



Climate Corps: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice

2021



CLIMATE CORPS

Climate Corps: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice 2021

Climate Corps®

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Acknowledgements

The Climate Corps DEIJ Working Group authored this report. Thanks to many for contributions and reviews, including from EDF's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion team, EDF's Justice and Equity team, and to the fellows and alumni who have given feedback on our DEIJ initiative.

Environmental Defense Fund

Founded in 1967, Environmental Defense Fund is an international environmental organization working at the intersection of policy, science, and economics. EDF has an ambitious mission – a vital Earth for everyone. EDF+Business, the organization's corporate engagement arm, leverages the power of the private sector and challenges business leaders to raise the bar on environmental leadership and innovation and forging unexpected partnerships that catalyze action across companies and supply chains.

A Note on Photos

With the exception of the cover photo, all photos in this report are from Climate Corps events or fellowships, however as all events and most fellowships were virtual in 2021, these photos are from previous years.

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A Note from Our Director

Over the last 15 years, Climate Corps has played an important role in Environmental Defense Fund's (EDF) efforts to achieve its mission of building a vital Earth for everyone. In that time, we have recruited, placed and supported more than 1,500 Climate Corps fellows working with over 600 companies and organizations across the U.S., China and India, and have built a network of 2,500 climate leaders and practitioners dedicated to solving the climate crisis. I am immensely proud of these and the many other accomplishments realized by this Climate Corps program and its network.

As our program has evolved, so too has our understanding of what it takes to solve the climate crisis. Critical to achieving this is to harness a diverse set of perspectives, ideas and solutions, and to embrace a vision of environmentalism that is equitable and inclusive. This is what we strive to achieve as a program, and this report is our first attempt to share our progress with you.

As a leading graduate-level fellowship program operating within the field of sustainability, Climate Corps sits in a unique and important position, providing real-world experiences to students interested in this work and helping to

set them on a trajectory of environmental sustainability throughout their careers and lives. We take this responsibility seriously and believe there is much we can and must do to realize the full potential of the Climate Corps program. I am committed to ensuring diversity, equity, inclusion and justice remain key priorities of the Climate Corps program now and well into the future.

Thank you,

Scott Wood
Senior Director, Climate Corps®
Environmental Defense Fund



Introduction and Context

[Climate Corps®](#) is building a network of climate professionals to accelerate a clean energy future for all.

Now in its 15th year, Environmental Defense Fund's Climate Corps fellowship recruits and trains talented and passionate graduate-level students and pairs them with companies and public institutions to work on projects that help the organizations meet their climate goals. With nearly 1500 alumni, 80% of whom are working on energy or sustainability as a component of their full-time jobs, Climate Corps is launching the careers of the climate leaders of today and tomorrow, making it ever more crucial that our program is deeply rooted in principles of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ).

We developed and enacted our first diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategy in 2019 with an aim to strengthen our DEI practices across the program. Over the 2019 calendar year, we researched best practices, baselined data, evaluated processes, and created a strategy with specific tactics to begin implementation. Initially, our main goals were focused on

improving the diversity of our fellow cohort, creating an inclusive culture within our network, and applying a DEI lens to all decisions, processes and team norms. We also defined key metrics and data collection best practices. The year 2019 was focused on ensuring progressive acclimation to DEI basics within the program.

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent racial reckoning influenced us to further reflect on and re-evaluate our work and priorities. What resulted was a doubling down on Climate Corps' DEI efforts with an additional focus on Environmental Justice (EJ). This included conceptualizing a new cohort of fellows to advance environmental and climate justice issues, scaling up diversity recruitment efforts and updating our fellow eligibility criteria.

This report details the DEIJ efforts that were taken in 2021. In pursuit of increased transparency and accountability, we aspire to openly and clearly report on our progress on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.

Diversity: Multiple identities and differences represented within an organization/network/group.

Equity: Opportunities for equal access, fair treatment and advancement. Identify and eliminate barriers that prevent full participation for all groups, especially those historically underserved and underrepresented.

Inclusion: Diversity being valued, welcomed and embraced. Active and intentional engagement with diversity in a way that enhances the ability of individuals to interact and participate.

