



Diversity Equity & Inclusion Initiative

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Association of
Environmental
Professionals

CASTILLO
CONSULTING
PARTNERS

Table of Contents



03

Context &
Engagement
Overview

05

Executive
Summary

07

Findings

08

Demographic
Overview

10

Member
Experiences With
DEI

11

Member Ideas for
Advancing DEI

12

Suggested Board
Action Items

13

Recommendations

15

Quick Wins

16

Medium-term
Goals

18

Long-term Goals

19

Next Steps



Context & Engagement Overview

In the spring of 2022, California Association of Environmental Professionals (“AEP”) engaged Castillo Consulting Partners (“CCP”) to support the organization’s DEI committee and state leadership in their efforts to shift the culture of the Association so that it not only welcomes all environmental professionals to participate and be fully engaged, but considers how to make environmental professions accessible to more people.

As a first phase of our partnership, CCP attended AEP’s 2022 convening and met with state leadership to learn about AEP’s DEI work to date and get a better understanding of the AEP’s longer term vision and goals for its DEI Initiative.

Following the convening, CCP advised the AEP DEI committee on the development of a DEI survey that took into account feedback, vision and goals gathered during the leadership team retreat in advance of the convening. The survey was designed to get a snapshot of the current demographic composition of AEP’s members, and gather members’ thoughts, sentiments, and views about how AEP can become more diverse, equitable and inclusive.

The final phase of CCP’s engagement with AEP was to review and provide feedback on a series of action items that the AEP board has recommended as priority steps for AEP to take in its efforts toward increasing diversity, equity and inclusion among its membership and in the environmental professions, more broadly.

This report provides an analysis of, and insights from the data collected via the DEI survey, feedback on the board’s action items, and recommendations regarding how the AEP can advance the goals it has set for its DEI initiative. A review of the AEP website and other collateral provided additional information that also informed the recommendations offered in this document.



Defining DEI

To ensure that AEP members were operating from a shared understanding of what AEP means by diversity, equity and inclusion ("DEI"), CCP worked with the AEP DEI Committee to draft definitions for each term. The following working definitions were included at the beginning of the survey:

Diversity – Diversity represents the “who” and “what” of all the characteristics of who we are. Diversity includes characteristics such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, disability, and age, among others.



Equity – Equity is defined as the “what” and “how” we invest in people to ensure all groups get what they need to grow, contribute and develop; this also includes the organization’s ability to ensure that resources and opportunities are equitably distributed and accessed across various identities/ groups of individuals, taking into consideration historical and present day systemic policies and practices that advantage some over others.

Inclusion – Inclusion is “how” we create an environment of involvement, respect and connection that values unique qualities and perspectives while providing meaningful opportunities for these perspectives to be involved in the planning and decision-making within an organization. An inclusive culture in our organization is one in which all members feel a sense of belonging.



Executive Summary

In preparation for developing recommendations for the advancement of AEP's DEI Initiative, Castillo Consulting Partners analyzed data gathered from a variety of sources, including a member-wide survey, board members' suggested action items, insights from AEP's leadership, and a review of other AEP collateral made available through the organization's website. These are the key takeaways that emerged from the data and materials we reviewed and analyzed:

1

AEP members want equity to be prioritized and promoted in the field.

An overwhelming majority (92%) of survey respondents believe that it is important for AEP to promote equity in the environmental field. Fewer respondents agree that AEP has an explicit commitment to diversity (47%), equity (53%) or inclusion (52%).

2

There is a lack of diversity within current membership that is inhibiting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Self-reported demographic information indicates that AEP's membership does not currently reflect the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity represented across the state. The majority of the organization's members (73%) are White; 55% earn salaries \$101K or above (\$23K+ above the state's median income¹); 61% have been employed in their professional field for 16 years or more; and 56% work in the private sector. Research shows that a lack of diversity within organizations is one factor that influences whether or not individuals from underrepresented groups, namely BIPOC, choose to pursue opportunities or affiliate with organizations.²



¹ US Census, California Quick Facts: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CA/INC110220>

² Pew Research, January 2018: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/01/09/blacks-in-stem-jobs-are-especially-concerned-about-diversity-and-discrimination-in-the-workplace/>

3

BIPOC and younger AEP members don't feel a sense of belonging.

