Green Pathways
Winter 2019 Update

An overview of program history and an update on program progress

By Florence Sum & RVC
Summary

People of color (POCs) are severely underrepresented in the environmental justice movement, yet they are the most affected by environmental challenges. In fact, across the country, race is the biggest predictor of who lives near contaminated water, air, or soil.

In 2019, RVC and Got Green launched the Green Pathways Fellowship Program to address the lack of diversity in environmental organizations. There needs to be a deep commitment for POCs to undergo professional and leadership development so that lower-income communities and communities of color finally have a substantive voice at the table. The Green Pathways Fellowship Program was created to confront and combat this very issue.

The program has placed a cohort of future leaders of color through a two-year program. This is a similar structure to our Community Impact Fellowship Program, and will provide Fellows with coaching and mentoring support, technical skill building and training in leadership development that is culturally relevant, community-centered, and context-driven.
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In the summer of 2014, Dr. Dorceta E. Taylor released the “Green 2.0” report. This report outlined the state of diversity in environmental organizations in the United States, looking at the makeup of their boards and staff.

The findings highlight that ethnic minorities are severely underrepresented in the environmental workforce.

“The percentage of ethnic minorities on the boards or general staff of environmental organizations does not exceed 16 percent,” states the report. “Once hired in environmental organizations, ethnic minorities are concentrated in the lower ranks. As a result, ethnic minorities occupy less than 12 percent of the leadership positions in environmental organizations.”

The constant failure for the green movement to exceed these low percentages is known as the green ceiling.

The study also outlines that environmental organizations do not use the internship channel effectively to find ethnic minority and POC workers.

In 2015, Got Green launched a study of their own to assess whether young people of color cared about the environment (and what specifically) as well as what the barriers were to get involved and invested in the issue. It concluded that young people do care and the main barrier was employment opportunities.

Thus, Got Green’s Young Green Leaders Committee launched a campaign to get the City of Seattle to pass the Green Pathways Resolution in 2016, which said the City will commit to advancing green careers for POCs. This didn’t have any funding or initiatives behind it. Got Green approached RVC in 2017 about building the Green Pathways Fellowship Program, and we said yes.

To show why this program is needed and what it would look like, Florence Sum, our Green Pathways Program Manager, researched and wrote a report, “Stronger Investments in Leadership Programs will Diversify Environmental Justice Movement.” The report offers clear ways to achieve diversity to bolster the green movement.
Recruitment, Fellows, and Partner Organizations

Looking at race and ethnicity of our applicants across the board, we were pleasantly surprised by the number and diversity of our applicants. In terms of numbers, we did better than when we launched our Community Impact Fellowship Program.

HOW WAS OUR FIRST YEAR OF RECRUITING FOR THIS PROGRAM?

We had more than 75% more applicants apply than the first year RVC launched its Community Impact Fellowship! Below is a breakdown of our demographic based on race/ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
<th>% of Total Applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian American (Southeast Asian &amp; Central Asian)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American (East Asian &amp; South Asian)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial/Multicultural</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (African American, African Descent)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (African, Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin@/Latinx</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Peoples of America, American Indian, or Alaska Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t indicate their race/ethnicity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL APPLICANTS FOR POSITIONS

73 TOTAL APPLICANTS FOR 10 POSITIONS
We were also surprised at how many folks with postsecondary education applied for the program, as we did not have an education requirement. Our initial target for the program was to recruit people who did not have postsecondary education. While having a meaningful career is certainly possible without a college degree, our intention for the program was to recruit folks who did not have postsecondary education so we could help to provide more options. As it turned out, 65 percent of applicants had a postsecondary education, while 12 percent of applicants only had a high school degree.

**Educational Attainment of Applicants**

65% of applicants had a postsecondary education

12% of applicants only had a high school degree
Another target for the program was to prioritize folks who have deep roots in Seattle/South King region because we wanted applicants that were invested in the community and being a part of the change happening here. While the greatest number of applicants (35) belonged in the “Roots” category (10+ years), there were 14 in the “Transplant” category (5-10 years) and 24 in the “New” category (less than 5 years). Again, this was more wide-ranging than we were expecting.

47% of applicants of “roots” in King County

In regards to our partner organizations for the program, Got Green talked to many organizations about Green Pathways and those relationships were transferred to us at RVC to figure out who would be a part of the inaugural group of Green Pathways Partners.

We have partnered with six local organizations. We are so grateful as this program wouldn’t be possible without their partnerships and contributions. They are Got Green, Duwamish River Clean-up Coalition, Forterra, King Conservation District, Resource Media, and The Nature Conservancy. Five of the Fellows were placed at Forterra.
Structure of Green Pathways Fellowship Program

Community Impact + Green Pathways
Program Model

Leadership Institute
First 5 weeks of Fellowship start
- 1st week Retreat
- MWF at RVC
- TTh at Host Site

Leadership Development
Remaining 2 years
- Monthly All-Day Trainings
- Monthly 2-hour Workshops

GP Partners

Training
Training Resources for Environmental Community (TREC)
Quarterly trainings adjusted to the cohort of partners (white-dominated/led)

Equity Assessment
RVC Capacity Building Dept + Org’s Equity Change Team implements an equity assessment and creates plan to address the areas of improvement

Fellows

Training

Coaching
Monthly 1-2 hour meetings with an RVC Fellowship Program staff

Mentoring
Monthly 1-3 hour meetings with a mid to senior-level professional
In September 2019, after the Fellows were chosen, the program started off with a week-long opening retreat to establish strong relationships and trust between the Fellows.