Environmental Justice: Remedying environmental harms that have been purposely or incidentally imposed on specific communities and preventing similar injustices from happening in the future.

Climate Corps' DEIJ Commitment Statement, Short-term Goals and Tactics



Building the Statement and Tactics

In April 2021, Climate Corps engaged [The Impact Seat](#) as consultants, to aid in the design and development of a Climate Corps DEIJ vision statement, DEIJ organizational lexicon, and strategic priority identification. The Climate Corps team then worked from June 2021 through October 2021 to determine our priorities and craft short

term goals. We sought and incorporated feedback from stakeholders such as alumni, current fellows and EDF staff. The finalized commitment statement and goals are [published on our website](#) and are also shared below.

Climate Corps' DEIJ Commitment Statement

Climate Corps seeks to bolster our diverse network of climate professionals by embracing a vision of environmentalism that is equitable and inclusive, as we work toward a collaboratively built future where everyone, especially communities of color, low-income, and marginalized communities, can access and enjoy a healthy and sustainable world.

As Climate Corps aims to empower the next generation of climate leaders to accelerate the transition to a clean energy future for all, we recognize that our individual and collective futures depend on the contributions of people from all backgrounds and identities – such as race, ethnicity, nativity, physical ability, socio-economic status, gender identity and sexual orientation – to create lasting environmental solutions.

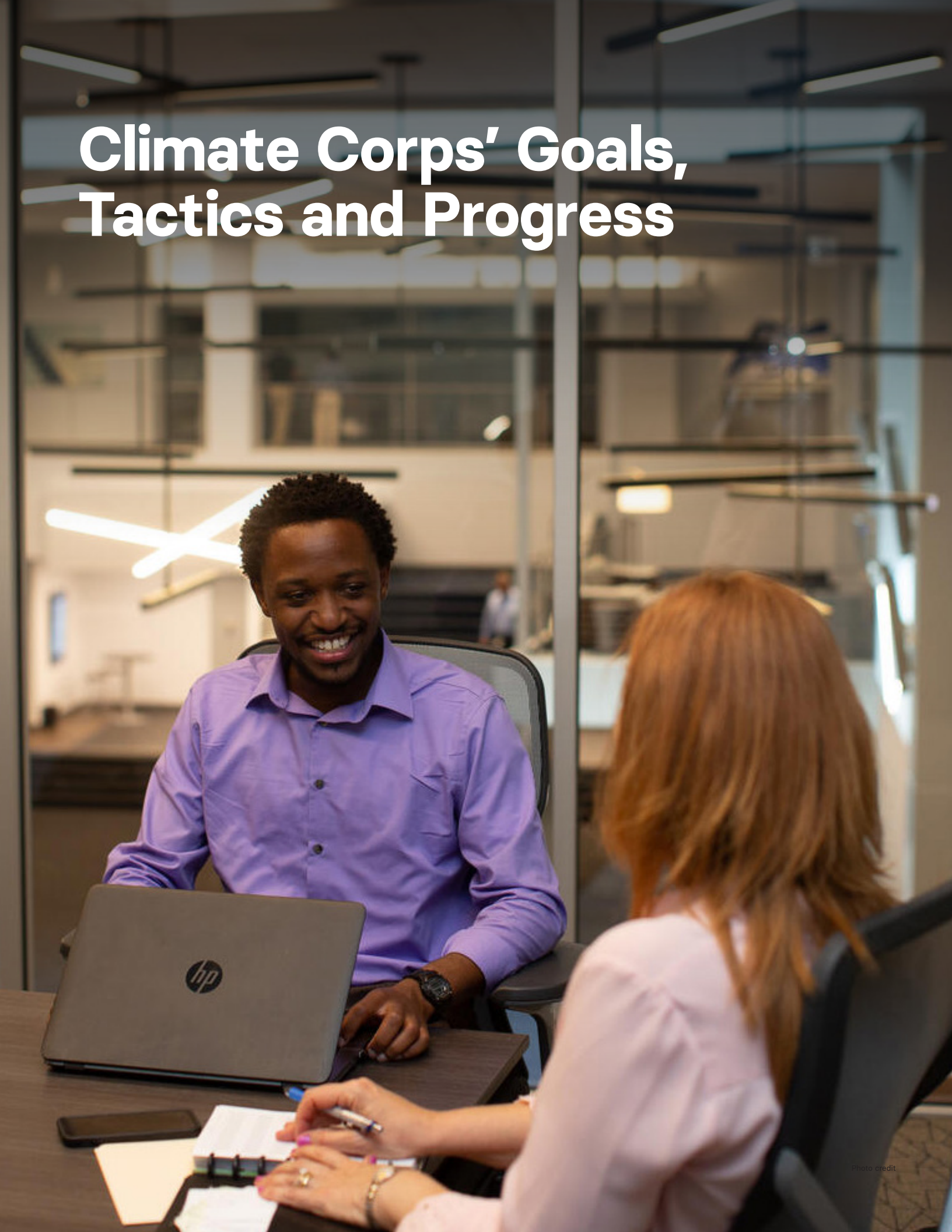
We are committed to amplifying our efforts to recruit a diverse community of fellows and provide resources throughout their fellowships and careers. We are working to incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice throughout the Climate Corps program.

