



INCLUSIVITY BLUEPRINT

Earth Force

2011

Introduction

Earth Force is committed to becoming an inclusive and equitable organization. We can sum up our rationale simply:

- 1) We are doing our place-based civic engagement and community environmental improvement work with in low-income and communities of color, and yet people of color are dramatically under-represented throughout our organization, in the professional educational system, and historically, in the environmental movement.
- 2) We are asking young people to create lasting change in their communities by addressing root causes. We need to be conversant about and able to engage in dialogue with our educators, partners and young people about how power and privilege play out in their communities.
- 3) On a much larger scale, and one that speaks to our mission quite directly, the environmental issues we want young people to take leadership in addressing impact low-income communities first and hardest. If we want to be allies in helping change the quality of life in these communities, we must do work around inclusivity.

Earth Force's Strategic Plan (2010-2015) outlines a future for the organization that embeds our work within communities and creates networks of partners for actively engaging young people there. While the strategic plan makes explicit and implicit reference to Earth Force's commitment to inclusivity, this Blueprint represents road map for the coming year. It focuses on 4 goals for integrating inclusiveness into the fabric of our organization via:

- 1) our organizational culture and norms (*workbook tab: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE / MISSION AND ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES*)
- 2) our strategies and preparation for engaging in communities (*workbook tab: PROGRAMS & CONSTITUENTS*)
- 3) how we articulate and share the best practices of our Earth Force process (*workbook tab: PROGRAMS & CONSTITUENTS*)
- 4) How we assess our effectiveness as an organization both with staff and through our programs (*workbook tab: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE / PROGRAMS & CONSTITUENTS*).

Our Definition of Inclusiveness and Our Case Statement

We have adopted the Denver Foundation's definition of inclusiveness:

Inclusive organizations are learning-centered organizations that value the perspectives and contributions of all people, and they incorporate the needs, assets, and perspectives of communities of color into the design and implementation of universal and inclusive programs. Furthermore, inclusive organizations recruit and retain diverse staff and volunteers to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the communities they serve.

Our case statement is:

Earth Force will intentionally act to promote self and community created learning to address power and privilege issues. Our commitment is to include diverse perspectives in all of our work. Earth Force, including our staff, leadership, and partners, commit to:

- *Integrating the ideals of equity, justice, and sustainability into our work,*
- *Promoting equal access to education and civic engagement to address environmental inequities, and*
- *Serving as allies in solidarity with the partners and communities where we work.*

How the Blueprint Came to Be

As stated above, this Blueprint is a dynamic document that provides a concrete, shared roadmap for the organization around making inclusivity an integral part of the organization. It reflects an articulation of priorities that have been part of discussions within FrontRange Earth Force and Earth Force over the last few years. Both organizations have had inclusivity teams that have worked to establish guiding principles, done organizational assessments, and started to integrate inclusivity into the fabric of the organization. With the recent merger of the two organizations, we have combined our inclusivity teams and see a part of the Blueprint is to develop a strategy that allows us to do work intensively in Denver, and then to share and support our work with the rest of the organization.

The process for developing this Blueprint involved several steps:

- 1) As part of the Denver Foundation Initiative, the FREF inclusivity committee worked with consultant, Nita Mosby Henry to gather data to help us identify some areas for focus (see research section). With the merger, we extended her data gathering to include both organizations.
- 2) A sub-set of the inclusivity committee met to discuss those results and started to identify big categories that we wanted to include in the Blueprint.
- 3) We shared those categories with the entire inclusivity committee to solicit input and additional areas or goals we could include.
- 4) We had a half-day retreat to narrow down the goals and build out the action plan.

Research

Our information-gathering process focused on obtaining information from key stakeholders (partners, staff and board) to gauge (1) their definition of inclusivity and (2) their perceptions of how inclusivity is demonstrated by Earth Force. We used key informant interviews as our methodology for facilitating. All interviews were facilitated by our consultant, Nita Mosby Henry. There were several common themes raised in our information-gathering process that led to the development of our Blueprint goal areas. Among many findings, the prominent themes were:

- **Our partners believed we were inclusive, but could rarely articulate how they came to this conclusion.** In almost all cases, the stakeholders based their perspective on the clients that we served. In essence, because we serve, largely, communities of color, the stakeholder made the assumption we must be inclusive.
- **There was an internal organizational perspective that staff in Denver had more experience/successes in working with inclusivity initiatives than the national staff.** This perspective was widely shared by Denver staff and the perspective caused a great degree of

conflict and misunderstanding about the “ideal” model for expanding inclusivity in the whole organization.

