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Green Pathways Fall 2020 Update

An update on program progress
and lessons learned

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Pictured: RVCs' 2019-2021 Fellows



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Intro

As we enter the end of the first year of the [Green Pathways Fellowship Program](#) during a pandemic and revolution, we are capturing the lessons learned to better support fellows, staff of color, and white-led organizations to commit and integrate a culture of equity. Launching a new yet familiar program comes with challenges, but there are also some successes. Below you will find what's been successful in our first year, how we've adjusted to COVID-19, and the lessons learned about our program structure.

Green Pathways (GP) is a pilot program; this is a fellowship program with similar bones to the Community Impact Fellowship Program. Still, there are distinct differences between the two, such as equity-focused capacity building services, type of partners, 1-on-1 coaching for supervisors, trainings provided by TREC (Training Resources for the Environmental Community), and the program's funding structure program. In the Community Impact Fellowship Program (CI), fellows are on RVC's payroll. We pay for the salary, benefits, and other supportive elements of an employee. The host organizations pay us a fee proportionate to their budget. In GP, fellows are employees of host organizations, and they pay RVC a fee that supports the fellowship programming and the equity capacity-building services. The differences between these fellowship programs drive the lessons learned in this update.

▶ What's been successful for Green Pathways?

1 POC-led, Mixed-POC-led organizations and POC leaders enjoy and benefit from the partnership with RVC through our capacity building department, and consultants 3E Integrity & Sapna Strategies.

“ I am so grateful for the Green Pathways Program. This partnership has benefitted all of us involved at TNC. Our fellow has had the opportunity to learn about the world's largest conservation organization while developing her skills as an environmental professional. As her supervisor and a BIPOC environmental professional, I have also received incredible support from RVC. By working with a career coach they provided, I feel more confident in my own professional development and career path. Last, The Nature Conservancy in Washington benefits from the partnership because it is a continual reminder of the organization's commitment to creating a more inclusive and diverse organization. ”

- **Alfonso Orozco**, Volunteer and Field Experiences Manager
The Nature Conservancy

“ Roshni has been an incredible guide for our organization to prioritize and see what's possible! This partnership with RVC has helped me as an Executive Director create policies and more capacity with thoughtfulness and intention. ”

- Green Pathways Partner

“ Working with RVC has helped Got Green grow in many different capacities. In particular, we have gained a staff member through the Green Pathways. Shaylea, our Green Pathways fellow, has been able to expand our capacity by doing multiple workshops in High Schools around Got Green's work as well as work with the High School students to support Got Green through graphic design. Shaylea has also been a huge influence in supporting our visions and strategies for the future by keeping us grounded and focused on the best opportunities for our communities. ”

- **Marion Romero**, Operations Manager
Got Green

2 Adapting to Transition & Fellows' Needs

Like many people, we transitioned our programming to a virtual space. We reduced the number of hours our training took place and have been able to make things more accessible for folks to participate or catch-up.

In addition, we've been able to create an emergency fund for our fellows (Community Impact + Green Pathways) to support their livelihood over the last year. Specifically, we've been able to support fellows' housing needs.

3 Fellows whose participation isn't disrupted have a holistic experience and have shown marked progress in their leadership (confidence, creativity, and initiative) and role at their host organizations and within the cohort.

Read Shaylea Pilarski's blog about her experience at Got Green as an RVC Fellow: [What My Work at Got Green Taught Me About Environmental Justice.](#)

“ Being at Got Green made me see that environmental justice isn't all about planting trees, recycling, picking up trash, or taking public transit; it's also about the people, the community, and policies and arguing cases to city council members, in order to give the people a chance to have their voices heard.

[With this fellowship] I've learned how to insert myself into places I normally wouldn't be able to get into, I've learned how to speak about something in a way that will make everyone listen and understand what I am saying; I've been shown how to make community connections, and how to listen to what the community members have to say.

- Shaylea Pilarski, Got Green Fellow ”

4 Fellows use their connections in their cohort to create opportunities to collaborate or support across their organizations.

Fellows have been able to organize tabling events, volunteer or attend one another's events, distribute healthy bucks, share professional development opportunities, and support food justice projects.

► What other lessons have we learned?

1 Challenging when Fellows are under employer's payroll instead of RVC

RVC has little leverage in changing organizational practices, especially when Green Pathways Fellows are employees of their respective organizations. There are risks and benefits to this configuration. However, the biggest drawback is that employers have no obligation to implement suggested changes and have more power to back out of the partnership in ways that can harm RVC, RVC staff, supervisors of color, and the fellow. And RVC has no structural leverage to prevent this harm.

2 Supervisors of Color need support too

Supervisors often do not get the training or support they need when managing people, especially training that involves addressing power dynamics. We've seen this particular lesson recur across our programs and interactions with partners. There needs to be an investment in supervisors to grow their skills and capacity to manage people, especially fellows. This is particularly true for supervisors of color who are often facing the same issues that the fellows do. We are trialing a coaching service for supervisors of color in white-led environmental organizations specifically those supervising fellows. It's been beneficial to those who opted in.

3 White-Led Organizations' alignment with RVC

As noted in the previous update, we needed to implement our due diligence process to vet which organizations truly align with RVC values on transparency and equity and a commitment to staying in difficult conversations. It can be hard to maintain a mutually beneficial partnership.

▶ How does this impact Green Pathways 2.0?

1 Building Equity in Historically White Led (HWL) Organizations

This takes a different kind of effort than any current programming RVC has or can offer. For the next iteration of Green Pathways, we need to decide what offerings we can reasonably provide to our partners. That could look like an assessment or focus on direct supports to fellows (trainings for their supervisor structure & department). Also, we must begin capacity-building work with these organizations and build relationships several months before the fellow's hire date.

2 Fundraising Differences and Challenges

We will need more funds to support building pathways for young leaders of color and will need to reconsider our initial assumptions that fees from white-led organizations could cover the program's actual cost. Our initial funding structure was not enough to sustain the program.

3 Smaller Cohort or Combined Cohort

Fundraising challenges would mean we need to be creative about how we can sustain this program and still make it a quality experience for both host organizations and the fellows, which could look like decreasing the size of the cohort or combining it with the Community Impact Fellowship.

4 Types of Organizations RVC can partner with

Our mission, experience, and commitment have always been with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, leaders, and organizations. This program tested whether or not we could tackle fruitful equity work at HWL organizations through a fellowship model. While there have been marked successes, it's inconsistent, and we will be reflecting on what role we can best play in supporting leaders of color in the environment field moving forward.

▶ Conclusion

Not only is Green Pathways a pilot program with plenty of ongoing experimentation, but this pandemic has also thrown us all in a time of uncertainty and of possibility. We continue to use our cohort spaces to respond to emergent issues and create new opportunities to support fellows in their leadership and work. Because we do not know when this will end, our planning ability can only stretch so far. But, we see this moment as a time to be creative, practice the values that allow for our collective liberation, and lean into the world's possibilities that honors and uplifts Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities.

▶ 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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