



**Race to the Board:
Strategies for Readiness, Recruitment, and Retention
of Black Trustees on Green Nonprofit Boards**

THE TOOLKIT

RACE TO THE BOARD (R2B) TOOLKIT

A recent report from the Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in Environmental Philanthropy (InDEEP) initiative shows that a lack of trust in organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) is the underlying cause of the \$2.7 billion dollar funding gap that exists between what is awarded to white-led versus BIPOC-led groups. This lack of trust can also be directly translated to the shortage of Black candidates elected to serve on boards.

In 2020, a new body of work emerged from InDEEP that was built on the momentum and sociopolitical opportunities to reverse environmental racism and advance climate justice.

Race to the Board (R2B) is an approach intended to disrupt current practices that are not bringing sufficient levels of Black leadership; in particular to the boards of environmental and conservation organizations. R2B aims to identify ways to cultivate more equitable and inclusive nonprofit board practices while amplifying Black voices and participation in leadership roles within the environmental and conservation field.

This toolkit serves as a supplement to the R2B pilot research completed in fall 2021 and is a call to action for the environmental and conservation field to move toward organizational transformation.

InDEEP conducted interviews with 35 board leaders representing 16 prominent green organizations and 39 Black leaders in the field. The interviews yielded the following areas for improvement within environmental and conservation boards:

- Lack of diversity
- Lack of readiness
- Recruitment strategies
- Recruitment challenges
- Retention strategies
- Retention challenges
- Increased engagement
- Indicators of inclusive culture
- Social justice-oriented indicators



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WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING

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“I think they need to do more internal work, be committed to doing more internal racial equity work to understand where they're deficient and where they're strong, and what they need to change internally. Because if the day to day is messed up and toxic, it doesn't matter what the board recommends.”

- Black Leader

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THE 3 RS

Readiness

Board culture supports and aligns with genuine capacity to cultivate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) of perspective and membership within practice.

- Prioritize transformation
- Establish metrics
- Dismantle, recalibrate, rebuild
- Be intentional and authentic

Recruitment

Equitable strategies reinforce the ability to proactively engage diverse talent with broad skill sets and expertise.

- Expand networks
- Build the pipeline

Retention

Policies and practices promote inclusivity while encouraging and valuing participation of diverse talent through active engagement.

- Recognize intersectionality
- Be inclusive in practice
- Develop critical mass



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

01

**BE INTENTIONAL.
AND AUTHENTIC**

Be intentional, authentic, and explicit in developing and communicating DEI goals. Commit to being transparent with plans and progress, and take actionable steps toward making good on statements made.

Prioritize the individual and interpersonal reflection and growth that is necessary for organizational transformation. Board culture can only be improved if the individuals who are part of an organization commit to doing better.

02

**PRIORITIZE
TRANSFORMATION**

03

**DISMANTLE
RECALIBRATE
REBUILD**

Dismantle, recalibrate, and rebuild systems historically rooted in white supremacy. It is important that organizations examine the structures and functions within their organization that may be impeding Black board leaders.

Expand networks, create connections, and rethink strategies of recruitment to broaden leadership reach. White-centered networks tend to replicate themselves within board composition.

04

**EXPAND
NETWORKS**

05

**BUILD THE
PIPELINE**

Build the pipeline for Black leaders by working with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), creating junior boards, funding fellowships and internships, and starting organizational chapters at colleges and universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

06

**INCLUSIVE
PRACTICES**

Be inclusive with practices and policies by engaging, valuing, and acknowledging the skill sets and contributions of Black board members and by providing effective onboarding methods and mentorship programs.

Remember that critical mass matters. By including more than one Black member, the board may not only benefit by having increased talent and representation, but the board may also find that those members are more likely to stay.

07

CRITICAL MASS

08

**ESTABLISH
METRICS**

Go beyond demographic data collection, and establish both quantitative and qualitative DEI metrics to glean the broadest understanding of areas of deficiency and room for opportunity when assessing discrepancies between DEI goals and current realities.

Recognize the intersectionality of environmental and conservation work and social and racial justice. Without uplifting and working in power with the people most often harmed by environmental catastrophe, organizations will be less likely to have an impact.

