



Sierra Club's
EQUITY DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT



CREATING A FOUNDATION TO TRANSFORM OUR COMMUNITY

Creating a new department dedicated to shifting Sierra Club's culture toward Equity, Inclusion and Justice is a bit like building a house. We arrived on our job site on day one with a set of blueprints: our first ever, board-approved [Multi-Year Equity Plan](#). Our first order of business was to build our crew, and our second was to lay a foundation that would make all the rest of our work possible.

That foundation was Growing for Change. By bringing every staff member and over 150 Sierra Club volunteers together for a single workshop, we began a conversation that will continue for years to come. Sierra Club communities now have a common language and shared concepts for understanding systemic oppression and the ways it shows up in our lives and work. We have concrete tools that each of us can use to shift our work away from transaction and toward transformation. Together we built this foundation of learning and shared understanding, and together we will use it as a platform from which to transform ourselves and our communities.

Now that our foundation is in place, and our team growing and coalescing, we look forward to revisiting our Multi-Year Equity Plan, which is nearing its completion date. We've learned so much about our community and the challenges we face through the Growing for Change process. In 2018 we are launching a collaborative process to collect the wisdom and learning of everyone at Sierra

Club who is working to advance equity, and build out a cohesive vision of how we will all work together to transform ourselves in the coming years.

THE EQUITY DEPARTMENT TEAM

Nellis Kennedy-Howard

Mike O'Brien

Allison Chin

Jessica Ronald

Cait Lull

George Chavez

Brittany Harris

April Thomas



BUILDING OUR CREW

When our department was founded, we had a full-time staff of two people. At the end of 2017 the Equity Department is a full-fledged team bringing their expertise to bear in order to support the Sierra Club on our journey. In 2017 we added three new full-time staff positions to the department: a Cultural and Behavioral Metrics Analyst, an Equity Training Coordinator and an Administrative Assistant. We conducted broad searches for these new roles, working to create diverse applicant pools full of highly talented folks, resulting in over three hundred applicants.

As we head into 2018, the Sierra Club Department of Equity, Inclusion and Justice is now made up of:

- **Nellis Kennedy-Howard, Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Justice.** Nellis leads the effort to transform Sierra Club into an organization that welcomes and values people from all walks of life. Nellis is an attorney with certificates in Federal Indian

Law and Natural Resources Law, and previously served as Senior Campaign Representative of the Beyond Coal campaign in the Southwest region.

- **Allison Chin, Volunteer Co-Lead for the Equity Steering Committee and Equity, Inclusion and Justice Support Team.** Allison helps lead the transition of Sierra Club to a more welcoming and inclusive organization, one to which people from the full spectrum of society want to belong. Allison also serves on the Sierra Club Board of Directors and the Chapter and Leader Capacity Building Team.
- **Mike O'Brien, Volunteer Co-Lead for the Equity Steering Committee and volunteer leader for the Department of Equity, Inclusion and Justice.** Mike is a current member of the Sierra Club Board of Directors and has been a member of the Seattle City Council since 2010, where he has worked to ban plastic bags, create a public financing system for local elections, create stable living options for people

living in vehicles and without shelter, find alternatives to incarcerating children, and prevent Shell Oil from establishing their Arctic drilling fleet in Seattle.

- **Jessica Ronald, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Manager.** Jessica provides guidance, coaching and holistic support to staff and volunteer leaders across the organization and supports an organizational journey for understanding, awareness, action and accountability towards a more intersectional and just world.
- **Cait Lull, Administrative Assistant.** Cait provides administrative support to the Equity Department and comes to the Sierra Club with over a decade of experience as a social worker, advocate, and educator in nonprofits and social justice movements. Cait has a master's degree in social work and a bachelor's degree in sociology
- **George Chavez, Cultural and Behavioral Metrics Analyst.** George works to develop effective and collaborative means of tracking and furthering Sierra Club's progress towards its equity goals, drawing on his background in academia and research on topics including multiracial identity, racial cognition, and anti-transgender prejudice. George is a social psychologist and has several scholarly

publications and grant awards on the topics of racial identity, gender prejudice, and substance use.

