

An Opportunity: Equity and Conservation

During this unprecedented time of COVID-19, more people than ever are using our trails and preserves in their need to be in nature – but not everyone finds those places safe or welcoming. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) face many barriers that keep them from accessing and enjoying these spaces.

One of these barriers is that BIPOC are underrepresented in our organization's volunteers, staff, and program participants. BIPOC have shared that this is one reason they may feel unwelcome and even scared to enter protected places, join events, and engage in outdoor activities in Maine.

Additionally, BIPOC know how the history of land protection and acquisition has gone hand-in-hand with oppression and violence. That history connects to their lives, and it continues with current events that are a direct continuation of these cultural and physical systems of inequality.

This moment in time gives us an opportunity. As conservationists and as part of the SMCC community, we're called to look more deeply at our role in creating and perpetuating these systems.

And most importantly, we have an opportunity to address and change those inequities.

For people and organizations, it can be hard to know where to start on this work. The issues and injustices of race, racism, and systemic oppression are so big, so unclear, and so overwhelming.

But the good news is, you don't have to try to address these issues alone. If you're looking for ways to transform your organization into one that's more inclusive, equitable, diverse, and welcoming, SMCC is here to support you!

We want to work with you to create events and spaces for all people to feel welcome and comfortable. Ultimately, we want our staff, volunteer, and program participants to be more diverse. We also want our work to be more relevant to community needs, more reflective of community members, and more effective and resilient.

To reach this goal, SMCC has been working over the last several years to identify and acknowledge harm and shortcomings. We've also been identifying opportunities to dismantle exclusive racist and classist systems. This has allowed us to begin building new approaches that are inclusive and equitable.

So far, we've:

- Collected and shared resources related to understanding the connections between systemic racism, colonization, and conservation
- Cultivated regenerative relationships with black- and brown-led community organizations
- Developed a statement of equity with our full staff and board
- Reformed our hiring practices and policies to reflect our commitment to inclusion and cultural diversity
- Hosted multiple discussions and learning opportunities for member organizations with a focus on:
 - Decolonization of Conservation

southern maine
CONSERVATION
COLLABORATIVE

- Equity and Conservation
- Wabanaki History and Reconciliation
- Created relationships with queer, BIPOC youth who have worked with us as Summer Associates and beyond
- Developed new programs centered on the intersection of conservation and social justice

If you're interested in deepening your understanding and improving your efforts in these areas, we'd love to work with you and offer support!

Tangible and measurable projects you could work on are:

- Developing a Statement of Equity for your organization, with a clear sense of vision and connection to other aspects of your organizational work
- Creating a curriculum for a discussion group focused on equity in conservation
- Assessing and reviewing hiring practices and job descriptions to appeal to a greater diversity of applicants
- Fostering new relationships with community-based organizations
- Leading discussions on dominant culture and supporting shifts to be more welcoming
- Looking at organizational change through an equity lens
- Supporting organizations to define equity and related terms

We've also partnered with several groups that offer a variety of approaches to addressing equity and equity-related topics. SMCC can facilitate a connection with these organizations, which include:

- Natural Difference, LLC
- Deborah E. Bicknell Consulting Services, LLC
- Maine's Environmental Changemakers
- Maine Wabanaki REACH
- The Avarna Group
- Up with Community

SMCC can help you start from where you're at and define the next steps. To begin the conversation, we invite you to give us a call at (207) 699-2989 or send an email to Jess B. at conservationcollaborative@gmail.com.

All inquiries are welcome – we look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,
Jess Burton

P.S. We at SMCC believe that all people have a right to access and be comfortable in nature and in public spaces. Now is the time to make that access a reality for all Mainers. [Contact us](#) today to see how SMCC can help!