

Diversity & Inclusion Working Group Notes
AFWA Annual Meeting
Thursday September 10, 2020
2:30 pm-5:15 pm Central Time

2:30 pm Call to Order/Review Agenda

2:35 Introductions

Jen N.: Trust is important. This is a long-game. Want to have rich conversations in a safe place.

2:40 Relevancy Roadmap

Identifies 19 barriers that agencies face that might be standing in the way of our agencies to reaching broader constituencies and achieving success. Jen showed the conservation relevancy community site. To succeed takes all of us. If we all use this site, we can help move things forward.

Join the relevancy roadmap community of practice interactive website <https://conservation-relevancy-community.mn.co/feed>

<https://relevancyroadmap.squarespace.com/>

Jen N. gave a tour of the Relevancy Roadmap website. This group has partnered with the Outreach Working Group to do some research on messaging to audiences we have not traditionally been reaching.

Agency Culture - our agencies are not well adapted to meet the needs of new constituents. What are the interests and trends of diverse audiences? We need to find that out.

2:50 Panel: Stories from the Field [recording available]

David introduced the panel: Deja Perkins, NC State University; Kevin Malonson, TX Game Warden Recruiter; Jason Ward, Founder/CEO of Black AF

1. What attracted you to nature and the outdoors?
2. What issues have you faced as a person of color in the outdoors?
3. What would you suggest conservation organizations do to become more relevant to the growing diverse population?

Deja Perkins gave her background story. Early exposure with mother and visiting zoo. Exposure from a few select organizations, and paid internships in high school and college student were key. Organizations need to be better connected and demonstrate relevance of nature to more diverse communities and neighborhoods. Increasing programming in every aspect of our organizations, giving

back to community, and connecting people in community with memories. David's comments:
Importance of exposure, access to programs (going where the people are), PAID opportunities, educating about the outdoors, starting at an early age.

Jason Ward shared his background story. From early age, books on animals, with attraction to dinosaurs and then birds in particular. Spark moment in high school--observing Peregrine falcon hunting, Jason learned he could connect with nature anywhere, and that observing birds could help him forget the stress and negative aspects of his difficult situation, living in a homeless shelter. When in 20's, he realized he wanted to do work involving wildlife. He started leading bird walks and creating games connected to birding. This led to a video series that Jason is featured in "Birds of North America." Jason helped form "Black Birders Week." What drew Jason to nature: This was a natural curiosity that his parents did not interfere with. Challenges: Referring to Christian Cooper incident in Central Park--"Black bodies are weaponized sometimes." An extra thought process to keep himself safe is a challenge--so as to avoid fearful reactions from others. To reduce language barrier--hire people of color to talk, to present, and to represent. Key points: **Early age interest important. Seeing others who look like the growing diverse demographics. Being intentional and persistent. Hiring diverse people.**

Kevin Malonson's story. Connection to nature space at his home, and visiting/ fishing at state park. Parents supported and participated in interest. Grew up dove hunting annually. Interest in law enforcement came when attending law enforcement magnet school. Gained further appreciation for wildlife and hunting opportunities while in Navy, in Alaska. Meeting game warden while duck hunting led to internship--a major mentoring experience. Kevin found there were many misconceptions about the work of being a game warden. His work includes strategically engaging/ educating kids who he presents to. **Key points: Exposure to nature at young age, paid internships, education in urban settings (HBU, HBI's, Native American organizations), sharing / communicating about the value in conservation careers.**

Discussion on what panelists feel comfortable or uncomfortable when visiting outdoor spaces: Comforting: familiar faces, bringing a dog, smiling faces. Discomfort: New places. When others stare. For Kevin, as a warden, training to be a game warden was key to feeling secure. Mentoring was connected to him feeling accepted in work.

How can agencies and universities foster opportunities in virtual workplaces: Be intentional about who you invite, take advantage of large audience you can reach. Make the connections to the many out there who would be willing to speak. For law enforcement training and recruitment, the pandemic has made it very difficult.

Barriers for conservation organizations in becoming more diverse, and what would make the biggest impact for increasing diversity in the agencies: Unwillingness to adapt and change is big barrier. Misconceptions about careers and lack of understanding about the value of conservation. Funding is key to address misconceptions and knowledge gaps. Lack of pipelines to ensure people of color stay in field. Entry jobs often do not pay sufficiently to stay in one location. Lack of diversity in those people responsible for hiring.

How to avoid being patronizing or overly friendly: watch body language, be open and authentic, find the common ground/ common interest to help with a more natural conversation.

4:05 Breakout groups:

1. Which speaker's experience resonated most with you and why? Deja, Jason, Kevin

Resonation: having to justify being outdoors; the stories of overcoming; nature as an escape; the word 'traditional'; the common threads in everyone's story;

2. Was there a presentation that challenged the way you think about DEI? If so, how?

What do we need to change to allow for people to even get an interview; too many agencies are prescriptive with their hiring process that is exclusionary

What are our loyalties to?

Focusing on finding common ground instead of differences

PAID internships

3. What are some of the barriers?

How we recruit and retain employees

Having time to think about how to increase diversity

Have leadership make it a priority and be intentional with it

Fear in delving into these issues and how we are viewed within our organizations.

Marginalization and potentially retribution. Transparency.

Not buy-in at levels

Changing how we word our job descriptions because the perception that the jobs are being "watered down"

Not knowing where to start with recruitment

AFWA setting the example that this is important nation-wide

Help with funding these efforts

Getting HR department on board. Helping with recruiting

Slow process, but we can be empowered within our smaller circles to make changes

Lack of perspectives at the table. People of color were not in positions where their voice could be heard.

Lack of turnover. New opinions and voices cannot be heard.

Lack of hiring

Traditionalism in recreation activities

Two main points from our group: Fear among those in authority of jeopardizing their "traditional"

constituency AND need more investment in hiring, pipeline development (MENTORING), and ensuring they feel welcome/belong.

Points from my group: buy in and willingness from leadership to really delve into these issues and take effective action, not just a few "diversity hires" when convenient. Focus on programs within the organization where DEI work is easier if necessary (wildlife education division, indigenous outreach, etc.). Grassroots effort can be helpful if people who are passionate about DEI work are doing that work and imposing accountability on the group ("accountabilibuddies").

5:05 Review workplan

Action item:

Please take 5 minutes today to fill out this form and help drive the future of DEI in our country!

<https://forms.gle/xY9WgnqxrqkwfUCJ6>

Email David or Jen if you have any suggested changes to the charge

2:55 Roundtable

10:00 Adjourn