

DEI&A WORKING PLAN

23 NOVEMBER 2021

BAYOU LAND CONSERVANCY
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Access
Committee



A Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEI&A) Working Plan for Bayou Land Conservancy

In June 2020, Bayou Land Conservancy (BLC) formed a Working Group to assess the state of DEI&A within the organization and to develop actionable strategies to incorporate these principles into all aspects of land conservation. The Working Group consisted of staff, current and past board members, and community volunteers.

From there, the Working Group created a DEI&A Charter, which was approved by the Board in January 2021, to serve as guiding principles that were also integrated with BLC's existing strategic plan. The Charter provided a framework for each staff and board member to incorporate DEI&A practices into their daily work, including committee activities and events. The Board then approved the creation of the DEI&A Committee, and we have developed this actionable implementation plan to serve as BLC's guide over the next 5 years.

Engaging in DEI&A work is critical to the future of land conservation and an essential part of BLC's mission. Land conservation has historically perpetuated systemic racism, particularly around the role of the U.S. National Parks^[1] and other conservation efforts^[2,3] on the loss of land of indigenous people. The conservation of land in perpetuity bears additional responsibility considering the past and those served in the future. In addition, it is crucial that BLC's programs and land conservation efforts are shared equitably, and we understand that there are institutional, economic, and cultural barriers that have kept people from engaging in our work. BLC is committed to addressing these barriers by acknowledging the internal and external biases that have promoted inequity.

“A core value at Bayou Land Conservancy is the belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to enjoy time outdoors. The more people connect to nature, the more we all benefit. The work of the DEI&A Committee creates a pathway to engage more people in BLC’s mission and helps ensure the sustainability of our work.” – Jill Boullion, Executive Director, Bayou Land Conservancy

BLC’s DEI&A Working Plan is separated into two categories: internal and external strategies. The plan has been approved to serve as a guide for the DEI&A Committee through 2025 and will be a living document with the committee reviewing and editing the plan every 5 years.

INTERNAL STRATEGIES

CATEGORY 1: RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND PLANNING

GOAL 1: Establish a staff, board, and advisory council that focuses on DEI&A.

While the DEI&A Committee has already been created and formalized, the addition of an advisory council member to serve as a resource to our committee is pending.

GOAL 2: Develop succession and recruitment planning that centers DEI&A.

Include an interview question centered around DEI&A for both board and staff candidates. Post new jobs and open board positions in diverse forums, ensuring we are not being exclusive in our hiring pool. Reduce or eliminate opportunities for conscious/unconscious bias to influence hiring or recruiting (for example, the committee would consider conducting a blind resume review of the candidates by removing identifiers such as their name, photos, etc.).

GOAL 3: Implement training and continuous DEI&A learning opportunities for the staff and board members.

BLC’s current training package was developed in Jan 2021, and it currently references the DEIA Committee’s existence and resources to reach out or get involved. We would like to expanding upon this and potentially include training topics such as “how to be an ally”, “using your privilege for good”, “uncovering

the history behind systemic racism and its impact on land conservation”, etc. However, the ultimate goal is to have BLC members move beyond being an ally to becoming an advocate. Workshops that combine training + open dialogue are preferred; it is valuable to learn from a speaker and from others. Our committee will also propose training media and frequency for board and staff (to be bundled with board meeting follow-ups). It is crucial that we create a safe environment for all BLC members for these conversations.

CATEGORY 2: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

GOAL 1: Amend personnel policies and procedures handbook to include DEI&A language.

Our committee, in conjunction with BLC’s Executive Director, would like to review and assess the handbook to ensure it contains DEI&A language (such as – treat others with respect, discrimination will not be tolerated, etc.). We will also incorporate board development opportunities and incorporate a DEI&A slide into the onboarding presentation.

CATEGORY 3: COMMITTEES

GOAL 1: Develop guiding principles for each committee that ensures alignment with DEI&A best practices.