- **There were some indicators from staff that revealed some skepticism about whether or not a national model for inclusivity would be sufficient or effective in leading a Denver-based initiative.** This perspective raised important issues around creating a consistent, universal culture in the organization, while maintaining the local nuances and cultures needed to do effective work in a community.
- **Our information-gathering revealed that beyond our immediate work, there wasn’t much Earth Force presence in the community.** This perspective came from most of our stakeholders. They were proud of our work, but could not articulate places that we were present in the community. This community engagement/presence question was an indicator that we needed to create intentionality in where we appear, what we participate in and how we ultimately engage communities.

Action Plan

Our Action Plan has 4 goals. One goal is internal, with a focus on how we reflect inclusivity as a core value throughout our organization. The second goal targets how an inclusivity perspective shapes how we go into and intentionally involve ourselves in communities. The third is about advancing our field and our actual programs in terms of best practices, which incorporate an inclusivity lens. Finally, we have an assessment and evaluation goal.

Goal 1: To articulate what is the “Earth Force culture”

We want inclusivity to be how we are at Earth Force, not something we “do.” Our strategy for truly integrating it into the core of our being as an organization is to work together to articulate what “Earth Force” is, and bring the sensibility and expectation of inclusivity to that reflection. This work will inform all of our other work. It will drive how we bring on new staff, board and volunteers; it will inform how we train and support educators and partners; etc. But first, we need to intentionally call out what it means to be “Earth Force.”

Outcome: Revision or affirmation of organizational mission, priorities, values, behaviors, language, communication, orientation strategies, budget, organizational structure, staff time allocations and performance metrics , communications strategies and hiring practices from an inclusivity perspective.

- a) Assess current state of “organization culture”
 - Conduct an organizational culture assessment capturing current state of organizational priorities, values, behaviors, language, communication, shared learning experiences, budget as a reflection of organizational priorities, structure, staff time, metrics, audience, hiring through an inclusivity lens.
- b) Collectively set norms for working together and with partners related to the areas outlined above
 - Work with consultant to set up a process for organization wide discussion for identifying, affirming and operationalizing shared norms as part of August meeting).
- c) Have specific experiences and professional development for staff to be able to do the work (e.g., how to have difficult conversations among staff and partners)

- Identify and provide professional development and training experiences for staff to gain skills identified as critical for staff through process above.

Goal 2: Create a community engagement strategy that utilizes existing tools and develops new tools that are needed to ensure that we engage authentically and effectively with those communities.

The Earth Force Strategic Plan focuses on creating change at the community level, using an approach to service-learning that brings the best of community development and youth civic engagement together with what we know is effective environmental education. The result is a strong network of organizations that effectively engage youth in civic life. We have committed to working with low-income youth in communities that are the most impacted by environmental problems. One of the critical elements of this work is to develop and replicate effective community-based models for environmental service-learning.

Outcome: A community engagement strategy and tools for Earth Force staff

a) Create a partnership team with representatives from each of the other work teams (training, evaluation, communications, and inclusivity)

- Evaluate the implementation guide to see whether it's appropriate for building a presence in a community
- Collect data from interviews & reflections to translate into a profile document/matrix that identifies:
 - qualities of an anchor partner in a potential CBI community
 - qualities of effective community engagement
- Share the blueprint information with the rest of the organization by taking the inclusivity lens back to the other teams

b) Gather data around effective methods for partnership building and community involvement

- One-on-one interviews with people for whom the work is second nature (what is the thinking as they build partnerships; what are they looking for)
 - Community organizers
 - Existing EF staff
- Involve ourselves in potential CBI communities
 - Develop and test strategies for each community
 - Serve on local boards or committees
 - Shadow fellow staff and community members
 - Use the tools the partnership team develops to reflect on the involvement and translate it into data

Goal 3: To establish high quality standards for the Earth Force process

The Earth Force 6-step process is the tool we use to engage young people in communities. It embodies what have been established by the field as best practices in "service-learning." As an organization, we have scaffolded that 6 step process with training and support strategy and an organizational mindset about how we do our work. So, when we talk about establishing high quality standards for our

“process,” we are including all of those pieces – training, support, the 6-step process, and mindset. We see inclusivity as central to a high quality program and need to run our programmatic work through that lens. That is what this goal is about.

