



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A PAPER OF COLOR FOR GREEN PATHWAYS

Stronger Investments in Leadership Programs will Diversify Environmental Justice Movement

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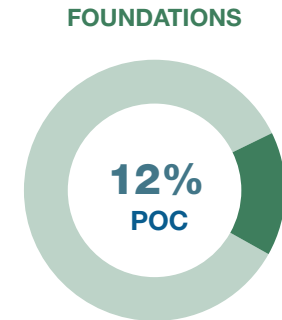
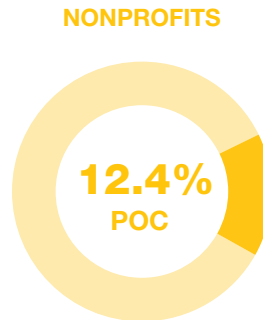
Pictured: Rainier Valley Corps' 2017-2019 Fellows



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► Executive Summary

People of color (POCs) are disproportionately impacted by climate change and yet are consistently underrepresented in environmentally focused organizations. **According to the Green 2.0 report by Dr. Dorceta E. Taylor, the percentage of POCs working within environmental organizations are 12.4% in nonprofits, 15.5% in government agencies, and 12% in foundations.**



BARRIERS POCS FACE ENTERING GREEN SECTOR

According to various sources, environmental institutions have been working on increasing diversity in the sector for decades, yet growth has not been significantly enough, as professionals of color still face the following barriers when it comes to entering and advancing in the environmental sector:

- Systemic racism, structural and institutional oppression
- Lack of access to continuing education and job training
- Lack of funding support given to organizations led by and serving communities of color
- Uninviting and exclusionary organizational and environmental movement cultures
- Lack of strategic direction in mainstream organizations around diversity and inclusion

These barriers were consistently observed in various reports and surveys completed by environmental professionals of color. The City of Seattle supported the creation of the Equity and Environment Agenda, which offered diversity and inclusion recommendations based on the Green 2.0 report. A significant recommendation is for stronger programs focused on creating career opportunities, specifically low-wealth people and people of color. A critical recommendation is that there needs to be more programs that specifically focus on supporting the career advancement of leaders of color.

CURRENT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EFFORTS IN GREEN SECTOR

A scan of local and national opportunities to engage people of color in understanding and becoming involved with the environmental movement discovered the following common **strengths** and **weaknesses** within existing programs:

Strengths

- They provide opportunities to deepen and expand knowledge of environmental issues
- They foster connections between program participants and professionals in the field
- They provide some form of compensation

Gaps

- They are not grounded in values of racial equity, Native/ Indigenous rights, and the history of colonization
- They often provide low compensation, which disproportionately affects POCs
- They often include barriers, such as requirements for formal education, that prevent leadership advancement for POCs
- Placement sites at these programs are not culturally welcoming environments for POCs
- Programs are usually one year or less, which is too little time for skills to be learned and for authentic connections to be made that greatly contribute to career advancement
- Programs are focused on building networks among program participants, which, while helpful, is not sufficient to retain and advance POCs
- Programs are focused on direct service, not systemic change

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GROW DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN GREEN SECTOR

A stronger investment in leadership programs that focus on recruiting and supporting leaders of color is critical to the success of the environmental movement, as this sector's ethnic, racial, and cultural makeup should more accurately reflect the general population. Leadership pathway programs such as fellowships and internships supporting both entry-level and mid-career POCs are pivotal.

These programs should build on the current strengths of the sector, address the weaknesses identified above, as well as:

- Be grounded in racial equity, including Native/Indigenous history and rights, and include thorough examinations of the lasting impact of U.S. colonization
- Strategically recruit and target POCs
- Have curricula that comprise education around cultural elements such as historic trauma, intergenerational dynamics, gender differences, disability and health inclusion, religious differences, and more.
- Provide living wages to program participants or significant compensation
- Have it be at least two years in duration
- Remove unnecessary barriers that disproportionately affect POCs, such as formal education requirements and lack of criminal record requirements, unless relevant
- Support participants in both direct services work as well as in affecting systemic change
- Provide mentorship and career coaching for participants
- Simultaneously support host sites in developing and strengthening equity practices
- Place two or more participants at the same sites to provide mutual support, if possible

► About RVC

Rainier Valley Corps (RVC) strengthens the power of communities of color in order to create a more equitable society through capacity-building, leadership development, and operations support. We accomplish this through our core programs and services as well as through leading partnerships with community members and organizations of color. These members and organizations provide support services tailored to the strengths and needs of the communities they serve.

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