River Network

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee Guiding Document

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Background

Over the course of the past decade, River Network's work on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) has deepened significantly, focusing on both internal aspects of our organization and external programming. Our organization is committed to justice and to dismantling systems of oppression and barriers to opportunities – this commitment guides and informs all our EDI work, even while we acknowledge that our current efforts are more directly focused on EDI. Through the work of our Board and a series of staff efforts, River Network developed a case statement for EDI at the foundation of our mission and principles for equitable and inclusive work, in addition to several programmatic changes to center EDI in our work. However, the organization lacked a centralized and consistent home for ensuring the presence of EDI principles across all our work - internal and external.

For us to move toward equity, inclusion and diversity, we recognize that work is needed at the individual, organizational and movement levels. Highly competent staff help build competent organizations, which can serve as models to propel a movement forward. Our committee's work includes initiatives aimed at these three scales, even while at any given time, we may focus more directly on any given one. The purpose of this internal committee is to ensure that principles of equity, diversity and inclusion are incorporated across all our teams and structures. This is done through quarterly work planning to identify goals and opportunities to review and revise current processes across our programmatic and operational work. The committee also aims to serve as a model for equitable, inclusive and diverse collaboration, with staff members from across the organization sitting on the committee and contributing to both ideation and decision-making.

Goals and Goal Setting - How the RN EDI Committee defines its goals and our overall goal setting process

1. **Frequency**
   a. Follow a similar process to River Network as an organization, developing an annual workplan for the coming fiscal year during Q4. Attempt to set 3-4 priorities per quarter (see process below).
   b. Once during the last month of each quarter, set aside 1 meeting to:
      i. Review outlined priorities for that quarter and assess whether we're on track. If yes, great! Celebrate! If no, think about why, and decide whether anything needs to be prioritized or can be pushed into the coming quarter. Still celebrate!
      ii. Look ahead to the coming quarter and think about what can/should shift and what new goals have come up
2. **Process**
   a. Collect goals in a single document, drawing from:
      i. Existing grant deliverables, when relevant to organizational culture; making space for staff to bring in strategies coming out of program work
      ii. Members' ideas, including from River Network's Leadership Team

       iii.   Staff ideas - Build a culture of encouraging all staff to suggest items for committee discussion and action and invite that input proactively each quarter. Do this either via the internal Mobilize channel, or through direct requests by a committee member at an all-staff call.

       iv.   Parking lot

b. Annually rank these ideas through a google form/poll - members do this anonymously

c. Meet during Q4 to review the list and build in time for fleshing out specific goals / asking staff for clarification as needed.

d. Confirm goals, establish timeline estimates, plug into quarterly plans.

e. Identify a lead person for each goal to distribute leadership.

Policies and Procedures for Issue Consideration

a. See the goal setting and process above. To the extent feasible, keep the committee's work focused on issues identified during that process or that are highly aligned with our priories for the year. If a new issue emerges that the committee wants to consider mid-year, the committee can reassess the work and remove or postpone a current priority.

b. For HR-related issues that come up – start and continue a dialog within the organization that makes the case for formally including HR responsibilities in a staff person's job duties.

Committee participation and membership

a. Committee membership is capped around 8 participants; embers serve 1-year terms. At the end of each calendar year, open committee participation to all River Network staff. Current committee members may rotate off, as needed, to allow new committee members to participate. Members can serve consecutive one-year terms if there are spots available.

b. Anyone on River Network staff may serve as a committee member, although the norm is that the President does not serve on the committee

c. Meetings are open to all staff; any staff member is welcome to attend, observe and participate in any given meeting.

d. The norm is that a member of the Leadership Team be a member of the EDI committee

Committee member responsibilities:

a. Regularly attend and participate in bi-weekly meetings

b. Volunteer to work on committee tasks

c. Chair meetings or take notes on a rotating basis

Leadership model and rotating leadership

a. Co-Leader Responsibilities:

       i.   Lead EDI initiatives on behalf River Network (e.g. organize all-staff trainings)

       ii.   Carry recommendations to the Leadership Team by adding EDI items to their agenda collector and joining LT meeting to present recommendations from this committee

       iii.   Meet with new staff to onboard re: EDI initiatives

       iv.   Rotating role, staggered 2-year terms

b. Rotating Committee Leadership

       i.   Rotate meeting chairs and note-takers each meeting

       ii.   Meeting chairs – lead agenda development and facilitate meetings

       iii.   Note-takers – take meeting notes
   c. Onboarding of new committee members
       i.   We will solicit a current committee member to volunteer to schedule a meeting with any incoming members to review our annual plan of work, guiding documents (i.e. agreements, meeting notes, River Network's EDI guiding documents, etc.), and a quick overview of River Network's past EDI initiatives and outcomes.

Key Definitions

River Network is committed to building on its history in working with others by embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in all areas to achieve our mission. In working toward promoting EDI in our work and partnerships, it is important to define these concepts and how they show up at River Network.

- "Diversity" appears at the group/partnership level and refers to the identities that are represented by individuals within the group. We currently center our EDI work on racial equity but welcome and celebrate diversity in all its forms, including class and income, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, learning style, and more. We anticipate that this focus will continue to evolve, led by our internal staff EDI committee, which is exploring ways we can expand our focus.
- If "diversity" creates a space where different and non-dominant identities are represented, then "inclusion" refers to creating a space in which all people in the network are heard and valued. "Inclusion" is achieved by designing a network culture that understands and prioritizes what individuals need to be valued in the group. At River Network, we strive to understand what individuals and groups in the network need to be successful. We work to implement inclusive measures in our facilitation practices and technology.
- "Equity" means that we recognize the differences in individual experiences and support those individuals based on their needs and the identities that they hold. Prioritizing "equity" means that River Network works to eliminate barriers that only those with marginalized identities experience so that everyone is able to access resources.
- "Justice" refers to dismantling systems of oppression and barriers to opportunities so that all individuals and communities can live a full and dignified life. This concept also recognizes past injustices and how individuals holding marginalized identities can get access to resources and opportunities that they are denied through white supremacy culture. At River Network, we are consistently evaluating how white supremacy culture shows up and working to dismantle it, both internally and within the network.
- *"Inclusion" - River Network welcomes, involves, and values all perspectives, voices, styles, and identities, with special attention to racial power dynamics. We foster inclusion by building internal structures and processes that promote a sense of belonging. We encourage inclusion throughout our network by validating the inherent worth and dignity of all people with an expectation of mutual respect. Cultivating a culture of inclusion enables us to unite for clean water and healthy rivers, allowing the needs and voices of those that have been marginalized to be heard. This inclusive approach ensures our work benefits all types of people and communities and does not cause unintended harm. Embracing diverse experiences and insights enhances understanding and creativity, ultimately resulting in better decision-making and problem solving throughout our network.
  - *The definition of inclusion was developed in 2018-19 with guidance from Marcelo Bonta under the Kresge-funded DEI Capacity Building Program. It has since been incorporated into RN's Organizational Values.*

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