Our priorities for 2021 – 2023 are:

1. Assemble and support diverse cohorts of Climate Corps fellows by amplifying recruitment efforts for historically underrepresented groups, removing barriers to participation and revising internal processes and systems to build inclusion and equity into our global program.
2. Provide events, trainings and resources to equip our fellows and network to recognize the root causes of environmental inequities and to advocate for and collaborate with historically marginalized communities when making environmental decisions.
3. Create a culture within the Climate Corps team of continuous learning, feedback, improvement and accountability on diversity, equity, inclusion and environmental/climate justice through staff training, quarterly progress reviews, individual goal setting and annual reporting.

There is still much work to be done and we welcome any feedback and suggestions on ways to develop and improve.

Climate Corps' Goals, Tactics and Progress



Goal 1

Assemble and support diverse cohorts of Climate Corps fellows by amplifying recruitment efforts for historically underrepresented groups, removing barriers to participation and revising internal processes and systems to build inclusion and equity into our global program.

Tactic 1 - Recruitment

Continue to build relationships and program recognition with relevant graduate programs at minority-serving institutions and state schools across the U.S. Determine each year if there are new schools to target for outreach and prioritize outreach plans. Continue to engage with organizations that reach diverse student populations.

For the 2022 recruitment season, which took place in the fall of 2021, the U.S. fellow recruitment team amplified their efforts to expand recruitment from a wider range of schools and reach more diverse student populations. This effort began in the summer when we conducted research to identify new schools with graduate programs that align with Climate Corps. These schools included University of North Texas, University of Texas Dallas, Hawaii Pacific University, and San Jose State.

In fall 2021, Climate Corps hosted 40 informational sessions including one-on-one sessions, conferences, career fairs and university-specific sessions. Of the 20 universities that hosted information sessions, 30% of the schools were minority-serving institutions and 65% were public colleges or universities. The conferences EDF staff attended were Prospanica and Women of Color in STEM.

In 2022, U.S. fellow applications totaled 1,265, a record high for the Climate Corps program. Fellow applicants represented 205 different universities

compared with 980 applications and 178 universities and for the 2021 program. People of color¹ represented 42% of the applicant pool and 47% of participating fellows. Applicants were 57% women and 2% non-binary individuals² and participating fellows were 56% women and 2% non-binary individuals. In 2022, 29% of our applicants and 33% of our fellows were international students. To see how these demographic stats compare to the 2021 fellow cohort, see Table 1.

TABLE 1
US Program Demographic Highlights, 2022 & 2021

Year	Status	People of Color	Women	Non-binary	International Students
2022	Applicants	42%	57%	2%	29%
	Fellows	47%	56%	2%	33%
2021	Applicants	39%	56%	1%	22%
	Fellows	53%	53%	1%	25%

1 People of color is defined as individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Pacific Islander, Black/ African American, Hispanic/Latinx, or two or more races.

2 Non-binary is defined as individuals who identify as non-binary, genderqueer or other genders.



Photo credit

Tactic 2 - Selection Process

Assess fellow qualifications, examine screening process for bias, and identify opportunities to value lived experience or non-traditional experiences.