BIPOC and younger AEP members were less likely to express that they feel a sense of belonging within AEP as compared to their peers (44% and 37%, respectively, compared to 63% of respondents overall). Younger members were also the least likely to agree that they are able to meaningfully contribute to AEP (39% compared to 71% of respondents overall), while BIPOC members had the lowest rate of agreeability for 60% of the survey questions.

5

Members also want to see more efforts to include a diversity of voices and perspectives across AEP.

In addition to increasing diversity in representation among members, survey respondents suggested that AEP can and should do more to include the voices of BIPOC community members, especially women of color, organizations and individuals that advocate for environmental justice, LGBTQ+ community members, individuals living with disabilities, and young/emerging professionals in the field. Younger members were especially interested in seeing more of a focus on environmental justice.

4

The board and members are aligned on the need for targeted outreach to increase diverse representation.

There is significant alignment between the members and the board regarding action steps to take toward increasing diversity within the AEP through various recruitment efforts, including a focus on high school and college student outreach and engagement.

6

More attention and intention must be given to equity and inclusion in order to ensure a sustained DEI effort.

While there was no shortage of innovative ideas regarding ways for AEP to increase diversity through targeted recruitment, suggestions regarding efforts that can be made to address inequities in the field and ensure inclusion and belonging among members were sparse in both member survey responses and the board's suggested action items. Fewer than half of all survey respondents (47%) agree that leaders demonstrate an understanding of equity. This lack of attention to and understanding of equity and inclusion might be an indicator of the need for training to increase awareness about unconscious bias and to explore and address the systemic impacts of racism, sexism, and other biases in the field of environmentalism.

"Work with students in diverse communities through mentorship, internships, and scholarships"

Findings

About the DEI Survey

The AEP DEI survey was the first of its kind to be administered by the AEP. The survey was designed by the DEI committee and CCP, with feedback from executive leadership, and administered to all AEP members via email and through QR codes shared at various AEP events. The survey served multiple purposes:

- Collect demographic information to get a snapshot of the current composition of AEP's membership
- Understand AEP members' sentiments about and experiences with diversity, equity and inclusion within the organization
- Gather feedback and ideas from AEP members regarding how the organization can advance DEI

An incentive was offered to chapters for participation and AEP chapter leaders were encouraged to solicit responses from their members. Responses were anonymously collected by AEP and shared with CCP for analysis and reporting. After three weeks of data collection, the survey received 180 responses – just shy of 10% of the total AEP membership. 92% of respondents are AEP members.



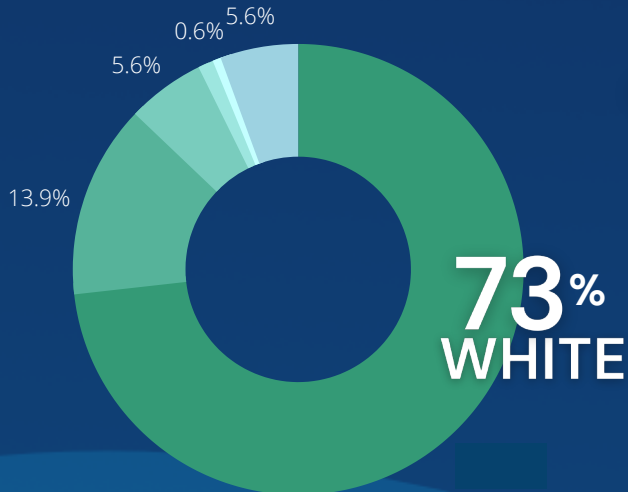
AEP's Current Membership

One of the primary goals of our data collection process was to understand the current demographic composition of AEP's membership. As AEP does not currently collect demographic information from members, we are unable to determine if the responses in this survey provide a representative sample of the current membership. Nevertheless, the demographic data collected provides valuable insights about perceivably active AEP members who were able to participate in the survey.

Survey respondents were invited to share select demographic information. Demographic questions were selected for inclusion in the survey in partnership with the AEP's DEI Committee. Respondents were provided with an option to "decline to state" for each question, but could not skip any of these questions. Here's what the data told us:

2022

AEP'S MEMBERS



13.9% Multiracial; 5.6% Asian Pacific Islander
1.1% Black; 0.6% Native American; 5.6% Did Not Disclose; 15% Ethnically Latinx