09

**RECOGNIZE
INTERSECTIONALITY**

BE INTENTIONAL AND AUTHENTIC

BE INTENTIONAL, AUTHENTIC, EXPLICIT, AND TRANSPARENT IN DEVELOPING AND COMMUNICATING DEI GOALS.

Recommended actions

- When setting goals, make sure all members of the organization understand the requirement of moving the organization toward being a more sustainably equitable and inclusive institution while recognizing that it may be hard work and that it should be continual.
- Collaborate with your organization on the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) messaging and display it transparently.
- When asked by organizations, like Green 2.0, be prepared and willing to share your practices and data - this sends the message of intentional transparency.
- Recognize that the work must be continuous to actualize authentic and meaningful change.

Consider adapting and sharing one of the following DEI checklists to ensure consistent accountability:

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Checklist
- Center for Equity, Gender, and Leadership (EGAL): DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) Checklist

Consider the following questions when DEI goals have been established:

- Why is it important that your organization moves toward becoming more equitable and inclusive?
- What does diversity, equity, and inclusion mean to your organization with regards to established metrics, processes, and policies?
- Are the goals built into a multi-year plan? Yes___No___
- Are the goals visible on your organization's website? Yes___No___
- Are staff and board members aware of the organization's goals? Yes___No___
- How often is progress toward goals assessed?
Quarterly___Annually___Other___
- Does your organization modify goals based on assessment of progress?
Yes___No___
- How does your organization modify goals based on progress?

Resources for transparent, authentic, intentional, and accountable power sharing in board leadership:

- [Race and accountability in the boardroom](#) (Webinar)
- [Leading with Intent: Reviewing the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards](#)
- [Genuine v. Performative: How To Be Sure Your DEI Efforts Are Authentic](#)
- [Why authenticity is crucial for diversity and inclusion initiatives](#)
- [Keys to Integrating DEI: Transparency, Power-sharing, and accountability](#)
- [Five Practices for Developing and Staying Accountable to Racial Equity Goals](#)
- [How to Have Impactful, Authentic DEI Conversations: A 3-step Process](#)
- [10 Steps to Building an Authentic Diversity and Inclusion Initiative](#)



WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING



“Wanting to create more transparent pathways to leadership on the board. Thinking about co chairs, vice chairs, more clarity about who gets on the executive committee and why, how are people chosen, how you can put your name in. Working with the nominating committee, working more closely with board members, finding out what they want to bring to the board, engaging them.”

– Board Leader

PRIORITIZE TRANSFORMATION

PRIORITIZE THE INDIVIDUAL AND INTERPERSONAL REFLECTION AND GROWTH NECESSARY FOR ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION.

Recommended actions:

- It is important that leadership acknowledge and communicate that the work will be an ongoing commitment to being authentically engaged in the process of becoming an equitable, inclusive, and diverse institution.

Consider focusing on individual, organizational, and sectoral progress in the following ways:

- Individual readiness:
 - Begin by allowing space for the examining of personal relationships with race, power, and privilege.
 - The organization can support staff by:
 - hosting affinity groups,
 - offering internal and external training,
 - providing funding for professional development opportunities, and
 - continuing to transparently prioritize interpersonal reflection and growth
- Organizational readiness:
 - The organization and individuals should engage in the process of self-reflection.
 - Examine organizational policies and practices that may be rooted in white supremacy and bias, such as Human Resource documents, employee policies, and anti-harassment procedures.
 - Be honest about the state of the organization throughout the process of implementing new strategies and policies.
- Sectoral readiness:
 - Partner and workshop with other organizations in the field who are on a path of transformation.
 - Share resources with others doing similar work.
 - Attend and present progress at sectoral conferences focused on the intersection between race and environmental concerns.
 - Join organizational pledges focused on DEI.