Communicate recruitment priorities to host organizations¹, encourage hosts to re-evaluate required skill sets and project phrasing, and communicate to hosts EDF's expectations for inclusive and supportive work environments for fellows.

In the summer of 2021, we hired a DEIJ Intern to assess and recommend improvements to our application screening process, including existing eligibility and other screening criteria,

1 A host organization (Host) is an organization that hires a Climate Corps Fellow

and to identify best practices used by similar programs. We also added a new field on the fellow application for applicants to share any lived experiences that might not be reflected on their resume.

In 2021, we continued to include the following statement on the Climate Corps host organization application. The statement conveys to interested organizations the importance of DEIJ to EDF and our expectations, which are that host organizations provide an inclusive and safe environment for fellows. In addition to this statement, EDF also provides Human Resource (HR) crisis support to all Climate Corps fellows. If a Climate Corps fellow is subject to harassment or discrimination at their workplace, they can access EDF HR as a resource.

Host Organization Application DEIJ Statement

Climate Corps is committed to improving upon diversity, equity, inclusion and justice across all areas of our program. We are proud that our fellows represent a diverse population of individuals with different experiences, backgrounds and identities - both visible and invisible. We believe this diversity makes our program stronger.

We similarly seek host organizations that embrace diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. We expect all participating host organizations to provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive work environment for their fellows.

Tactic 3 - Alumni Application Coaches

Pilot “alumni application coaches” to provide application support to students from schools with no or few Climate Corps alumni. Assess how to continue in future years.

In fall of 2021, we piloted a new initiative in which Climate Corps alumni application coaches were made available to U.S. applicants who did not already have a large alumni presence at their school. If we want to diversify the schools our fellows come from, we must enable support for students from schools who do not have an established Climate Corps alumni network.

This year, 4 alumni served as application coaches, advising applicants through 15 or 30-minute meetings. These coaches met with 38 applicants; of those, 30% advanced to the first round of interviews, compared to 26% overall. Seven of these applicants were ultimately selected as 2022 fellows, representing an 18% acceptance rate, higher than the overall acceptance rate of 12%. Feedback received from the applicants and alumni coaches was positive.

Tactic 4 - Language Updates

Address exclusive language on Climate Corps website and other materials.

Prior to the 2022 recruitment season, we updated our recruitment collateral – including the fellow and host brochure, job description, and website – to remove exclusionary language such as “elite schools.”

Tactic 5 - Financial Equity

Address financial equity, including ensuring compensation for fellows during fellow Training week¹, increasing salary rate,

1 The fellow training is an in-depth, week-long training provided by Climate Corps in May that prepares fellows to succeed in their summer fellowships and welcomes them to the Climate Corps Network.

removing upfront costs for Training travel, and examining relocation policies.

If financial barriers to participation exist for prospective fellows, they will not apply or will decline their placement offer. We aspire to remove such barriers so that financial constraints do not serve as a deterrent for individual participation.

During the 2022 recruitment season, we implemented a new policy in which all participating host organizations would be required to compensate their fellows for participation in the Climate Corps fellow Training week. This policy ensures that all fellows are fairly compensated for the time they spend preparing for their summer projects.

In the fall of 2021, we clarified the language in the 2022 host application stating that the fellow salary of \$1,250/week is the minimum amount fellows must be paid. This change was, in part, intended to encourage host organizations to compensate fellows at their internal intern rate if it is higher than the Climate Corps minimum salary.

Tactic 6 - Accessibility

Examine accessibility and support needed for fellows and network members to fully participate in the fellowship program and network offerings, including assessing opportunities to support or connect fellows with resources for mental health.

In 2021, we developed a set of Events Best Practices to outline how we can and will offer events that are inclusive and welcoming. Based on research and feedback from the Alumni Advisory Board², we developed [meeting guidelines](#)

2 The Alumni Advisory Board is a group of volunteer alumni who help inform future network and fellowship programming and strategy, providing a fresh perspective and new ideas for the Climate Corps program.

[for network members](#) that we apply at each event. These best practices include information about accessibility features such as live transcription and opportunities for inclusivity such as adding pronouns to Zoom names.

