



LOCAL CHANGE. A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE.

Our Commitment to Equity

Adopted July 27, 2021

The Environmental Center's mission is to embed sustainability into daily life in Central Oregon. We define Central Oregon as Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson counties.

Sustainability is supported by three interdependent pillars that influence one another (for better or for worse): a healthy environment, social equity, and economic vitality. We see sustainability as both an active process and an outcome we strive for. It is what we want to achieve; and it is also how we get there. Our work helps to shape sustainable communities that meet human needs equitably, live within our planet's ecological limits, and build a prosperous economy for all — without compromising the ability for future generations to do the same.

(Learn more about the definition of sustainability [here](#) via Institute for Sustainable Communities.)



Here in Central Oregon, The Environmental Center has historically paid close attention to nurturing the healthy environment pillar by improving environmental literacy and access to outdoor education, and helping our community to conserve water and energy, to reduce waste, and to transition away from fossil fuels. More recently, we have bolstered the economic pillar by advocating for policies and infrastructure that support smart

growth, safe walking, biking and transit, and by partnering with environmentally responsible businesses.

We recognize now that we have often neglected the equity pillar of sustainability. We have not paid enough attention to meeting the needs and including the voices of individuals who are most often impacted by environmental degradation and climate change — including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), people who are LGBTQ+, people with diverse abilities, and people and families with low incomes. In addition, our predominantly white staff and board collectively do not represent the full spectrum of people who make Central Oregon their home.

This is not an acceptable path forward. Prioritizing and investing in social equity is imperative to achieving our sustainability mission. We must work on all three pillars.

We commit to prioritizing equity and accessibility in the decisions we make, partnerships we build, programs we deliver, and outcomes we seek to achieve.

We will work to ensure that our whole community is included in shaping and benefiting from a sustainable future for Central Oregon – especially our neighbors who are most impacted by systems of oppression. This requires us to recognize, understand, and dismantle white supremacy in our organization and local communities.

Looking inward, we commit to being a more welcoming organization.

Working toward sustainability is difficult and complex, and requires organizational strength and resiliency to play the long game. Research shows that organizations who build diverse, inclusive teams and programs are more effective because they are better equipped to develop relevant and effective solutions for today's challenges.



The Environmental Center's work in Central Oregon is one piece of a much larger movement to reduce and adapt to the impacts of human-caused climate change. We help to develop local, regional solutions through education and policy discussions. We also look to environmental justice organizations, communities of color, and Indigenous communities for leadership and guidance on just solutions to the climate crisis. Collaboration is key; and so is uplifting and supporting other individuals and organizations doing the work when we're not the right people for the task at hand.

Our commitment to equity is strengthening as we grow, and our team is actively integrating what we learn into our work. We invite feedback around this statement, and more importantly, we invite you to join us and engage in these important conversations together.

About the terms we use

We know there's vocabulary in this statement that may be new, unfamiliar or challenging. We have provided a few definitions below to describe what we mean when we use these terms.

We want to be intentional with our language; and in equity and inclusion work, terminology is complex and frequently evolves. We realize that these terms and definitions may not resonate the same way with everyone.

White supremacy

TEC defines this as systems and institutions that support one another to position whiteness as ideal. We are not using this term to describe individual people associated with extreme hate groups or world views. We are referring to a set of deeply embedded ideas and norms that work to the advantage of all white people, regardless of intentions or awareness.

In the nonprofit world, white supremacy shows up in both subtle and explicit ways. (And the first step is naming it!) The majority of directors on our board are white individuals; we don't always vet our partners, funders, and vendors for a commitment to equity and inclusion; and many of the solutions we propose do not reflect the needs and input of our neighbors of color. These are just three ways that white supremacy shows up in organizations

like ours, and examples of what we are working to identify and disrupt.

*We recommend the following resource to learn more about why we choose to use these words: [White Supremacy Culture – Still Here](#) by Tema Okun

Systems of oppression

Many structures, systems, and policies designed by white leaders (throughout history and today) prevent our neighbors who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx/o/a, Asian, people of color, people who are LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities from gaining power and access to resources and opportunities.

Racism is one example that occurs when multiple institutions, policies, and ideas overlap and reinforce the inequities BIPOC experience compared to white people. In the environmental sector, racism has resulted in white leaders locating hazardous, polluting facilities in close proximity to communities of color rather than white communities, leading to higher rates of significant health problems.

Climate change

We are referring to the current, rapid rate of climate change due to human activity, largely burning fossil fuels such as natural gas, oil and coal. Here in Central Oregon, we feel the impact of climate change every time there's a severe wildfire, weather event or drought, and when decreasing snowpack leads to water shortages that impact fish and wildlife, recreation and agriculture.

Diversity

Our definition of diversity seeks to recognize, include and celebrate all human identities, expressions and unique differences. Diversity makes our board, staff, and community stronger. We strive to build authentic relationships with people and communities across Central Oregon so that individuals of any race, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, geography, political affiliation, religious belief, or age can participate in our mission. We also strive to have a staff and board of directors who are representative of the communities we reach. We understand that diversity alone, without inclusion and equity, doesn't lead to meaningful change.

Equity

Equity is a core pillar of our mission, both in how we approach solutions and in the results we seek to achieve. We work to create access and opportunity so that everyone can engage with The Environmental Center and benefit from local sustainability initiatives. This means identifying, understanding, and removing a variety of different barriers that people experience. It means listening to the needs of community members who we've excluded; and then reallocating our time and resources to ensure equitable outcomes.

Inclusion

Our definition means to thoughtfully welcome, listen to and value every member of the community and every person on our team. To us, inclusion in practice means that we support and celebrate everyone's efforts toward a healthier future. And if we hope to include more people in our mission, we need a team (both staff and board) that represents a diversity of identities and experiences.

We prioritize authentic collaboration and partnerships as we develop and deliver programs, advocate for change, and make decisions that impact all corners of the Central Oregon community we call home.



Thank you for reading! We invite you to join us in our commitment to equity.