

MEETING NOTES

Metro DNA

February 22, 2017 | 8:30am

In Attendance

Brian Kurzel, Jennifer Riley-Chetwynd, Leslie Pickard, Stephanie Stowell, Jeff Su, Sara Abdulla, Delissa Padilla, Anna Zawisza, Sarah Thomas

Updates

- Gap Analysis is well under way. ST Consulting has started interviews and sent out the survey. So far getting good feedback and information.
- March 8 meeting will focus on other models (e.g., Intertwine) as they relate to possible roles for mDNA. In addition, there is a need to discuss targeted stakeholder meetings in late March and April.
- ST Consulting will send out a doodle poll to find a time for an early June large stakeholder meeting.
- CAEE is hosting a summit on March 10 and has a panel on which mDNA can participate. Brian cannot participate and he hopes someone else can.
- A new document will be available on DropBox to track Steering Committee members' conversations with other groups related to mDNA.

Equity Conversation

Jeff started the equity conversation by framing the reason for the conversation: feedback from equity groups in a recent meeting about mDNA (i.e., that mDNA needs to show greater commitment to inclusiveness and equity) and the need to potentially "reset" mDNA's approach to equity and inclusiveness. Jeff then welcomed stories about how different organizations have approached equity and what they have learned in the process.

Alliance for Sustainable Colorado: When Jeff came on Board as ED, there were 6 white Board members. Internally, the organization had a sincere desire to do better. Initially, though, the conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusiveness were fairly naïve – such as "let's get a black woman on board". So, the Alliance has started a process, with the help of an outside consultant, to better engage with issues of equity and inclusiveness. It started with a readiness assessment of staff. Now the Alliance is thinking about next steps. Jeff mentioned that: 1) the Alliance intentionally did not start with discussions about structural oppression out of concern that staff would not have the tools to address/deal with the issues that emerged; 2) It is thinking about rapid, small interventions it can make now; 3) The Board gave support when it realized that a failure to engage with the issues would undermine the Alliance's work.

VOC: Also is working on equity and inclusiveness. It is looking to Conservation Colorado's Protégé program, in which it hired Latino staff, as a model. VOC is considering creating a specific program, fundraising for it, and staffing it. For now, it is working with Westwood.

USFWS: The original constituents for national wildlife refuges were fishers and hunters, predominately white. USFWS realized that to be relevant with changing demographics would require doing conservation differently. It is approaching equity in 2 ways: 1) trying to diversify the workforce so that the staff is representative of the communities in which they work; 2) at the same time, it is working to make an urban wildlife conservation program that is relevant for the communities in which the USFWS. This involves developing relationships and understanding the types of relationship with nature that are of value to diverse communities. As a part of this work, it relies a lot on partners who already are trusted voices in communities.

Botanic Gardens: Inclusion has been the primary overlay – not diversity for diversity’s sake. The Gardens has approached this through the Board – trying to make it more representative of the community. Mostly, though, it has approached it through audience engagement: making relevant programming, being intentional about cultural organization, making a space that is comfortable and familiar to different people. Staff also have found that working with a trusted source can help open conversations and trust within a community.

Zoo: The Zoo is making progress through the education program. It is trying to shift from one-time engagement, to multi-contact programming in which it works with a school or center for weeks. This approach is helping it to become a trusted source in different communities, but also to improve its programming. The hope is that the education and community partnerships can inform the greater organization.

NWF: NWF completed an assessment “Greengroup” 101 along with other major enviro groups. The conclusion was pretty scathing. Even after the first round, many groups are still struggling with issues of equity and inclusiveness. Mostly, the approach to improve matters has been to look at diversity of the Board and staff, not through authentic programming. Even though NWF works in 10,000 schools nationwide, the feeling that it is not really engrained in the communities or authentically connecting with communities. The tribal program has been more successful, but leadership is often frustrated by the lack of deliverables.

Boys and Girls Club: From a staff level, it is doing well. 50% of staff come from communities. The real struggle is with the executive teams. Additionally, the direct service providers are not always the strongest voice in terms of the future direction of organization – that is a disservice because that is not the strongest voice. Leslie added that working on equity and inclusiveness is an ongoing process, that changes over time, and even changes when an organization’s leadership changes. So, approaches have to adapt.

Next Steps on Equity

The group then discussed possible approaches to equity for mDNA, including:

- Start somewhere
- Own some early mistakes around mDNA’s approach to equity (e.g., the equity stakeholder meeting that focused on data and was potentially off-putting, emails that seem overly academic)
- Demonstrate commitment to equity (e.g., “training”) by mDNA leadership
- Undertake a more thoughtful and strategic approach to outreach to equity groups (e.g., one-on-one meetings, going to their meetings instead of inviting them to ours)
- Show transparency in processes
- Include equity groups in leadership immediately (e.g., inviting Jes Ward to Steering Committee) – show that not just trying to “take” information from them but meaningfully involve them
- Emphasize commonalities and areas of shared values
- Wait to complete results and indicators until better relationships exist with equity organizations so that the results and indicators are “co-created”

Jeff then identified a suite of immediate actions:

1. Leslie will invite Jes Ward to join the Steering Committee
2. On March 8, the Steering Committee (when more members are present) will decide on the following possible actions:
 - a. Decide internally to authentically commit to equity and inclusiveness
 - b. Decide on whether the Steering Committee should undertake a training (a couple of members will look into possible options prior to March 8).

- c. Decide to conduct outreach to targeted grassroots groups, not just “VIP” individuals as part of stakeholder outreach in Task 2 (March and April).