In 2021, we launched our first offering of career coaching for 2021 fellows. We collaborated with Trish Kenlon of [Sustainable Career Pathways](#), to provide a select group of fellows with access to a sustainability careers expert to help navigate the sustainability jobs landscape. Because this was a limited resource, one of the criteria used in the fellow selection process was the quality of sustainability career coaching available at the fellow's university. This helped to ensure that the fellows who needed this resource the most were the ones gaining access to it. In this pilot year, 10 fellows participated in this special career coaching.

Tactic 7 - Global DEIJ

[Address global inclusivity, including assessing timing of events, language,](#)

[and other barriers for international participation and inclusion in the fellowship program, and with the network and staff.](#)

To date, our DEIJ work has been focused on the U.S. program. We currently have programs in China and India that are run by EDF staff in those countries. Looking to the future, we intend to support our international colleagues in their development of DEIJ priorities that are specific to their country.

Tactic 8 - Sharing Resources

[Identify opportunities to share Climate Corps resources with individuals outside of the Climate Corps network.](#)

Workshops and resources related to climate advocacy have been made available to individuals outside of the Climate Corps network. In the coming years more work will need to be done to expand access to Climate Corps resources beyond the network.

Goal 2

Provide events, trainings and resources to equip our fellows and network to recognize the root causes of environmental inequities and to advocate for and collaborate with historically marginalized communities when making environmental decisions.

Tactic 1 - Training

[Build and implement relevant training and resources for fellows on Environmental Justice topics, for both the Environmental and Climate Justice/public sector cohort and the full fellow cohort.](#)

In 2021, the Climate Corps team incorporated sessions on diversity, equity, inclusion and environmental justice into the U.S. Program Fellow Training. These sessions were required for all fellows. The DEI session, which was developed with The Impact Seat,



aimed to educate fellows on how they can create equitable and inclusive climate solutions throughout the summer and in their careers. Feedback on this session helped us reflect on the importance of establishing trust before wading into sensitive topics and the importance of involving alumni in the development of new DEIJ sessions. Another Fellow Training session, delivered by [3 Degrees](#), a core Training partner, was intended to introduce environmental justice to all fellows. Many fellows encouraged us to expand upon this subject matter in future years. Additional feedback from the training has helped us rethink how EDF talks about our organization's history and the history of the environmental movement. The feedback and learnings were applied to the following year's Training content in 2022.

To ensure that DEIJ learning was incorporated into the summer, we piloted a series of summer events called "Continued Conversations" to gather fellows for discussion on articles, podcasts and videos on different DEIJ themes. This series consisted of 4 events spread throughout the summer

of 2021 on the topics such as environmental racism, and disability and disaster planning.

Tactic 2 - Network Events

[Integrate more trainings, resources, and speakers on Environmental Justice topics into the network's events strategy.](#)

In 2021, we offered the following network events focused on themes of equity and environmental justice:

March – Climate Corps Solutions Sharing: Sustainability and Climate Equity

- Three Climate Corps alumni shared their experience with sustainability and climate equity as part of our solutions sharing series.

Summer – Birds of a Feather Conversations

- Related conversations included "Energy Affordability & Decarbonization" and "The Future of Cities."

September Summit¹ Keynote – Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson

- Moderated by Heather McTeer Toney, Dr. Johnson spoke about The All We Can Save Project, an anthology of writings by a diverse group of 60 women at the forefront of the climate movement.

November – Climate Corps Event: Listen & Learn with EDF

- Dr. Margot Brown spoke about how EDF is integrating environmental justice & equity into the organization. The conversation was facilitated by alum Brandon Rothrock.

The Summit keynote, which was viewed by over 160 alumni, staff and partners, was particularly well received. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, including, “I appreciated how [Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson’s] research influences her policy recommendations, climate solutions for a diverse, inclusive, equitable and brighter future.”

Tactic 3 - Environmental and Climate Justice Cohort

[Deploy a cohort of fellows focused on Environmental and Climate Justice in 2021 and determine how to develop this](#)

¹ The Summit is Climate Corps’ annual conference held each fall for Fellows, alumni, Hosts and partners.

[in future years based on feedback from fellows and hosts.](#)

For the 2021 fellowship season, Climate Corps deployed a pilot cohort of fellows who worked on environmental and climate justice (ECJ) topics as the focus of their fellowships. The goal of the pilot was to recruit at least 10 fellows, provide them with a base level of ECJ training and match them with city governments, non-profit organizations, and private sector companies to advance ECJ projects. Internal stakeholders such as the EDF Environmental Justice Council were consulted before the pilot was rolled out.