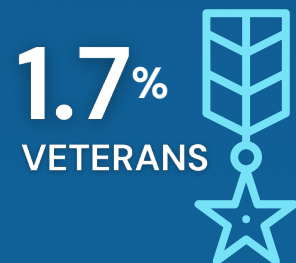
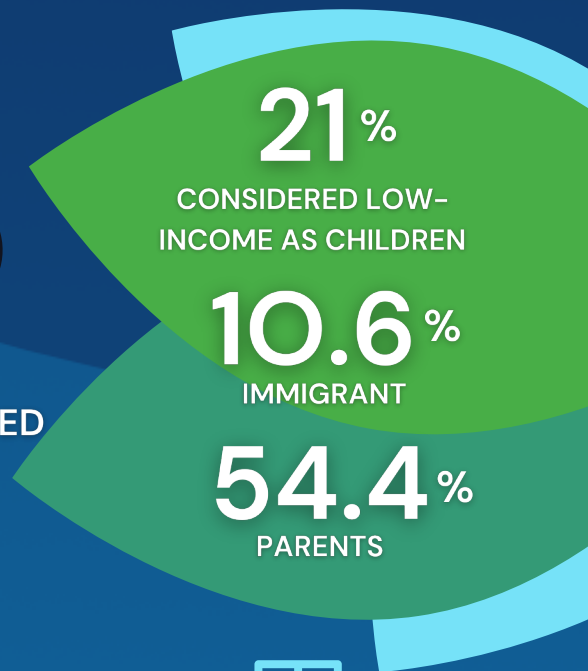
1.7%
JUSTICE INVOLVED