- **Brittany Harris, Equity Training Coordinator.** Brittany is a published social justice educator and advocate, committed to bringing knowledge and power into the communities she serves while uplifting communities that have been historically oppressed. Her research and professional interests include intersectionality, dismantling systems of oppression, black feminist thought, empowering queer communities of color, and supporting communities navigating across difference. In her role she hopes to serve the Sierra Club through innovative, transformative, and necessary social justice education.
- **April Thomas, Deputy Press Secretary for Equity, Justice and Outdoors.** April serves as deputy press secretary for the Sierra Club's Department of Equity, Inclusion and Justice, as well as the Outdoors program, the Labor and Economic Justice program, the Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships program, and Sierra Student Coalition. She works to lift up the voices of people at the margins of the climate justice movement and use storytelling to change hearts and minds. April lives in Oakland, California with her partner, where she is a delegate to her local labor council and frequent agitator at City Council meetings.

SAYING GOODBYE AND OFFERING A HELLO



2017 was a year of transition as outgoing Lead Volunteer Allison Chin worked closely with Mike O'Brien to prepare him to take on volunteer leadership for the Department in 2018. Mike brings a unique perspective to this work as an elected official who has bridged political divides and advanced progressive priorities. He holds a deep personal

commitment to his own equity journey and to supporting others on their journey as Sierra

Club grows and changes.

TEAM-BUILDING

This year we accomplished a long-held dream for many: after decades of work, all three of Sierra Club's teams working on equity were able to convene for the first time in Sierra Club history. Our primary goal was relationship building, and we spent three days together confronting our challenges head on and dreaming collectively about what comes next after our big investment in training this year.

These three teams represent over fifty people working across the Sierra Club community. The members of these teams who are staff members rather than volunteers all have a significant portion of their work time dedicated to equity projects. The volunteer members of these teams are also deeply committed, meaning the teams working on equity at Sierra Club have more collective

capacity than ever before. By meeting together across our teams, all charged with different goals and working on separate projects, we worked to foster cohesion and connection among all the incredible folks working hard to make sure our shared vision for the future becomes reality.

This year also marked the reactivation of the Equity Steering Committee, which met this year with a new charge and new membership, ready to build on the work already done. This committee also includes a new addition—the inclusion of a partner organization. Chas Lopez, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion from Earthjustice is working with this committee to help offer powerful insight and to build more alignment in the greater movement to advancing equity.



ALL THREE EQUITY TEAMS AT OUR FIRST SUMMIT

GROWING FOR CHANGE: INVESTING IN EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

This was a year of investments in skill development across the whole organization. Growing for Change, our anti-oppression workshop for all Sierra Club staff and over 150 volunteers, gave us an opportunity to gather as a community and develop a shared understanding of our Equity goals and values.

To develop the curriculum for Growing for Change the Equity Department worked closely with [Partners for Collaborative Change](#) to conduct an organization-wide assessment of our progress on Equity. We engaged over 300 people to help design the curriculum. In the end we held ten staff workshops that included both pre- and post-work. Ninety-seven percent of Sierra Club staff were able to attend this year. We also held three volunteer workshops attended by over 150 volunteers; many of which will be provided with ongoing coaching and support by the Equity Support Team.

Our work to take the tools created in Growing for Change and apply them widely throughout the Sierra Club community is ongoing. One way we plan to bring the experience of Growing for Change into our broader community is by releasing a series of videos about the workshops for social media. The videos will document our massive investment in skill development, invite our social media followers to join us on this journey, and share some of our greatest learnings from this unprecedented learning project.



MODELING LEARNING STARTS WITH LEADERS

This year the whole Executive Team attended a two day anti-oppression workshop similar to Growing for Change, in order to make space at Growing for Change for staff to grow and explore without executive staff present. After their workshop, executive team members reflected on their experiences and how Equity skill development has impacted their everyday work.

National Program Director **Sarah Hodgdon** learned new practices from her equity education that she uses every day in her work at Sierra Club.