In the spring and summer of 2021, Climate Corps trained and matched 14 fellows with 8 cities/municipalities, 3 non-profit organizations and 1 private sector company to advance ECJ projects at organizations such as the NYC Mayor’s Office of Sustainability, the City of Austin, and PayPal.

Lessons learned to be applied to future cohorts include considering extending the length of the fellowships, recruiting more fellows with lived experience, and expanding training and support on ECJ topics.



Goal 3

Create a culture within the Climate Corps team of continuous learning, feedback, improvement and accountability on diversity, equity, inclusion and environmental/climate justice through staff training, quarterly progress reviews, individual goal setting and annual reporting.

Tactic 1 - Data and Transparency

Collect data and continually assess opportunities for improvement on DEIJ. Report to key stakeholders through an annual report, be transparent on actions taken and results observed, and accountable when mistakes are made.

Climate Corps collects demographic data through questions on the fellow application, but there are limits to the demographic data our program can collect. We do not have access to data on aspects of identity that are important to evaluate the diversity of our program, such as sexual orientation, religion, nativity, physical ability, and socio-economic status. We will explore the possibilities of improving such data collection in the future but must be mindful of privacy and appropriateness.

The publication of this report is intended to increase transparency in our DEIJ efforts. We intend to publish DEIJ reports on a regular basis.

Tactic 2 - Staff Cultural Competencies

Build staff cultural competencies: Train the team on DEIJ topics, via an EDF planned training, or seek out our own at another organization. Continue to share resources via Slack and as ice breakers on the Climate Corps team call. Determine other opportunities for learning.

In the fall, 2021, all EDF staff participated in DEI training through two virtual sessions that were organized by EDF. In the future, we intend to build out more DEI-related trainings specifically for the Climate Corps team. Additionally, the team has committed to continued learning on DEIJ topics. We regularly share articles on related topics, discuss DEIJ themes during weekly team meetings, and are exploring further training for the team.

Tactic 3 - Team Hiring

Build a diverse Climate Corps team by posting all staff job openings to a wide range of job boards and websites with the aim of achieving a diverse pool of applicants. Collect demographic data on all job postings, assess if we are reaching a diverse pool of candidates, and determine new job-sharing tactics if necessary. Identify other opportunities to promote inclusion in hiring, including applying best practices to writing job descriptions.

The Climate Corps team frequently hires new staff. During these times, we work to post the jobs to several job boards to reach a diverse pool of applicants. Some of the job boards that we have posted to in the past include Women of Color Collective in Sustainability, Green Latinos, Black Oak Collective, Idealist.org and Net Impact.



