews are scheduled for 60 minutes, **bolded** questions will take priority if time is limited.

### **Introduction:**

- **Please tell me briefly about your introduction to the environmental field and how you got involved with your current work:**
  - **What people and organizations were important to this path?**
  - **What has been your greatest social barrier to pursuing an environmental career?**

### **Social Capital:**

- **Were you supported in your decision and your path to pursue an environmental career (family, friends, peers, mentors)?**
  - **How did this impact you?**
  - Who has been the greatest supporter of your career success? How do you know them?
- **Did you have a mentor or a champion?**
  - **How did you meet them and what is/was the nature of your relationship (informal/formal)?**
  - Did you feel genuinely connected to them? **Is there anything they did that was particularly helpful/unhelpful?**
- **What role does your social network play in your work as an environmental professional?**

- Do you find that most people you are connected to through your work are similar or different from you?
- **How has your career or the environmental movement connected you to people who have different identities, backgrounds, and realities from you?**
- What role have your peers played in your career development?
- How important is it for you to work for/with an organization that shares your goals and values? Why?
- How has the organizational culture/social capital of any environmental institutions you have worked for impacted you?
  - **Have any practices made you feel particularly included/excluded?**
- **Have you made genuine relationships/alliances with other environmental professionals or advocates where you met online? How did this happen?**

#### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice + Career Building:**

- What active roles do you believe environmental organizations should play in achieving equity and justice in the environmental movement?
  - Are there any examples of these efforts you know of and would like to share?
- **How should “big green” organizations like the National Wildlife Federation uplift young environmental professionals from communities (BIPOC, low-income, etc) that have been historically harmed by their impact?**
- **What kind of career building or guidance programs were or would have been helpful in meeting your needs and overcoming your challenges getting started in the environmental field?**
- How have you effectively integrated your value of DEIJ in how you connect and partner with people for your work?

#### **Conclusion:**

- **What advice would you give someone that wished to follow in your footsteps - especially as they face social barriers to achieving career success?**

## **APPENDIX C** – *Young Environmental Professionals Needs and Experiences Survey Questions*

Please help the National Wildlife Federation better support you! A University of Michigan graduate student is conducting a survey on NWF's behalf about navigating the environmental field and movement. Your answers will be used to make recommendations to the National Wildlife Federations' career and leadership development program, EcoLeaders, for young environmental professionals like yourself. By filling out this brief, anonymous survey, your voice will also help shape the justice and equity initiatives at the NWF.

All respondents can receive a FREE EcoLeaders certification and three respondents will receive a prize. Please follow the link at the end of the survey to learn more and be entered to win!

Connection to the environmental field or movement:

- Connection to the environmental field or movement (select as many as apply)
- Student
- Environmental organization member
- Professional
- Community/grassroots advocate
- Other, please describe:

How has your identity (race/ethnicity, income level, age, sexual orientation, educational background, etc.) influenced your experience within the environmental field or movement?

What has been the most challenging aspect of pursuing an environmental career?

- Financial barriers to pursuing education
- Financial barriers to pursuing careers in the environmental field
- Lack of support from family or close relationships
- Lack of support from mentors, teachers, or other elders knowledgeable in the field
- Lack of access to career development opportunities (internships, research, etc.)
- Family-related issues (lack of childcare, instability at home, family illness, etc.)
- Racism and white supremacy in the environmental field
- Health related barriers (chronic illness, disability, mental health, etc.)
- Other

Where do you get the most support for furthering your environmental career?

- Family
- Peers
- Teachers or professors
- Friends
- Mentor
- Club or organization
- Advisor
- Partner or significant other

Do you believe your values are shared by major environmental organizations, such as the National Wildlife Federation or the Nature Conservancy?

- Yes

- No

Please explain your answer to the previous question:

(If so: What actions are these organizations taking that align with your values? If not: How could these organizations better align with your values?)

Do you trust major environmental organizations, such as the National Wildlife Federation or the Nature Conservancy, to address the climate crisis and protect biodiversity as is their mission?