“ What I love about these equity workshops is watching that moment when folks start to realize, this isn’t just about our relationships with partner groups. It’s not just about how we show up as allies in the progressive movement. It’s also about how power and privilege are held within our own organization, how we do decision making internally, and how we interact with the people we work alongside every day. Previous workshops have given me powerful tools to help put equity values into practice in my work. At one workshop I learned about a tool

called “prompts”—the idea is to have a question that you’re always asking yourself in every interaction so you can put a lens of equity on everything you do. So now, in every decision making process I ask myself, “Will this decision lead to better retention of staff who are people of color?” Asking myself this question helps me to center my thinking on how every decision impacts staff members who are people of color.”

Our Director of Human Resources **Kerry O’Donnell** found the executive team workshop transformative.

“ I’m so grateful to be part of an organization that has created space for me to focus on equity—an opportunity I haven’t had previously in my career,” said O’Donnell. “Learning opportunities like the executive team equity workshop and the White Privilege Conference have changed my life, in and outside the Sierra Club. Since I’ve been on a journey of learning about equity, inclusion and justice issues, I’ve gotten more comfortable with talking openly about identity issues and have a better understanding of how systems of

oppression operate within our daily lives. Confronting hard topics head on and struggling through them together with friends and family has lent a new richness to my relationships and allowed me to build deeper connections.”

Deputy Executive Director **Bruce Hamilton** is an enthusiastic supporter of our Equity trainings.

“ The executive team Equity workshop I attended was challenging and transformative. It was the best training in diversity and equity skills that I have attended to date, offering just the right balance of learning, growing and discomfort with my own privilege and history. I’m so excited that we are able to offer the opportunity to experience Growing for Change to the entire Sierra Club staff and over 150 volunteers. It will help each of us and the Sierra Club grow and change for the better.”

As a follow-up to the Executive Team’s workshop, the Board of Directors will undergo their own version of Growing for Change.

LEARNING ON THE EQUITY TEAMS

In addition to the Executive Team and Board of Directors, all three equity teams participated in a workshop specifically designed for each team, recognizing that the needs of these groups are very different than the average member of the Sierra Club community.

The Equity Support Team workshop was designed to help ground the trainers on the

team in critical pedagogy and liberatory frameworks for learning, as well as support the team in further developing their own training program and creating tools to address specific challenges the trainers on this team face in their work.

The Staff Equity Team’s two-day equity workshop was focused on building trust in each other and as a team and establishing

shared understanding and language to more effectively communicate and work together.

The Equity Steering Committee focused on understanding one another's background

in equity work—the personal “why” of their commitment to this work—building group norms and creating a shared vision for the role of this team.

TELLING OUR STORY

Communicating about Equity work can be challenging. For every milestone we hit, there are thousands more ahead of us. It can be tempting to celebrate each victory without acknowledging how far we have yet to go. At the same time, we must celebrate our progress in order to honor the hard work that so many people are putting in every day to transform Sierra Club, and to ensure this work is sustainable. After all, collective liberation is all about joy. This year we have attempted to open a window into this work and make it visible to the rest of the world, in hopes of providing a positive example for other organizations struggling toward equity and justice.

As we look ahead to 2018 we are leaning into our responsibility to bring everyone in the Sierra Club community along on this journey with us. This journey isn't just about

our hundreds of staff and thousands of volunteers—it's a journey that all three million members of the Sierra Club community are on together. We will use the communications channels and strategies developed in 2017 to give more people than ever before access to the learning opportunities and tools for growth that we have developed internally.

Our most visible move this year has been to firmly establish Nellis's popular blog, which helps to put a human face on our work and increase transparency. The blog has also helped to develop Nellis's role as a thought leader and the department's role as a go-to resource for press writing about equity and inclusion in the environmental movement, resulting in interview opportunities for Nellis on topics including the Dakota Access Pipeline and sexual violence targeting Native women.

COMMUNICATING INWARD

Our communications efforts have looked inward as well as out. As an internally-focused department, we place a high priority on internal communication and transparency. This year the department began to track all our internal communications to surface lessons learned, and plan to share those lessons throughout the organization.