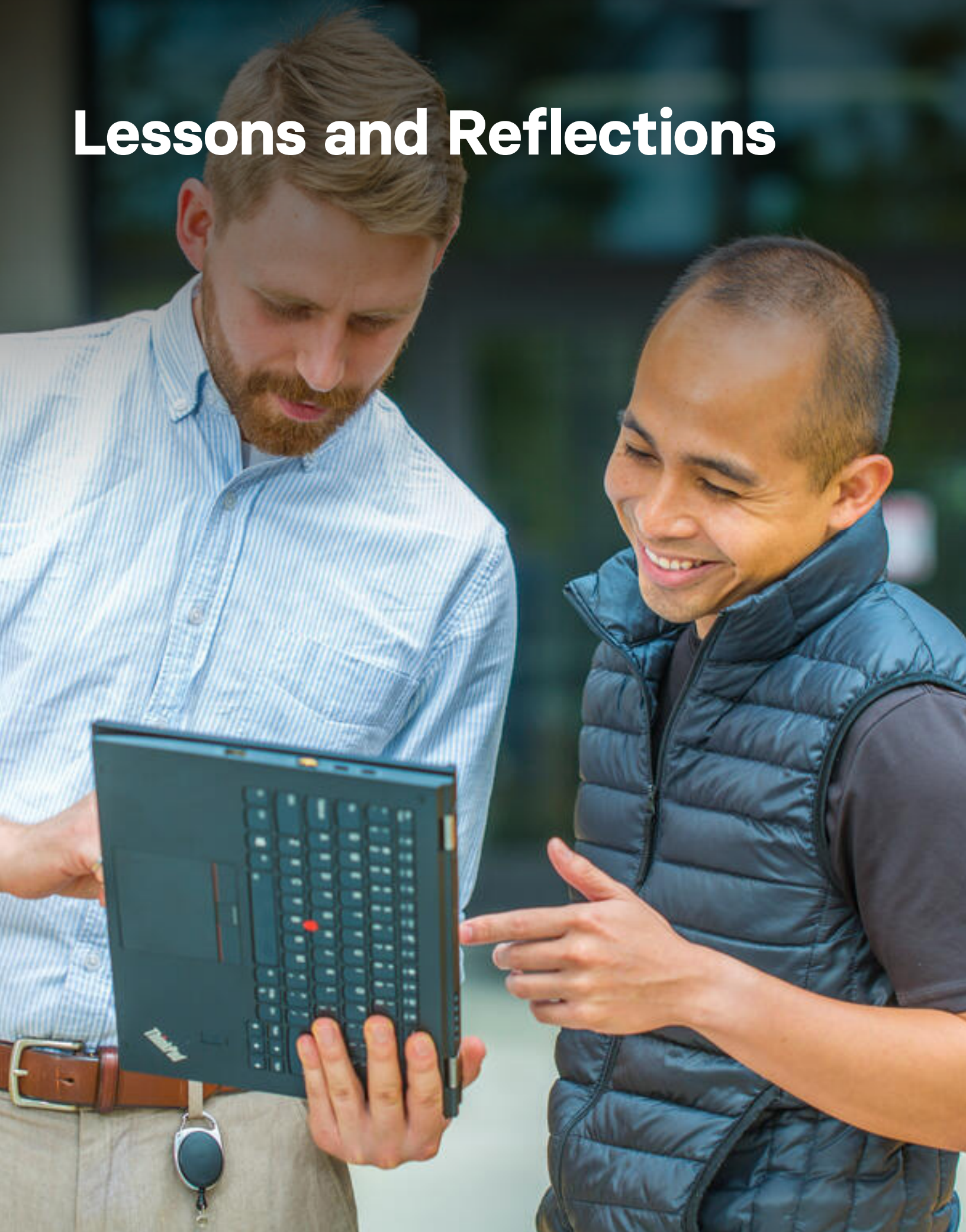
We aggregate and analyze data on the demographics of our applicants to understand the diversity of our applicant pools. EDF HR compares this data to the Bureau of Labor Statistics demographics for similar positions. For our roles posted in 2021, we found we had an overall comparable representation of non-majority candidates in our pool.

Tactic 4 - Team Workplans

All Climate Corps staff have DEIJ related goals or projects in their work plans and have the support needed to continue to implement DEIJ efforts that are currently in practice.

There are several ways that the Climate Corps team works to achieve our DEIJ goals. First, all staff on the team have at least one DEIJ related goal or project as a part of their workplan. This ensures that the work is distributed amongst the team and that everyone is accountable for achieving the goals. Second, we have established a DEIJ Working Group that meets bi-weekly as another mechanism for ensuring that we meet our DEIJ goals and that related projects benefit from feedback from multiple team members.

Lessons and Reflections



Lessons and Reflections

In 2021, we learned the importance of taking time - time to devote energy and effort into completing DEIJ projects. We've found these projects can often take longer than expected, especially when accounting for the time needed to collect and incorporate the necessary feedback.

We learned the importance of involving stakeholders early and often - it is crucial to involve our alumni, current fellows, host partners and EDF staff in decisions and strategies related to DEIJ. Plus, they often have the best ideas! For example, we would not have piloted the alumni application coaches without the recommendation of two of our alumni.

Finally, we learned the importance of keeping up the momentum of this work - we must be unrelenting in our efforts to continue improving and to actively seek out opportunities to do better. We'll continue to lean into our DEIJ Working Group as a place to regularly connect on DEIJ projects and develop new approaches.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about our efforts in 2021. We welcome [feedback](#) while we continue to strive for improvement on DEIJ and work to make this program the best it can be.