12.8%
LGBTQ+

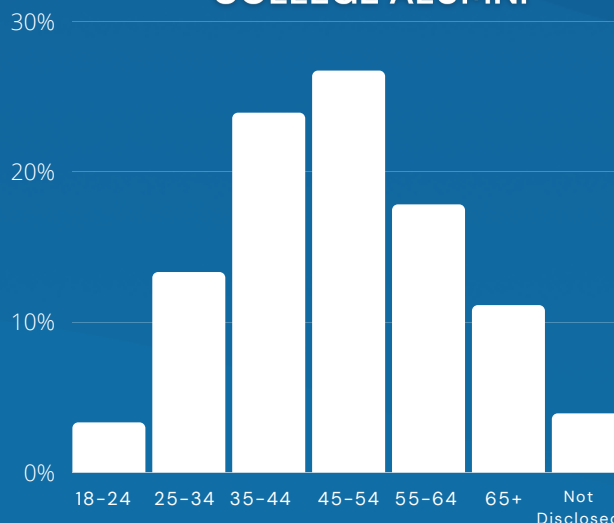


30%
FIRST GENERATION
COLLEGE ALUMNI



1.7%
VETERANS

50%
AGES
35-54



9.4%
LIVING WITH
A DISABILITY



SECTOR



55.6% Private

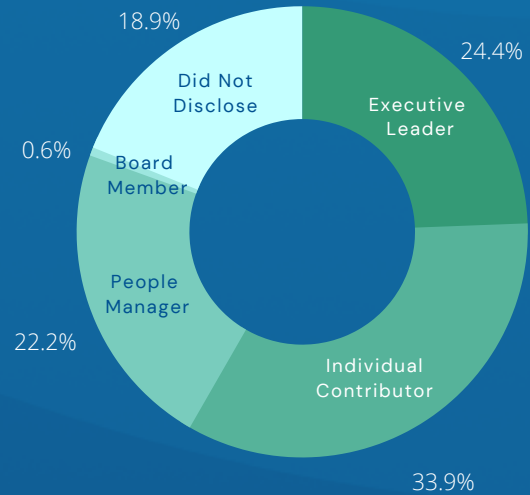


36.1% Public

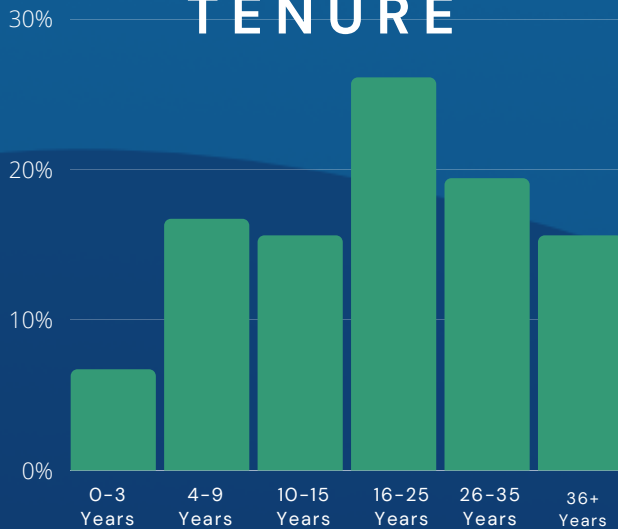


2.2% Nonprofit

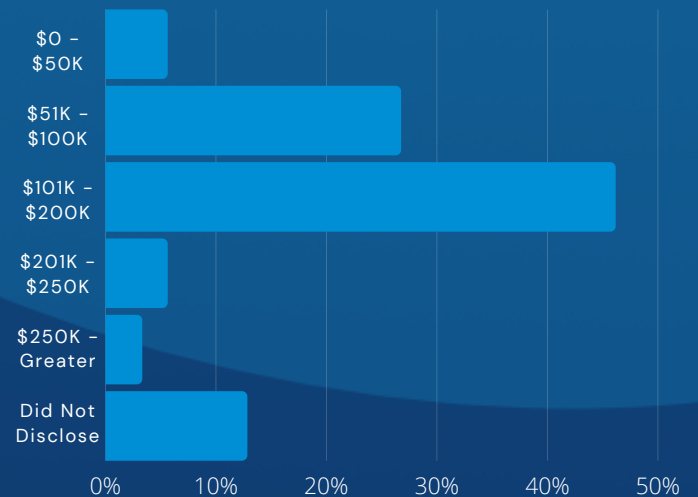
ROLE



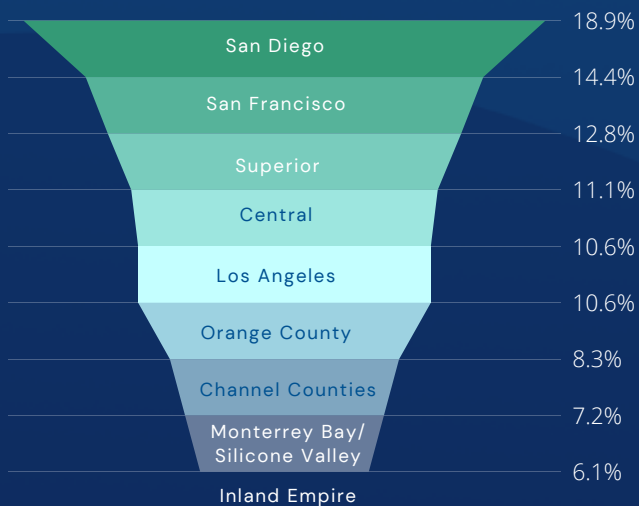
WORKPLACE TENURE



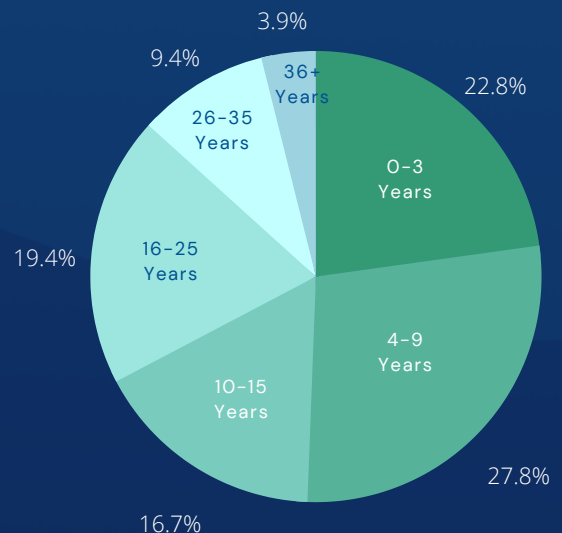
SALARY



CHAPTER



AEP TENURE



Member Experiences With DEI

Survey questions centered on three concepts: (1) Diversity, (2) Equity, and (3) Inclusion. Averaging the percent of those who agree or strongly agree with the questions centered on each concept, we found that:

- Diversity = 34% agree average
- Equity = 64% agree average
- Inclusion = 63% agree average

Thus, questions surrounding AEP diversity produced the least positive responses overall.

About 53% of those who took the survey agreed or strongly agreed with all questions. Most notably, nearly all respondents (92%) agreed that it is important for AEP to promote equity in the field. A majority of respondents (71%) also believe that they are given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to AEP. And 63% of those who took the survey agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging within AEP.