The Equity Department also partnered with Communications and Digital Strategies to create the Language Equity Guide, a tool for all staff and volunteers to use in order to ensure respectful and inclusive language in all our public communications. The Guide will be rolled out for use in early 2018.

ALIGNING AROUND SHARED VISION FOR EQUITY AND PLANNING FOR CHANGE

One major theme of 2017 was alignment. Equity work has been happening at Sierra Club for decades, as staff and volunteers pushed from within to make change. One reason the Equity department was created was to bring all these different bodies of work and teams into alignment, so that we could all be rowing in the same direction with a shared vision and goals. In preparation for Growing for Change, the Equity department launched a series of webinars outlining a Board-approved vision for the work of the department, captured in our vision document, [Join Us In This Walk Through the World Together](#).

In the webinars we began to make a critical intervention in the way members of the Sierra Club community viewed equity and justice work. Previously, we had referred to “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” work. As the Department was created, we shifted focus away from the frame of “diversity” and toward a frame of equity, inclusion and justice. We released [Going Beyond Diversity](#) where we made the case that focusing on “diversity” is fundamentally tokenizing, and held sessions with groups of staff and volunteers across the organization to explore this reorientation of our work.

One of the ways we work to ensure alignment across the organization is through the departmental planning process led by the Staff Equity Team. The team is made up of two representatives from each department, who work with their department directors to build plans to advance equity within their departments. In 2017, departments implemented the following policies or approaches in order to advance our shared equity goals:

- **Advancement**

- Created a hiring strategies team that completed research, external interviews, internal interviews, surveys, and focus area recommendations, and is now developing proposed materials and roll-out plans for hiring strategies to support inclusion. The membership department has already piloted some of these techniques in hiring.
- Began a regular practice of challenging business partners and advertisers to incorporate equity goals and concerns into their proposals for collaboration with Sierra Club.

- **Digital Strategies**

- Began establishing baselines for our list and social media demographics in order to better understand who our audience is and measure our success in making our lists more representative of the American public.
- Began to optimize list segmentation process and technology so that organizers have more control over how their constituents will be communicated to by the broader organization.
- Obtained funding to host two paid KAIROS fellows in 2018.

- **Finance**

- Held bi-monthly team meetings and luncheons, each meeting focusing on a particular aspect of equity and justice for the department.
- Worked with program departments, Operations and Human Resources to start the process of moving Sierra Club’s banking and other financial related activities to companies more aligned with the Club’s values.

- **Human Resources**

- Created onboarding resources for new employees including a new hire welcome packet and new hire webinars as an adjunct to the New Hire Orientation (HR Partner Welcome, and Intro to Workday).
- Developed and conducted management skills workshops to be attended by all Sierra Club managers, intended to develop skills around providing constructive feedback and to promote greater consistency in staff experiences with managers.

- **Operations**

- Created a resource library for the department, which is used by staff both individually and during sub-departmental meetings in order to weave equity into our day to day work.
- Assisted with onboarding new Equity Department staff, supported logistics for Growing for Change Workshops, and managed the Equity department's budget.

- **Program**

- Successfully launched the Clean Energy For All Change process as a way to ensure that justice and equity are increasingly central to our strategy-setting, planning and budgeting across the department. CEFA has become the vehicle for socializing the Jemez Principles and integrating them into our campaign work. Further, the core values of CEFA—equity, collaboration, transparency and power-sharing—are intended to help us actualize and culturally support the pivots our staff committed to during the Growing For Change workshops.
- Began the process of creating a culture of accountability for how senior managers were demonstrating their

commitment to equity, collaboration, transparency, and power-sharing. This took the form of establishing the expectation that only those managers demonstrating that commitment would be eligible for an Exceptional on their evaluations and then working with senior managers on how to have those conversations with their direct reports.

- **Communications**

- Conducted follow-up interviews with department staff after Growing for Change
- Ensured that new staff will have our equity, justice, and inclusion principles explained to them during on-boarding process.
- Went above and beyond the goals in the plan to create the Equity Language Guide, a resource to support thoughtful, respectful communication.