Outcome: Exemplary training and support tools and strategies and educational materials

- a) Define current elements of high quality experiences based on current data
 - Work with our evaluator, Brandeis University to assess what activities, experiences, etc. lead to the best outcomes for young people and educators.
- b) Use the inclusivity lens established in goal #2 to see whether our process needs to be adapted to better reflect our “EF culture”
 - Establish a team to work through training, materials, etc with this lens
- c) Explicitly share the work in the educational field
 - Identify target conferences/opportunities for presentation
- d) Training team infuses EF high quality standards into the work around training and support

Goal 4: Create an evaluation to ensure that we are accomplishing the blueprint goals

How do we know we are making progress? This goal commits us to setting up systems and instruments for making sure our strategies and work are accomplishing our goals. We see that as critical both internally with staff and in terms of our program implementation.

Outcome: Good tools that give us reliable feedback as to whether or not we are on track with our efforts to infuse inclusivity into our organization at all levels.

- a) Review staff performance evaluations with an inclusivity lens
 - Establish a protocol for conducting staff performance evaluations
 - Integrate the norms and standards established in goal #2 into the current staff performance evaluation
- b) Review, and revise if needed, student, educator and partner evaluations with an inclusivity lens

Timeline & Responsible Parties

GOAL	TASK	WHO	TIMELINE			
			Apr - June	July- Sept	Oct – Dec	Jan - Mar
Articulate EF Culture	Culture assessment	Inclusivity team				
	Norms	all		Aug		
	PD needs	Training Team				
Develop Engagement Strategy	Establish Partnership team	Inclusivity team				
	Data gathering –re: partnership building	Partnership team				
	Evaluate current measures for building CBI	Partnership team				

	Articulate Anchor partner criteria	Partnership team				
	PD incorporation	Training Team				
Establish as part of High Quality Standards for EF	Define what is high quality from evals	Evaluation Team				
	Overlay inclusivity lens from goal 1	Evaluation Team				
	Share/present to field	all				
	Infuse into training/support/materials	Training Team				
Assess our progress	Change staff eval protocols to reflect inclusivity	All supervisors				
	Review program evals through lens	Eval team				
Share the work	Develop effective strategies to share across network	Partnership & Inclusivity team				

Accountability Plan

In terms of day to day oversight and our progress on the Blueprint, the Inclusivity Team will have overarching responsibility. The co-facilitators of the inclusivity team will manage that team and the communication and involvement of the other teams in this work.

- The Evaluation and Training teams are existing teams that will incorporate these tasks into their work plans. Each of them has a lead facilitator who will be responsible for task accomplishment and who will sit on the Partnership team.
- The President/CEO, VP of Operations and Board members who sit on the inclusivity team and are responsible for linking the work to the Board of Directors. The President/CEO and VP of Operations are also responsible for supporting any changes in policies/procedures that emerge from this work.
- The Board will receive a formal quarterly report on the progress of the organization as it works through the Blueprint.

Conclusion

The journey of building an inclusivity Blueprint created an extraordinary opportunity for us to think about inclusion in a universal way. What started as a Denver-based initiative became a national initiative with the reorganization of FrontRange Earth Force into Earth Force. This reorganization (which came with its own complexities) illuminated key components in what it takes to build inclusion from the inside out. We learned that during times of crisis and change, it is easy to lose sight of the power of inclusivity. The goal is sometimes to move through the complexity as quickly as possible; sometimes losing the very important lens – inclusivity – that creates a better outcome in the end.

The Earth Force Inclusivity Blueprint provides an effective framework for infusing the inclusivity lens in all that we do. From staff development, to community engagement to evaluation tools and processes – our plan provides the roadmap to looking at everything that we do and say in a way that garners full community, staff and partner engagement.