



Forming a Staff IDEA Committee Lessons Learned During our First Year

APGA IDEA Center Participants

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Project Background

Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens is an organization committed to welcoming all. We feel an important component to achieving this is taking a closer looking at IDEA principals through the lens of workplace practices and workforce culture. We are sincere in our dedication to DE&I and want our efforts to be well planned and executed so our impact is long lasting and sustainable.

The objective of our IDEA project is the formation, implementation and integration of a staff-run DE&I committee. We will share our experiences from the committee's first year, along with lessons learned, in the hope that our journey may be helpful to other organizations interested in creating a staff DE&I Committee.

Committee Formation

Our approach to selecting the committee members was to get the word out to staff via multiple channels: email, all staff meetings, through department managers, and just in conversation. We ended up with 7 employees who came forward with an interest in joining the committee. We accepted everyone and were lucky to end up with representation across many Conservatory departments - Community Outreach and Education, Horticulture, Special Events, Development. We would have preferred more gender and racial diversity on the committee, as we ended up pretty homogeneous. On the plus side, the committee members were engaged, bright, and committed to the principles of IDEA.

Committee Work during the 1st Year

INITIAL PLAN

Our first couple committee meetings felt very enthusiastic with many ideas being brought forward. Too many ideas honestly, and we determined we needed to choose a focus for our first year. As a committee we determined that a good starting point would be to focus on employee awareness and education on a variety of DE&I content and issues. All other ideas were put on the “back-burner” We decided to dedicate every other month to exploring a DE&I topic, called Deep Dives. Here is some additional information about our Deep Dives:

- Each Deep Dive month covers a different area of DE&I.
- Two committee members served as the leads for each month. This way we shared the “ownership” of each month between us.
- The monthly topics the committee decided on were: LGBTQ+ and Juneteenth, Unconscious Bias and Micro-aggressions, Socioeconomic Bias, and Disabilities and Neurodiversity.
- During a Deep Dive Month the committee would send weekly branded emails to all staff that included a variety of resources on that month’s topic . An example email can be found at the end of this paper.
- These weekly emails included online resources such as articles, videos, activities, websites, and podcasts.
- Employees had approval to spend 30 minutes each week of company time to review the materials.
- Some weeks we wanted to share more than 30 minutes of content, so we included a section called “Additional Resources and Further Reading” for employees who wanted to learn more in their free time. Where applicable, we also added community happenings related to that month’s topic.
- The committee would also occasionally bring in subject-area experts to present to staff on that month's topic.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

The committee was successful and met our starting objective of completing four Deep Dive months in 2022. We gathered a wealth of content, and in the process became more knowledgeable DE&I committee members. We felt good about sharing regular, ongoing messaging about DE&I to staff. It kept DE&I topics front and center. We heard positive feedback from some staff members. And, the DE&I Committee members bonded with each other and formed a strong connection.

CHALLENGES

The DE&I Committee, as expected, learned a lot over the course of the first year. First, we sensed that only a percentage of the workforce were reading the materials we sent out. Employees who attended the optional learning sessions with industry experts were mostly those who were engaged and interested in DE&I in the first place. We felt a bit static because we couldn’t measure the impact of the work we were doing. We also felt a bit “over our heads” being responsible for the Conservatory’s DE&I progress.

Regardless, we learned a lot and I think we needed to struggle through this first year, assess, and get to a point where we're ready to take the committee to the next level.

Our Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Understanding your own shortcomings

As stated above, our DE&I committee was made up of staff members who expressed an interest in advancing the Conservatory's DE&I initiatives. None of us were trained DE&I professionals. At times it felt like we were being stretched to fill a role that we were not comfortable with. For example, as committee members we didn't feel comfortable leading a training or group discussion on a DE&I topic. We feared we could unintentionally cause harm by saying the wrong thing, or not recognizing how a specific conversation could trigger someone. At one point we felt a bit paralyzed. Being honest with yourselves as individuals and as a committee is important in this work. We determined we needed to seek outside expertise to confidently advance our DE&I agenda.