- **Executive Team**

- Implemented a process for quarterly discussion to raise awareness on the executive team of equity issues and themes, in order to gain a shared understanding of problems in our organizational culture, and to better develop actions and solutions to address them.
- The Executive Team completed a full-day Management Workshop with The Management Center and a multi-day workshop on Equity, Inclusion and Justice with Partners for Collaborative Change. At the end of the third quarter, the Executive Team engaged an Equity Coach to work with our team to measure and track the team's progress on our commitments in this plan. The Executive Team has now engaged Angela Park to be our Equity Coach in 2018.

- o In the first quarter the Executive Team incorporated equity and justice values into the annual planning and budgeting process. 2018 annual organizational priorities included: “Create and implement a collaborative, cross-capacity long-term learning strategy that further develops a cadre of tools and resources, offers more localized training opportunities and

further supports staff and volunteers by offering coaching to help drive progress on the goals identified in the Multi-Year Equity Plan.”

These are just a few highlights from these plans. Taken by themselves, each of these items is significant. But all together, they represent transformation change in our organization.

BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE SIERRA CLUB, ONE POLICY AT A TIME

In 2016 Sierra Club committed to addressing issues with our retention of staff people of color. After many years of taking a diversity-based approach to this work, we had made some gains in recruiting people of color to come work at Sierra Club—but some of those same folks left the organization sooner than people without marginalized identities. In order to address this, we commissioned a study which confirmed what we had heard directly from staff of color: Sierra Club does have a problem with retention people of color on our staff. The study and accompanying memo, released in mid-2017, laid out a series of policy recommendations designed to shift Sierra Club culture toward inclusion. These recommendations were adopted by

the Executive Team and are currently being implemented across the organization.

This year the Sierra Club also began to redesign our internship program in order to address equity concerns. Beginning in 2018, all Sierra Club national interns will be paid a minimum of \$15 per hour. We anticipate this change will broaden the pool of people who are financially able to participate in a Sierra Club internship; given that our internship program frequently acts as an entry point for staff into the organization, we hope that our commitment to paying interns will have ripple effects on our community. To further this work, a paid internship policy for chapters will be designed and implemented in 2018.

CONNECTING WITH BROADER JUSTICE MOVEMENT—SHOWING UP AND CONTRIBUTING TO MOVEMENT

This year members of the Equity department showed up in solidarity with the broader justice movement whenever possible. At the Women’s March Nellis was interviewed by the [Huffington Post](#) and Jessica reflected on her experiences on our [blog](#). Nellis also joined a convening of Tribal leaders on July

4th, where representatives from over eighty different tribes signed a “Reclamation of Independence” vowing to work together to protect the sacred grizzly bear and the land endangered by the Keystone XL Pipeline.

LOOKING AHEAD TO A POWERFUL 2018

All the pieces are in place to amplify our impact in 2018. Our community is hungry for change—not a day goes by that we don't receive a request from a chapter, volunteer group or other Sierra Club community for more learning opportunities on equity. Those opportunities will certainly be available, in multiple formats to suit different learning styles. And this year we will also begin to shift our approach toward supporting self-directed learning and personal growth, recognizing that this journey is deeply personal and that everyone has different needs for learning.

The Equity department also looks forward to deepening our connections with the Equity teams in 2018, and providing support for their transformational grassroots work. Our greatest resource as a department is the incredible, brilliant people who have been



THE EQUITY DEPARTMENT ALSO SPONSORED AN EVENT AT MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY ON QUEER IDENTITY IN PUBLIC LANDS AND OUTDOORS SPACES, A TOPIC NELLIS HAS EXAMINED ON THE DEPARTMENT BLOG AS WELL.

giving their time, energy and heart to equity work for decades. Together we can transform Sierra Club into a more equitable, just, and inclusive place to live, work, and play.

Sierra Club National
2101 Webster Street, Suite 1300
Oakland, CA 94612
(415) 977-5500

Sierra Club Legislative
50 F Street, NW, Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 547-1141

sierraclub.org
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