- Yes
- No

Please explain your answer to the previous question:

How important is it for you to work for/be affiliated with an environmental organization that shares your values/beliefs?

- Not important
- Not very important
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Very important

What kind of career development program would be most empowering for your environmental career:

- Mentoring from established professionals
- Peer-to-peer mentoring
- Lunch hours with diverse environmental professionals
- Regular career building workshops
- Resume review and advice
- Personalized trainings
- Interest groups
- Networking events
- Scholarships or other funding opportunities
- Internship opportunities/Entry level job listings
- Other, please describe:

*The National Wildlife Federation strives to create programs and services that represent and support the full diversity of the country. We are asking the following questions about demographics to ensure that we are meeting this goal. Learn more about NWF's commitment to [equity and justice](#).*

What is your Date of Birth?

Please select the racial and/or ethnic identity/identities that describe you (choose as many as apply).

- Asian/Asian American
- Black/African American
- Latino/a/x/Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- Multiracial/Mixed
- Native American/Indigenous
- Pacific Islander

- White/Caucasian/Anglo
- Racial/Ethnic Identity Not Listed
- Prefer Not to Answer

If you chose " Racial/Ethnic Identity Not Listed" and/or would like to provide more context:

Please select the gender identity/identities that describe you. See

<https://welcomingschools.org/resources/definitions-gender-sexual-orientation> for definitions (choose as many as apply).

- Agender
- Female/Woman
- Gender Nonconforming
- Intersex
- Male/Man
- Nonbinary
- Two Spirit
- Gender Identity Not Listed
- Prefer Not to Answer

If you chose "Gender Identity Not Listed" and/or would like to provide more context:

Do you identify as Transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer Not to Answer

Do you identify as LGBTQ+?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer Not to Answer

How do you describe your ability/disability status? We are interested in identification regardless of whether you typically request accommodations for a disability (choose as many as apply).

- A vision impairment
- A hearing impairment
- A physical or mobility impairment
- A mental health, behavioral, neurological, and/or emotional condition
- Any other impairment, condition, and/or disability
- I do not identify with an impairment, condition, or disability
- I prefer not to answer

If you chose "Any other impairment, condition, and/or disability" and/or would like to provide more context on your choice: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D – Young Environmental Professionals Organizations Email List

Organization	Email
Young Environmental Professionals (YEP) - Texas Association of Environmental Professionals	yep@taep.org
The AAEEES American Academy of Environmental Engineers and Scientists - Young Professionals Program	MWaterman@aaees.org
Environmental Professionals Organization of Connecticut Young Environmental Professionals (YEP)	YEP@epoc.org
National Association of Environmental Professionals - Environmental Justice Working Group	emily.gulick@jacobs.com
National Association of Environmental Professionals - Emerging Professionals	michelle.rau@jacobs.com
EPAZ Board - Young Professionals Committee	<a href="mailto:youngprofessionals@epaz.org">youngprofessionals@epaz.org</a>
Environmental Professionals of Color	<a href="mailto:ggonzalez@cdeinspires.org">ggonzalez@cdeinspires.org</a>
Miami Group Sierra Club - Young Professionals Environmental Group	contactmariatruitt@gmail.com
Young Environmental Professionals (YEP) - Oregon and Washington Chapter	<a href="mailto:info@nebc.org">info@nebc.org</a>
Blacks In Green	<a href="mailto:naomidavis@blacksingreen.org">naomidavis@blacksingreen.org</a>
Black Minnentials for Flint	<a href="mailto:media@blackmillennials4flint.org">media@blackmillennials4flint.org</a>
Youth vs. Apocalypse	youthvsapocalypse@gmail.com
Greening Youth Foundation	<a href="mailto:contact@gyfoundation.org">contact@gyfoundation.org</a>
Power Shift Network	theteam@powershift.org
Indigenous Youth Leadership Initiative	reachout@earthguardians.org
Native Earth Environment Youth Program	<a href="mailto:Nikki.Cooley@nau.edu">Nikki.Cooley@nau.edu</a>
Youth Development & Nature Cohort	leaders@childrenandnature.org