Those who responded most positively (agreed or strongly agreed the most frequently) to the survey are parents who are men (61% overall), those in the OC Chapter (61% overall), those aged 65+ (60% overall), and White men (59% overall). Those who responded least positively are BIPOC parents (37% overall), those in the LA Chapter (38% overall), those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community (39% overall), and BIPOC women (40% overall).

92% of AEP members agree that it is important for AEP to promote equity in the field.

Most respondents do not agree that AEP has representation from people with disabilities or different socioeconomic backgrounds. About 11% of survey respondents agree that they have experienced bias within AEP, with 28% of those who are two or more races and 22% of BIPOC women agreeing. While 63% of respondents feel a sense of belonging, less than half of LGBTQ+ members, BIPOC women, and those who have been with the AEP for less than 3 years agree.

63% of AEP members expressed feeling a sense of belonging in the organization.

Member Ideas for Advancing DEI

Open-ended response questions were included in the survey to solicit feedback and insights from members regarding what AEP can do to attract more diverse environmental professionals, what voices, if any, members think are missing from AEP, and what AEP can do to bring these missing voices into the AEP network/community. Over 50% of responses about how AEP can attract more diverse professionals focused exclusively on outreach and recruitment. Only a handful of responses looked beyond recruitment; these suggestions included:

- Offering discounted memberships to nonprofits
- Emphasizing environmental justice
- Providing members with bias training
- Increasing accessibility to events
- Creating a DEI chapter position

When it came to identifying voices that are missing from AEP and ideas regarding how AEP can bring these voices into the community, most participants who responded to the questions identified BIPOC, LGBTQ+ or a combination of these groups. Others named individuals with disabilities, low-income communities, young professionals, and women as groups that need more representation within AEP's membership. Notably, several members expressed that there were either no voices that were missing, or that they were unaware of any voices that are currently missing from AEP. Still some shared that they do not believe that the AEP should focus on DEI at all; those who communicated these perspectives were few.

Overall, survey responses suggest that AEP members value DEI and want to see AEP increase representation among its leadership and across its membership. While there were few suggestions regarding how AEP can be more equitable and inclusive, members overwhelmingly agree that promoting equity in the field should be a priority for the organization.



Suggested Board Action Items

A review of AEP's Board action items demonstrated that there is significant alignment between the board and members as it pertains to actions that AEP can take to increase diversity through targeted outreach and recruitment. Of the 13 action items proposed by the board, 10 were focused on outreach and recruitment, including hosting informational events and offering mentorship. The primary focus of the outreach and recruitment efforts is with students, which is an important and necessary starting point. Some strengths of the board action items are:

- Clear ownership of specific action items
- Deadlines by which tasks should be completed
- Identification and articulation of the problem that each action item is intended to address
- Multi-faceted approaches and metrics to measure success of implementation
- Student-centered

While the board action items are a great starting point for the AEP's DEI initiative, they are heavily focused on increasing diversity (mostly in the long-term, as students may take a few years before they become and gain tenure as environmental professionals), and do not include actions that address inequities or promote inclusion. Some opportunities to strengthen the action items so they offer near-term increases in diverse representation, along with actions to promote equity and inclusion, include:

1 Identify, acknowledge, celebrate and welcome the diversity that already exists in the field. The notion that environmental professions lack racial, ethnic and gender diversity is anecdotal and might very well be an inaccurate assumption based on limited information due to a lack of data collected about the demographic characteristics of environmental professionals. A scan of staff in public agencies and environmental justice non-profits indicates that racial, ethnic and gender diversity exists in the field, but this diversity does not appear to be reflected in AEP's membership. AEP should take a deeper look into where diversity already exists in the environmental professions and look at ways to build relationships and bring that diversity into its membership.

2 Increase awareness of inequities in the field through ongoing learning for members. One of the most important and effective ways to increase equity is through education and exposure. Increasing AEP members' awareness of inequities in the field and how they tie to other systemic injustices will be a critical step toward ensuring that equity is promoted across the AEP and in the field.

3 Foster a sense of inclusion belonging among current AEP members from diverse backgrounds through intentional actions like ensuring diverse representation at AEP events (i.e. among speakers, in literature, in leadership, etc.), and providing affinity spaces for various groups, among other actions.