One of our values is community, and we strongly believe in building a foundation of trust at the start of the program. This allowed our Fellows to learn from, rely on, and collaborate with and empower each other in future endeavors.

Soon after, a five-week Leadership Academy was held (September–October 2019) in which the cohort built a shared understanding around environmental and climate justice frameworks, leadership skills, and other professional skills to be successful in environmental sector careers.

From the end of October 2019 and beyond, the work at partner organizations began, which includes monthly trainings, convenings, and more.

Throughout the year, the Fellows will engage in monthly all-day trainings, lunch-and-learn meetings, check-ins, peer-coaching, performance evaluations, and networking opportunities with community leaders. There will be mid-year retreats and celebrations annually to continue relationship-building and for further reflection.

For our Green Pathways Partners, we provide training resources for the environmental community, which include quarterly trainings adjusted to the cohort of partners, many of which are white-dominant/led. In addition, we ask the organizations to create or make sure their equity committee/team is a part of their organization’s infrastructure to address areas of improvement.
Cost of the Program

We estimated the cost of the program by factoring in a standard living wage, benefits, stipends for professional development, and so on. As a result, we budgeted for our cohorts accordingly. Since this is a pilot program, we are closely monitoring feedback and identifying gaps that would potentially raise the cost of this program in the next iteration. In responding to the needs of our Fellows and Partners, including potentially expanding the equity arm, our estimation may have been too low.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary (living wage, according to 2017 standards)</td>
<td>$42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits (at minimum)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Stipend (per year)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Reimbursement (provide or purchase)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Fee (per Fellow, per year)</td>
<td>$16,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cost to organization (per Fellow, per year)</td>
<td>$65,443</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lessons Learned and Looking Forward

As expected when launching a new program of this magnitude, there are already some important takeaways and lessons that were learned along the way. Whether it’s internal issues, such as reassessing the total costs of the program or building up more capacity prior to launching the program, or changing the application process to attract an even more diverse applicant pool and setting clear expectations for our Fellows, there are a few things to improve on to make for a smoother launch for future cohorts.

HERE ARE LESSONS WE HAVE LEARNED:

INTERNAL

1. Information Download/Transition

The launch of the program was rocky because some relationships (partners, funders, etc.) and other key programmatic information was not documented or transitioned well.

2. True Cost of Green Pathways Program

Our estimated expenses for this pilot program does not match with the current structure and vision for the program. It will potentially cost more.

3. Building Up Capacity We Need to Launch Beforehand

We need an additional FTE on the RVC Fellowship Team to assist in executing the program.

FELLOWS

1. Recruitment for Fellows

We need to improve our relationships with the Latinx, Black, and Indigenous communities to build an ethnically diverse pool of applicants. In addition, we need to concentrate on our recruitment for applicants without a college degree.
2 Expectations

Be clear and repeat our expectations throughout the application and program. We want to make sure there are no surprises.

3 Non-negotiable Start for Fellows

There were requests for Fellows to begin their position earlier than our September start date. This was not congruent with our cohort model.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

1 Screening Partners

We needed a clear criteria and vetting process to select partners for this program. For example, we needed to understand folks’ willingness and commitment to moving equity work and the intended Fellow’s supervisor’s preparedness and capabilities.

2 Clear Job Descriptions

Unclear titles and responsibilities confused all parties involved. This led to a messy or no onboarding, Fellows unsure of what their responsibilities are, and rotating supervisors/point-of-contacts.

3 Equity Work

We realized we needed at least a year before Fellows started their jobs with partners to build relationships, assess and begin to address the impact of racism. This takes more than an assessment and a couple of training sessions, but we don’t have the capacity.
4 **Supervision Match**

It’s so important to have a good supervisor! For a person of color in an entry-level position, it’s crucial to have someone with the capacity, skills, and support to be an incredible supervisor.

5 **Common Narrative Plan**

We need a clear communications plan to disseminate to our partners which outline the vision of the program, why the partnership exists, and what they can expect. This helps clear up any confusion about who the Fellow was and what RVC was contacting people about.

▶️ **Conclusion**

At the end of the day, we are beyond excited to take the lead on this important issue and about the work that’s been accomplished so far. There is much to be done in pursuing equitable change, and ultimately, we are optimistic about the program and excited to see what this dynamic group of young leaders can accomplish in the near future.

For more information, check out the [executive summary](#) and the [full version](#) of RVC’s Paper of Color for Green Pathways!
About RVC

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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