List of potential topics to be covered in [trainings](#)

- Defining diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
- Addressing unconscious and implicit bias
- Reducing prejudice and stereotyping
- Increasing cultural awareness and belonging
- Examining characteristics of white supremacy culture
- Confronting anti-Black racism
- Addressing microaggressions
- Understanding Sensitivity, civility, and respect
- Creating an inclusive workspace
- Preventing discrimination and harassment

Resources for moving through the process of transformation:

Learn about and measure interpersonal, organizational, sectoral change:

- Moving Beyond Diversity Toward Racial Equity
- Transforming Privilege
- White Privilege Handout
- Transforming White Privilege
- Equity-Driven Leadership Assessment

Adapt and utilize a diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) organizational readiness assessment:

- [The Chesapeake Bay \(DEIJ\) in Action](#)
- [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Audit Report The California Endowment's](#)



WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING



"I think very often organizations jump into this posture of, 'We, as an organization, want to recruit more people of color for our board, and we want to recruit more staff members of color, and we want to bring in these diverse perspectives.' But the individuals that comprise that organization are completely ignorant about their own internalized biases and sometimes their own lack of awareness, understanding, and appreciation for the ways in which race, power, and privilege play out in their own lives. And so I'm a big advocate and proponent of starting with the individual self first. So you move from the self to the organization, to the institution, to the system. If you jump any of those stages, then chances are you're missing something."

- Black Leader

DISMANTLE, RECALIBRATE, REBUILD

DISMANTLE, RECALIBRATE, AND REBUILD SYSTEMS HISTORICALLY
ROOTED IN WHITE SUPREMACY.

Recommended actions

- The commitment to becoming a more equitable and inclusive institution requires regularly examining structures and integrating necessary organizational changes.
- While working to understand the history of white supremacy culture and environmental racism, it is also important to examine the ways that your organization has been instrumental in sustaining institutional racism.

Consider doing the following to regenerate your board:

- Advocate for changing archaic bylaws and governance structures and other organizational strategies to those that operationally support Black leaders.
- Utilize collected data from the organization's staff, board, and the communities served to guide modifications of the ways in which the organization functions.
- Build a board culture that is comfortable for new members by putting relationships before task and developing deep connections.
- Incorporate staff and board affinity groups, race-centered professional development opportunities, and other tailored types of board resources and support systems into common organizational practice.
- Be willing to revisit and modify facets of board policies and member requirements.

Below are actions for consideration:

- Add term limits for all members and add more board seats for diverse members if necessary.
- Modify board recruitment strategy and requirements (i.e., de-emphasis formal education and professional network over lived experience, reassess giving duties, be transparent during recruitment process).
- Decrease the characteristics of white supremacy culture across the organizations.
- One board leader stated the following success after reforming organizational processes, *"We have reformed our process for how we nominate candidates for election to make sure that we're being aware of power dynamics and are changing our processes so that they're genuinely equitable with an eye to increasing the racial diversity on our board."* - Board leader

Resources for board renovation:

- [Green groups grapple with a history of racism and exclusion](#)
- [Dismantling racism](#)
- [Race and accountability in the boardroom: Considerations for boards to help drive progress on diversity and systemic change \(Webinar\)](#)
- [Decolonize your board](#)
- [Diversity Is Not Enough And, Done Alone, It Can Be Counterproductive](#)



WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING



“Some [green organization boards] have to scrap everything. Some of them have to scrap everything, start over. They have to give up power. They need to do some race analysis.

They need to look at their own positionality. They need to make space for youth leadership and so there's got to be...I just think that some of these organizations, particularly the ones that are boards that have been there for twenty years...folks have to kind of get out of the way and also just recognize...The other thing is that the whole model is antiquated...and so these models that we're utilizing are just very twentieth century. So I think having young diverse voices on a board are the type of individuals who can help the staff, the board as a whole, think through new models. It's just very difficult. We've been doing something the same way ten, fifteen, twenty years. That's not great.”

- Black Leader

EXPAND NETWORKS

EXPAND NETWORKS, CREATE CONNECTIONS, AND RETHINK STRATEGIES OF RECRUITMENT TO BROADEN LEADERSHIP REACH.

Recommended actions:

- To increase diverse membership, boards may need to rethink their recruitment techniques and the homogeneity of their current networks.
- It is important that boards are willing to be creative, flexible, and persistent in recruitment strategies if they want to bring on diverse membership.
- One CEO stated, "I had to work hard. I brought three people of color into the board this year and it was hard work."

Consider the following strategies that were found to be helpful by board leaders:

- Take advantage of opportunities to network with diverse leaders doing similar work within the field.
- Develop relationships with Black-led organizations and seek out environmental associations for Black leaders, such as the Environmental Professionals of Color (EPOC), the Environmentalists of Color network, or the Diverse Environmental Leaders Speakers Bureau.
- Hire a board recruiter specializing in engaging diverse candidates.
- Prioritize asking current diverse board members for potential candidates in their networks.
- Develop a clear path toward leadership for diverse staff members of the organization.
- Recruit through the organization's chapter networks and the served community.