Recommendations

Based on the above key takeaways, which were informed by insights from state leadership at the AEP 2022 leadership retreat, members via the DEI survey, and the board through a review of their action items, Castillo Consulting Partners recommends that the AEP prioritize the following strategic initiatives to advance the organization's DEI goals:

1

Develop a targeted recruitment strategy to attract and retain a diverse set of environmental professionals through outreach in the following arenas:

- High schools, community colleges, statewide colleges and universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)
- State prisons
- Public sector agencies and nonprofit organizations

2

Build a pipeline of the next generation of environmental professionals by:

- Increasing awareness about environmental professions through K-12 STEM education partnerships, outreach to students at community colleges, four year colleges and universities, and collaborations with prison and re-entry programs for formerly incarcerated individuals
- Providing training and skills development through hands-on learning opportunities via paid internships and fellowships with AEP member organizations
- Establishing a reciprocal mentoring program that creates opportunities for students and emerging professionals to learn technical skills and expertise from more tenured professionals in the field, and for tenured professionals to learn about environmental justice from students and emerging professionals



3

Leverage the AEP's unique position as a professional organization that is "dedicated to the continued improvement of the environmental profession"³ to infuse DEI into the field through its members. This might look like:

- Clearly communicating, consistently reiterating and demonstrating the AEP's commitment to and investment in DEI through sustained, intentional actions across all core facets of the organization (i.e. consultant and supplier diversity, event accessibility, the creation of DEI chapter positions, offering member affinity/resource groups, etc.)
- Educating AEP members about the impacts of individual and systemic bias in the field, incentivizing members to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered (i.e. via AICP equity credits, AEP DEI awards for individuals and organizations, etc.), and encourage members to champion DEI in their workplaces.
- Activating members and getting them involved in recruitment and building a pipeline of talent by creating opportunities for them to engage students in STEM learning, participate in programming in prisons and re-entry programs, serve as mentors, offer scholarships, internships and mentorship, engaging in policy advocacy to address systemic inequities, etc.



³ <https://www.califaep.org/membership.php>

These recommended strategic initiatives will not happen overnight. Realizing the potential of these initiatives will require consistent and sustained time, energy and effort. Nevertheless, some tactics will be easier to implement than others. As such, here are some suggestions regarding how AEP might prioritize actions and tactics as it works to increase DEI in the organization and across the field:

Potential Quick Wins - actions that could be implemented within the next 3 months to one year:

- Collect demographic data from all individual new members when they sign up, and existing members when they renew their membership. Demographic questions can be replicated from the DEI survey and must include an option to decline to state for each question or to opt-out of completing the demographic questions altogether
- Collect demographic data from member organizations as a way to better track diversity across the profession
- Select a time of year to administer annual DEI survey and stick with it; use data collected in 2022 as the baseline and track progress from there
- Create a DEI chapter position (i.e. DEI lead, DEI representative, DEI liaison, etc.) and invite each chapter to have this newly elected or appointed person participate in the DEI committee to ensure DEI is infused in AEPs DNA through the board and chapters
- Develop a DEI-centered event planning framework to ensure DEI is top of mind when planning AEP events, including annual conference, chapter activities, panel discussions, etc. This framework should include guidance for supplier diversity, considerations when selecting panelists and other speakers to ensure a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives, actively incorporating DEI into programming, etc.
- Make DEI training required for leadership and available to members, with participation encouraged through meaningful incentives (i.e. via AICP equity credits, AEP DEI awards for individuals and organizations, etc.)
- Engage the leadership and staff members of the organizations that wrote a letter of support in response to AEP's DEI initiative⁴ (and other organizations that are in support, but were not included in the letter) in a strategic planning process to identify their capacity and cement their commitment to playing an active role in promoting DEI in the field through collaboration for recruiting, educating, mentoring and investing in building a pipeline of diverse environmental professionals. This plan should include building relationships with environmental justice organizations and private sector sponsorship of memberships for environmental professionals in the non-profit sector (which tend to be community based, BIPOC led, and EJ focused)
- Build a database of schools (high schools, community colleges, universities) and community based organizations that AEP could potentially partner with

⁴ https://www.califaep.org/docs/Joint_AEP_Letter_DEI.pdf

Medium-term goals - actions that will take 1-3 years to implement:

