

# OCR / Meyer Memorial Trust

Final Report: Wild Diversity, December 31, 2023

**Project Name:** BIPOC Conservation Initiative

**Project Location:** Portland Metro Area

**Project Statement:** Grant funds supported a new Conservation Director staff position that worked with community to create and launch Wild Diversity's BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) Conservation Initiative. Through the project, Wild Diversity began laying the foundation to move away from the labor-centered and tokenizing model for people of color in conservation and instead began building the BIPOC community up as thought leaders who have the autonomy to create conservation initiatives that better support and retain people of color within the field.

**Summary of Goals:** The primary goals of the project were to: a) build a sense of community among BIPOC individuals working in the conservation field, b) facilitate discussions and create opportunities for learning and professional networking, and c) articulate a community-led vision and priorities to guide the future implementation of Wild Diversity's BIPOC Conservation Initiative.

Over the course of the project, Wild Diversity hosted 12 community meetings and field trips, attended by over 300 BIPOC conservationists.

- June (2022): Portland Parks and Recreation
- August: Portland Harbor Community Coalition
- September: Friends of the Columbia Gorge
- October: BARK
- January (2023): People of Color Outdoors
- February: General gathering and discussion
- March: Hoyt Arboretum
- April: City Repair
- May: Cultivating Reciprocity – Black Food Sovereignty
- June: Tryon Creek
- July: Camassia Natural Area
- November: The ReConnect

Wild Diversity also created a BIPOC Conservation Leadership Cohort who came together with staff to distill and synthesize what we were hearing from community during our events and through other community engagement channels. The findings of the Leadership Cohort created

the foundation for a community survey to gather additional feedback about future priorities and the community's experience with the initiative to date.

Wild Diversity surveyed individuals who had participated in one or more of the BIPOC Conservation Initiatives events or meetups. Please see the "BIPOC Conservation Survey Results" attachment for more details. These survey results will be used to continue refining the initiative and provide a baseline for measuring continuous improvement.

Key takeaways from the survey include:

1. The most pressing priorities for Wild Diversity to take on include:
  - a. Providing opportunities for BIPOC Conservation community to gather, share and connect (39% of respondents listed this as their number one priority for the organization).
  - b. Secondary priorities for Wild Diversity included: Advocating for BIPOC opportunities at the system level in conservation (e.g., funding, policies, lead initiatives) and facilitating professional advancement (e.g., mentorship and professional development) and collaborative opportunities for the BIPOC conservation community.
2. The most pressing priority for the corporate conservation industry and outdoor retailers included:
  - a. Prioritizing funding for BIPOC-led initiatives, experiences, and knowledge.
3. Two of the most pressing priorities for the conservation community in the PNW to take on included:
  - a. Including BIPOC leaders in dialogues about conservation and redefine the environmental movement in a holistic and inclusive manner.
  - b. Ensuring career pipelines to the highest levels of organizational leadership for BIPOC conservationists through support, pay equity, mentorship, and other opportunities.
4. In terms of their experience with Wild Diversity's BIPOC Conservation Initiative efforts to date:
  - a. 63% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt their voices were magnified, their experiences validated, and their perspectives valued.
  - b. 48% felt more optimistic about future career opportunities for recruitment, retention, and promotion in the conservation field for themselves and other BIPOC individuals.
  - c. 47% said they felt supported through networking, visioning, and professional development opportunities.
5. Respondents said the most impactful aspects of the BIPOC Conservation Initiative are:
  - a. Meeting and talking with BIPOC guest speakers and community leaders.
  - b. Field trips to significant spaces.
  - c. Casual meetups.
  - d. Facilitated discussions.
6. Respondents said they: a) attend our events to make new friends and meet colleagues who work in conservation, b) wish they had more opportunities to connect the BIPOC

Conservation Initiative more directly to their work, c) don't have anything else like the BIPOC Conservation Initiative (i.e., affinity space) in their professional network.

**Lessons Learned:** As is often the case with community engagement focused projects, things take longer than expected. We found that BIPOC conservationists were hungry for the opportunity to come together in community to reflect on and process their experiences in the workplace. Our meetings were the only chance many of these individuals had to gather with other BIPOC colleagues and peers, which created a unique opportunity for them to feel seen, validated and uplifted. For most of the participants, they were often the only person of color in their organization, which created isolating, diminishing and tokenizing workplace experiences. Community members needed time to process these experiences together before they were ready to move on toward visioning and articulating how things could and should change to create a BIPOC-centered and -led conservation movement.

We also had some staffing changes toward the second half of 2023 with the departure of the BIPOC Conservation Program Director. This caused some slight delays as Wild Diversity's Executive Director took time to assess the program to date, determine strategic next steps, and address staffing needs (which included hiring a Program Coordinator to continue the projects momentum).

**Next Steps:**

1. Synthesize the survey findings, share the results with BIPOC conservationists, and create opportunities for community members to provide additional feedback as Wild Diversity seeks to refine priorities and action steps.
2. Transition the project from visioning and community building to strategic planning and implementation.
3. Secure funding to support the work for years to come (grant applications in are currently in development).
4. Explore opportunities to design and pilot mentoring and professional development programs that help transform the career trajectories for a few aspiring BIPOC conservationists.

**Attachments:**

1. BIPOC Conservation Initiative Final Budget Report
2. BIPOC Conservation Survey
3. BIPOC Conservation Survey Results

**Certifying Statement:** I certify that the above and attached is true and accurate.

*Michele Crim*, Grant Writer, Wild Diversity



*Wild Diversity BIPOC Conservation Initiative participants at the Black Futures Farm, hosted by the Black Food Sovereignty Coalition in the summer of 2023.*