Resources for expanding networks and recruiting (and retaining) diverse board members:

- [11 Practical Ways To Build A Diverse Network Of Professional Connections](#)
- [How to Diversify Your Professional Network](#)
- [Attracting and Retaining Diverse Board Members: Webinar](#)
- [How To Recruit And Retain Diverse Board Members: Article](#)

ESTABLISH METRICS

GO BEYOND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTION, AND ESTABLISH BOTH QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METRICS TO MEASURE DEI.

Recommended actions:

- Go deeper than demographics of board members and implement open-ended feedback tools of performance geared at evaluating equitable and inclusive practices and policies.
- Build in routine quantitative and qualitative annual (or quarterly) assessments to determine and work toward minimizing discrepancies between DEI goals and current realities.
- Transparently present assessment findings and proposed solutions to board members.

When establishing **quantitative metrics**, think about:

- representing inclusive identity groups in demographic data collection and ensuring your board is representative of the communities served
- measuring the contribution from all members of a board
- measuring the demographics of organizations supported by the board

When establishing **qualitative metrics**, think about:

- developing a feedback tool that allows for open-ended responses
- measuring perceptions of equitable and inclusive practices from those on the board and/or staff and communities served
- incorporating the measurement of board members' feelings of belongingness, safety, motivation to participate, and perceptions of progress

***Pro-tip:** Developing a board matrix can help identify gaps in representation on the board. Learn more about board matrices ([Click here](#))

“ WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING ”

"I think there are the basic things that you can look at. How was your board changed? How have you become more inclusive? What kind of practices have you built in to become a more inclusive environment? What kind of structural bylaws have you changed? That sort of thing. What does your board construction look like? What do your asset maps now look like? I think there are things or indicators like that that you can look at that for me are indicators of success."

-Black Leader

BUILD THE PIPELINE

BUILD THE PIPELINE FOR BLACK LEADERS BY WORKING WITH HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUS), CREATING JUNIOR BOARDS, FUNDING FELLOWSHIPS AND INTERNSHIPS, AND STARTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHAPTERS AT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

Build the pipeline for Black leaders by working with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), creating junior boards, funding fellowships and internships, and starting organizational chapters at colleges and universities.

Recommended actions:

- Educate college students on board membership roles and responsibilities to establish affiliated junior boards or organizational chapters at colleges and universities
- Sponsor fellowships and internships for future Black leaders
- Educate primary school students on the importance of environment and conservation work and its connection to their lives.

Consider the following when building the pipeline:

- Look outside the box for recruiting, such as Black candidate pools, professional affinity groups, executive search firms, and the organization's own staff.
- Leaders are not born, but made. Identify ways to influence and train the next generation to become the leaders boards need in order to create the change needed.

Resources:

[Green is the New Black: Environmental Justice and HBCUs](#)



WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING



“So I guess what that means is that if you really want to build the pipeline, you have to create opportunities. I think you have to create opportunities not only on the boards, but you have to create opportunities within the leadership of environmental organizations, and you have to have a more diverse set of environmental organizations. That then comes back to foundations putting more money into, well, either environmental justice work or organizations that have a very diverse workforce.”

- Black Leader

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

BE INCLUSIVE WITH PRACTICES AND POLICIES BY ENGAGING, VALUING, AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE SKILL SETS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF BLACK BOARD MEMBERS AND BY PROVIDING EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING METHODS AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS.

Be inclusive with practices and policies by engaging, valuing, and acknowledging the skill sets and contributions of Black board members and by providing effective onboarding methods and mentorship programs.

Recommended actions:

- Invite community input into board meetings (community elected officials that represent the interests of the people directly affected by board decisions)
- Partner with BIPOC-led grassroots organizations working directly with communities affected by climate change.

When implementing inclusive practices, consider the following:

- Look outside the box for recruiting, such as Black candidate pools, professional affinity groups, executive search firms, and the organization's own staff.
- Ensure that mentorship programs and onboarding methods promote an understanding of board culture and requirements as well as a presentation of resources to be successful on the board.