- All chapters establish partnerships with at least one high school, one community college and one university in their region (can pilot with one or two chapters to prove the model before rolling out across all chapters):
 - Organize a STEM/environmental learning day and/or other activities for high school students (tap into AVID programs, science clubs, etc.)
 - Provide free membership to community college and university students in environmental studies, urban planning, public health and/or ethnic studies programs
 - Co-host or sponsor at least one environmentalism/EJ event with each school for the academic year
 - Provide at least one scholarship
 - Identify and recruit applicants for at least one paid internship opportunity with a member organization
- Develop a framework and solicit leaders for the formation of affinity or resource groups for BIPOC (organized in a way that works best for members, i.e. could be divided by race/ethnicity such as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, AAPI, etc. or could include all BIPOC in one group), women, LGBTQ+, individuals with disabilities, Environmental Justice, Emerging Professionals, etc. (note: these groups can serve as support for various groups, and will eventually become thought partners as AEP continues to advance its DEI goals). Look to other professional member organizations like the APA, which has long established spaces for BIPOC members (i.e. Planning & the Black Community Division, Tribal and Indigenous Planning Division, Latinos and Planning Division, LGBTQ and Planning Division, Women and Planning Division, etc.)
- Build relationships and formalize partnerships with public sector agencies and non-profit organizations; consider creating new membership models for the equitable inclusion of these agencies and organizations in AEP



- Develop the plan for engaging currently and formerly incarcerated individuals in the environmental professions. Doing so will require:
 - Research on barriers to employment for formerly incarcerated individuals that might necessitate policy advocacy;
 - Training to shift mindsets and minimize bias toward individuals with criminal backgrounds;
 - Identifying job opportunities and career pathways within the environmental professions for which training can be facilitated within the carceral system;
 - Establishing partnerships with community based organizations that work with re-entry populations and working collaboratively to create training programs and job placement. Some models to consider include Homeboy Recycling, Retriever, and Isidore Electronics Recycling.
- Develop the framework, and solicit funding for an Environmental Justice Fellowship Program to be managed by AEP in partnership with members and existing youth-centered, environmental/conservation focused organizations (i.e. Student Conservation Association)
- Develop a DEI, justice and antiracism training series for members, to include a certificate of completion (possibly in partnership with a college or university) and potential AICP credit for those interested
- Launch an annual environmental justice, policy advocacy conference for members (see APA Policy and Advocacy Conference as an example), that includes spaces for students and young professionals to co-design and co-lead through setting goals, planning the event, presenting research and policy recommendations, etc.



Long-term goals - actions that require intensive planning and investment to get going:

- Establish a Fellowship program that includes a cohort experience for BIPOC emerging environmental professionals, providing them with a unique opportunity to learn about the field through continued learning (i.e. a series of workshops as part of learning and development in the fellowship), hands-on experience (i.e. through placements in paid positions in the field), and networking (i.e. through participation in AEP events). Look into partnering with organizations like the Student Conservation Association (SCA) in creating this program
- Leverage community college and university partnerships to develop a mentorship program for high school students, thereby continuing to build a pipeline of environmental professionals that includes opportunities for mentorship and engagement of individuals at various levels in their education and career
- Launch training and job placement program for re-entry professionals

Ongoing communication through chronicling AEP's journey and providing regular updates to members will be an important part of ensuring that DEI remains top of mind, and the organization can hold itself accountable for realizing its goals, and hold its members accountable for prioritizing DEI in their organizations, as well.



Next Steps

As AEP continues on its journey to make environmental professions accessible to more people, it will be critical for the DEI committee and state leadership to take the following steps:

- **Map suggested strategic initiatives into a comprehensive DEI strategic plan that includes metrics for measuring success**
- **Fully incorporate the DEI strategic plan into the organization's overall strategic plan**
- **Identify FTE, technical assistance and consultant needs to develop a budget to adequately fund the plan**
- **Pressure test the plan with AEP chapter leaders and members, as well as key partners, to solicit feedback, ensure alignment, and secure support for effective implementation**
- **Provide training for AEP leaders across the state to ensure they have the knowledge and skills they need to actively and sustainably lead this work**



"AEP recognizes that diversity and inclusion make our organization stronger, and is committed to creating a more sustainable and resilient future for all Californians."

Acknowledgements

Castillo Consulting Partners would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this report:

The **AEP staff, leadership and board** for pursuing DEI through this initiative

The **DEI Committee** for their leadership, thought partnership and collaboration

The **AEP members** who responded to the DEI survey and shared their ideas about how to strengthen DEI at AEP

The **USC Price School strategic planning students** who provided qualitative analysis and preliminary recommendations.

The **Castillo Consulting Partners team** that analyzed the survey, wrote and designed the report





Appendix