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FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND JUSTICE:

MAKING SPACE FOR EVERYONE IN WILDFIRE RESILIENCE

Why DEI?

Diversity, equity, inclusion and justice are all big concepts on their own, let alone in combination. But the interest and vital need for exploring ideas, processes and the meaning of DEI in the wildfire resilience community has grown rapidly over the past several years. Living with fire requires partnership, trust and action. So the Fire Networks are centering DEI principles to address inequities and make space for all people in wildfire resilience work.

Reflecting the complexity of these topics, DEI projects look very different across our networks. Throughout the country, community leaders are tackling a huge variety of projects that empower and encourage all members of their communities to participate in fire adaptation. This looks like everything from developing evacuation plans tailored to aging populations to advocating for cultural fire, from translating preparedness materials into multiple languages to running cost share programs, and from supporting technology access for disabled agricultural workers to continue burning on their land to developing programs to reach the unhoused. The common thread among these projects is their support for whole community participation in fire adaptation—however different the composition of community is from place to place.

To support these local efforts, the Fire Networks seek to create safe spaces for practitioners to explore different conceptions of DEI in their work. This is driven by the understanding that being resilient to wildfire requires all of us. It is critical to expand and foster the whole spectrum of our human communities to engage safely and productively with fire as a partner.

The Fire Networks have been providing members with DEI offerings for years—through sessions at national

workshops and TRES events, online training courses, and learning groups such as the Beginners' Working Groups for those preparing to work with Indigenous partners. And in the past year FAC Net in particular has been able to leverage this, and with additional support from a private donor, expand and systematically improve our collective DEI work.

Internal Practices ...

To make efforts as impactful as possible in 2023, FAC Net staff approached this work from two angles. We have both offered additional member training and coaching, and participated in a network analysis and action plan to better incorporate DEI practices in FAC Net processes.

Training and Coaching

Members had asked for a foundational DEI series, as well as support in working with different types of communities. So in a series of virtual workshops, 28 Fire Networks members and partners explored their individual relationships to DEI work by co-creating definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice; discussing implicit biases; and building personalized DEI action plans. The participants came from nine states across the U.S. and worked for a variety of nonprofits, fire departments, local government agencies and conservation associations. Their work is already breaking down silos and translating DEI principles from individual to organizational levels. In their evaluations of this series, participants reflected that DEI is not a state of mind, or a journey, but a practice—one that requires both reflection and sustained action. And through these workshops, participants were able to deepen their practice by creating a safe space for each other and establishing a peer support network.

To support working with different types of communities, we also offered Fire Networks members a variety of skill-building opportunities for working with access and functional needs populations. These workshops addressed topics in equitable communication practices and inclusive disaster preparedness, and offered a variety of tools and materials that support disability rights during wildfires and other hazard events. These sessions were recorded and shared through the FAC Circular newsletter list of nearly 2,000 wildfire resilience practitioners, expanding their potential impact.

“I really appreciated the definition of psychological safety as ‘permission for candor’ and have brought that concept forward in a few different spaces. A broader takeaway was the idea of DEI as a practice rather than a journey, which helps to mitigate the idea that any person is more advanced or further behind than someone else.”

Network Processes

Through the evaluation of our network structure, we are identifying ways to holistically expand DEI capacity, action and impact. A diverse visioning committee of network members and DEI experts completed a DEI Action Plan for more inclusive network operations; identified 14 organizations that can serve as partners to further DEI work at FAC Net; reviewed the FAC Net website to evaluate ease of use and disability and language access; and described 23 grant opportunities that could support FAC Net and its members in further advancing their DEI work. The committee’s work built a solid foundation that will continue to support and expand the incorporation of DEI principles throughout the network.

... That Transform External Process

Our efforts to support members’ DEI work and also explore internal structural change to our network have highlighted many gaps that exist between wildfire adaptation and DEI principles. Though challenging, member projects and network commitments are spanning critical divides between these two areas, which will support necessary systems change. Working from individual to network scales, we are both seeding and modeling ways to functionally increase the depth of DEI programming and implementation within the wildfire space. Practitioners are gaining critical skills to stand up as DEI allies, and to incorporate principles of equity throughout their work.

We are striving to serve as a model to members and partners by fostering a more inclusive and accessible

network culture and creating a learning environment for staff, members and partners to continue diversifying our network and network impacts. DEI efforts are helping us build resilience across the entire spectrum of our communities, partnerships and networks. This work pushes us to not only support new opportunities for our members, but also to see equity as a powerful tool for building new coalitions, creating innovative projects, and promoting not only deeper forms of landscape stewardship, but also deepening our community and stewardship of relations with one another.

AROUND THE FIRE NETWORKS

In addition to the work highlighted here, staff and members across the Fire Networks have been bringing DEI concerns to the fore in a variety of ways, including:

- ▶ The staff member who facilitates the work of the Indigenous Peoples’ Burning Network also leads several cohorts of Beginners’ Working Groups aimed at guiding non-Indigenous practitioners preparing to equitably work with tribes in their landscapes.
- ▶ This spring the Fire Networks staff as a whole began a process to codify and commit to acting more intentionally in ways that incorporate DEI values. Now with a shared vision, staff will commit to specific actions and accountability processes by summer’s end.
- ▶ Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges continue to strive to serve a body of practitioners that is more diverse than the field as a whole. In 2022, for example, about 35% of TRES participants were women, compared to about 15% in the federal fire workforce. TRES participants are also exposed to practices such as active bystander training.

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