Resources:

[Beyond the Board Statement: How Can Boards Join the Movement for Racial Justice? \(2-part webinar, Nonprofit Quarterly\)](#)



WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING



"We're recognizing that we're going to have to be somewhat flexible with our focus to embrace a broader set of issues in communities that are adjacent to our work. So it's sort of like how you expand your mission to be accommodating to a broader set of community issues.

- Black Leader

CRITICAL MASS

REMEMBER THAT CRITICAL MASS MATTERS. BY INCLUDING MORE THAN ONE BLACK MEMBER, THE BOARD MAY NOT ONLY BENEFIT BY HAVING INCREASED TALENT AND REPRESENTATION, BUT THE BOARD MAY ALSO FIND THAT THOSE MEMBERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO STAY.

Remember that critical mass matters. By including more than one Black member, the board may not only benefit by having increased talent and representation, but the board may also find that those members are more likely to stay.

Recommended actions:

Go beyond what is perceived as diversity and compare current board composition to the communities being served. If more than half of the community is Black, there should be more than one Black board member.

Create space for Black leaders to recommend peers for board membership.

When thinking of critical mass, consider the following:

- Keep the focus on equity and inclusion rather than diversity numbers to avoid tokenizing Black leaders.
- By including more than one Black board member, the board may not only benefit by having increased talent and representation, but according to Black leaders, the board may also find that those members are more likely to stay.
- Black leaders know other Black leaders. Trust their connections and ask for recommendations for board membership.



WHAT BLACK LEADERS ARE SAYING



"I think at the beginning, the very first thing that I would want to offer is that I wouldn't want to be the only Black person on a board. It's not that I would not join a board that didn't have another Black person, but I would need to have a serious conversation about how I would be the only Black person on the board and how the board was working to bring other people in because tokenization is so real. And, also, Black folks are not a monolith. There are so many Black experiences, especially when you factor in the experiences of folks who are immigrants and children of immigrants. Blackness is not a monolith. So, acknowledging that and not putting the being the only Black person on a board, on one person's shoulders, is very important to me. That is the first thing."

- Black Leader

RECOGNIZE INTERSECTIONALITY

RECOGNIZE THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION WORK AND SOCIAL AND RACIAL JUSTICE. WITHOUT UPLIFTING AND WORKING IN POWER WITH THE PEOPLE MOST OFTEN HARMED BY ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE, ORGANIZATIONS WILL BE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN IMPACT.

Recognize the intersectionality of environmental and conservation work, and social and racial justice. Without uplifting and working in power with the people most often harmed by environmental catastrophe, organizations will be less likely to have an impact.

Recommended actions:

- Foster relationships with community-led organizations that fully integrate equity both internally and externally.
- Partner with social justice organizations working with the same communities your organization serves.
- Initiate candid conversations about diversity and other important issues facing grantees.

When recognizing intersectionality, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who's already doing the groundwork?
- How can my organization help uplift the work of others?
- What support do community-led organizations need and how can we meet those needs?
- In what ways does racism appear in environmental work?
- How do environmental issues disproportionately impact Black communities?
- What is my organization's role in addressing the overlap between environmental impact and other issues such as food shortages, housing conditions, and community health indicators?

Resources:

- [DEI Beyond the Boardroom: Environmental Justice is Racial Justice \(The Inclusion Solution\)](#)
- [Toxic Waste and Race in Twenty-First Century America](#)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- [Keys to Integrating DEI: Transparency, Power-sharing, and accountability](#)
- [Five Practices for Developing and Staying Accountable to Racial Equity Goals](#)
- [How to Have Impactful, Authentic DEI Conversations: A 3-step Process](#)
- [10 Steps to Building an Authentic Diversity and Inclusion Initiative](#)
- [Beyond the Board Statement: How Can Boards Join the Movement for Racial Justice? \(2-part webinar, Nonprofit Quarterly\)](#)
- [How Can You Ensure That Diversity Starts at the Top? \(Entrepreneur\)](#)
- [DEI Beyond the Boardroom: Environmental Justice is Racial Justice \(The Inclusion Solution\)](#)
- [Toxic Waste and Race in Twenty-First Century America](#)
- [Green is the New Black: Environmental Justice and HBCUs](#)



InDEEP

INITIATIVE

For more information on how you can
participate in the InDEEP initiative contact

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