Lesson #2: Things will go slow

The members of our committee were talented experts in their individual departments and accustomed to accomplishing tasks and seeing the quick result of their hard work. We learned that most of the time DE&I work is slow, and doesn't happen in a predictable or straightforward manner. It can be discouraging at times. Recognizing that progress is hard and slow is important so that your committee members are not disappointed. We regularly reminded ourselves that we're working towards long-term change.

Lesson #3: Committee needs defined

Our biggest lesson learned is that our committee is ineffective without our scope, purpose, and role within the Conservatory being defined and understood by all. We strongly felt that we needed outside help before we could move forward with more programming and activities. We began the process of vetting DE&I Consultants in December 2022.

Future of our Committee

In March 2023 Franklin Park Conservatory engaged the services of the Mosaic Group and Dr. Melissa Crum for the work of Committee Strategic Development. Dr. Crum acts as an advisor for our committee as we're guided through the process to develop the final product - a committee charter. The charter is the committee's governance cornerstone. The Committee Charter defines membership criteria and tenure, committee size, mission, leadership structure, guiding principles, roles and responsibilities, meeting frequency, communication, accountability, and senior leader involvement. This is a 6 month process that includes an Organizational Assessment, Council Assessment, development of Foundation Framework, our Value Proposition, the Committee's Roles and Responsibilities, and the Development of the Committee Charter.



Community and Celebrations

This Week's Dive will be focusing on Broadening Awareness on LGBTQ+ and Black Culture topics which includes some Columbus Specific Resources.

30 MINUTE DEEP DIVE

Four Flowering Plants that are Decidedly Queer
Article Detailing the History of Flowering Plants that
have been associated with the LGBTQ+ Community
Historically

8 MINUTE READ

Heteronormativity Article
Article on the 101 of Heteronormativity, What Is it and
how does it affect our everyday lives?

6 MINUTE READ

So You Want to Learn About Juneteenth?
New York Times Article Detailing More Recent
Juneteenth Celebrations and the Importance of
Growing Awareness for the Holiday

5 MINUTE READ

Celebrating Juneteenth
A Video Showcasing What Juneteenth Celebrations
Look Like

[3 MINUTE VIDEO](#)

**The Shooting/Targeting of Black Americans in Buffalo
is not an Isolated Incident**
An article written in light of the anti-Black and racially
motivated shooting that took place at a Buffalo
supermarket and claimed the lives of 13 unarmed
black civilians. This article offers important insight on
what black Americans face in their day-to-day lives
and why this shooting connects to hundreds of other
similar events in American society.

[5 MINUTE READ](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & FURTHER READING

Compulsive Heterosexuality
Video Discussing Compulsory Heterosexuality
“Comp Het” and Heteronormativity

[9 MINUTE VIDEO](#)

**What is Replacement Theory and its Impact on
Current Events**
Article is a short discussion about replacement
theory and why it is inciting racial injustice and anti-
black violence in today’s society

[5 MINUTE READ
OR LISTEN](#)

Excerpt of of Flag Wars
Excerpt of the Documentary on the Historically Black
Olde Towne East area of Columbus and the residents
who perceive themselves as being forced out of their
homes by affluent gay couples trying to make an area
for themselves

[2 MINUTE VIDEO](#)

UPCOMING COLUMBUS CELEBRATIONS!

Columbus Pride Parade
FPC Staff will be walking in the parade that kicks off
on June 18th at 10:30am. There is also a Columbus
Pride Community Festival from 11am to 8pm at
Goodale Park

[LEARN MORE](#)

King Arts Complex Juneteenth Celebration
Celebrate Juneteenth on June 18th from 12pm to 6pm
at Mt Vernon Ave

[LEARN MORE](#)

Genoa Park Juneteenth Celebration
Celebrate Juneteenth on June 18th and 19th from
12pm-3pm in Genoa Park.

[LEARN MORE](#)



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