We will need to work directly with each committee chair to ensure buy-in – this won’t work without their support.

GOAL 2: Create DEI&A evaluation tools for committees.

For example, we could develop a Community Event Assessment Tool for the Community Conservation Committee to reduce the potential for unconscious biases impacting the assessments. We would also like to review and revise the Lands Project Score Sheet to assess how potential properties would advance BLC’s DEI&A efforts and also increase access to new community groups. The goal is to add a DEI&A component to existing tools or tailor DEI&A considerations for each respective committee.

EXTERNAL STRATEGIES

CATEGORY 1: FUNDRAISING AND GRANT APPLICATIONS

GOAL 1: Evaluate funding partner's DEI&A goals.

Ensure that goals and values of funding partners align with those of BLC's. BLC will also evaluate alternative funding sources, e.g. crowdfunding, to gain new funding from individuals or groups who share similar DEI&A goals.

GOAL 2: Seek grants for programs/events for new committees.

BLC has already made a lot of headway on this target. The committee has already applied to new funding sources for DEI&A projects, and we have also received funding from new corporate sponsors in support of our DEI&A initiatives. BLC will need very specific projects for future crowdfunding projects.

In addition, BLC has applied for grants from foundations who are starting to attach DEI-related goals to our grants. For example, foundations would like to track the number of individuals engaging in BLC efforts who have been historically underrepresented in the land conservation community as well as the number of partnership opportunities activated with groups not traditionally connected to land conservation. BLC would like to ensure we have the programs and strategies in place to meet both the targets they have set for us and the goals we have set for ourselves.

GOAL 3: Provide scholarships to local students in the community to improve access to BLC programming.

For example, BLC received a donation from volunteers for our annual Gala, and the volunteers requested that they sponsor students with a passion for the environment to attend who may not otherwise have had this kind of opportunity for exposure to conservation careers.

GOAL 4: Consider funding for workshop-scale training.

BLC could host annual or bi-annual workshops that build on past training. In addition, we can work with consultants who provide phased training programs in which each phase builds upon the previous course.

CATEGORY 2: MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH

GOAL 1: Conduct public meetings and/or listening sessions that center impacted communities and groups.

In the short-term, due to COVID concerns, these sessions would be a hybrid of in-person and virtual. This ensures that we won't exclude those without internet access or those who do not yet feel comfortable attending in-person events. The meetings could focus on a specific neighborhood or community who may have experienced barriers in the past to outdoor or land conservation-related activities. BLC would also like to co-produce place-based events in the more diverse areas of our lands with the help of our Advancement Director and/or Development Coordinator. Ideally, we would work with another Houston-based group where BLC can support them to meet their mission.

GOAL 2: Build equitable partnerships with other diverse groups.

BLC will continue our partnership with Coalition for Environmental Equity and Resilience (CEER), and we will aim to have a board member attend their meetings. BLC would like to establish relationships with organizations in the community who have a diverse membership and are located within BLC's focus areas or whose missions overlap with those of BLC's. We would also like to reconnect with groups with whom we have had existing partnerships already. There is an opportunity for both groups to learn from each other. We have started partnering with Outdoor Afro by hosting their events on our lands, and we would like to continue fostering this relationship. In addition, BLC would like to strengthen our relationship with local indigenous tribes, particularly those who have a historic presence along the Gulf of Mexico.

GOAL 3: Modify the Ambassador Program and No Child Left Inside to incorporate DEI&A topics.

BLC could add DEI&A as a module in the program. This would be a longer-term project to craft the new content. We feel this is a great way for BLC to speak directly with volunteers and people who enjoy our lands about DEI and not just in print or social media. This will require an aspect of “training the trainer”, but this could be covered by staff.

GOAL 4: Evaluate barriers to membership that consider all aspects of DEI&A.

BLC knows the demographics of the watersheds we serve and of the lands adjacent to these watersheds, and we also know the demographics of property owners and those who volunteer with our organization. We need to evaluate and remove barriers to ensure that the demographics of these 2 groups better align. For example, BLC currently hosts a standing virtual tour of the Spring Creek Nature Trail through the Travel Stories app, and we will soon be releasing a Spanish language version. We have also done outreach to churches that serve a primarily Spanish-speaking congregation to introduce them to BLC and our Spanish eco-tour. BLC would also like to send press releases in different languages and schedule interviews with diverse media outlets to ensure there are no language barriers for the events that we host.

CATEGORY 3: EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING

GOAL 1: Ensure events are welcoming and provide a sense of safety.

BLC wants to ensure we do not exclude certain groups from our events and that we provide signage and visibility to be more inclusive. BLC has made some headway on this already – our committee hosted a Stop Asian Hate Trail Walk after the Atlanta spa shootings and in the wake of violence against Asians in America during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many members of the AAPI community did not feel safe going outside or being in public because of this, so this walk was designed to address this concern amongst the Asian community and provide a safe space for them.

It is crucial that we identify barriers to access, such as needing a car to drive to events, providing bathrooms or childcare, and being ADA-compliant. We will also review the language used during speaking engagements. We have a staff member on the Community Conservation Committee who has committed to supporting us on this aspect.

CATEGORY 4: COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE PARTNERS

GOAL 1: Build equitable partnerships with organizations serving under-resourced communities.

BLC would like to understand the DEI&A goals of our current partners. Our corporate partners traditionally have not connected with BLC through DEI&A initiatives, but we feel there is an opportunity to bring DEI&A into focus and deepen our relationship with corporate DEI groups. BLC would also like to identify new potential partners (such as local women/minority-owned businesses) and understand their DEI goals.

GOAL 2: Seek joint funding opportunities and organizations for specific DEI-related projects which can build into longer-term partnerships.

BLC would like to understand the focus areas of various foundations and see if they align with BLC's mission. We will also seek DEI-related projects or funding with corporations who have strong DEI values incorporated into their missions or who have ERGs (Employee Resource Groups). As previously mentioned, BLC has already received funding – specifically for our DEI&A initiatives – from two new corporate partners in 2021.

GOAL 3: Lead DEI efforts across the Houston region.

BLC would like to aid conservation peers Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF), Katy Prairie Conservancy (KPC), and Houston Audubon Society (HAS) in furthering their DEI goals and initiatives. We are also working to develop a local network of DEI counterparts (consisting of their staff and committees) at GBF, KPC, and HAS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BLC recognizes that it is a long journey to move the needle on DEI&A within an organization and within a community. We will utilize this working plan to move us along in a guided manner, and we recognize that it takes the efforts of passionate and hard-working people to get us there.

We would like to thank the following people for their dedication and efforts – we could not be where we are today without them!

BLC DEI&A Committee

Lisa Lin, Co-Chair

Rebecca Kuo, Co-Chair

Jonathan Lok, BLC Board Chair

Suzanne Simpson, Staff Liaison

Mary Bauer

Dr. Matthew Berg

Kelly Dietrich

Lisa Graiff

Mac Martin

Leadership

Jill Boullion, Executive Director

On November 30th, 2021, BLC was granted approval from the Board to proceed with this implementation plan (TBD).

References

- 1) Kantor, Isaac. Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks. 28 Pub. Land & Resources L. Rev. 41 (2007)
<https://scholarship.law.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1267&context=plrlr>
- 2) Chatty, Dawn, and Marcus Colchester, eds. Conservation and Mobile Indigenous Peoples: Displacement, Forced Settlement and Sustainable Development. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002.
http://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/chatty_introduction.pdf
- 3) Colchester, Marcus. Conservation Policy and Indigenous Peoples
<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/conservation-policy-and-indigenous-peoples#:~:text=National%20parks%2C%20pioneered%20in%20the,central%20to%20conservation%20policy%20worldwide>