

High Quality Jobs and Livable Wages in Environmental Education

In environmental education, pay equity remains a pressing and multifaceted challenge. Over the past two years, ChangeScale held convenings with professionals across the sector to discuss the issues of financial security, professional fulfillment, and overall well-being in environmental education. These topics include: high cost of living, sustainable career paths and burnout, staff attrition, proliferation of temporary positions, and funding constraints. We conclude that **these issues stem from a focus on programming over people**. Funders and executive leadership alike are motivated to fund more environmental education programming, but neglect to support the quality of work and life for the same staff that conduct the programming. To enable sustained impacts in environmental education requires that staff be well-supported in work and life.

The future of environmental education must focus on **People > Programming**. This requires funders, executive leadership, environmental educators, and the public to acknowledge that successful environmental education requires us – individually, institutionally, and structurally – to *Create Sustainable Jobs and Increase Communication & Transparency*. **People > Programming** also requires institutions and individuals to proactively address the systemic injustices and unequal burden that affect environmental educators with marginalized, intersectional identities.



March 2024 convening on Championing Fair and Equitable Compensation, where leaders in environmental education had a conversation with representatives of EEFC at Curiodyssey

People > Programming

To improve pay equity in environmental education and move towards a **People > Programming** paradigm, stakeholders across the field must Create Sustainable Jobs and Increase Communication & Transparency:

Hollis Pierce-Jenkins *“This convening is critical to moving forward and championing environmental work in communities of color. Equal access is key to survival. Mentoring is crucial. Institutional knowledge is key and passing the torch to a new generation of leaders is time sensitive.”*

Executive Director, Literacy for Environmental Justice

Create Sustainable Jobs

- **High Cost of Living** exacerbates the financial strain on environmental educators, rendering it difficult to remain in a career on stagnant or inadequate wages. People > Programming requires environmental educators to be paid a livable wage commensurate with the cost of living in their location of work.
- **Staff Attrition** and high turnover rates diminish organizational capacity and erode the quality of environmental education delivery, perpetuating a cycle of instability and inefficiency within the field. People > Programming requires us to create jobs that address environmental educators' needs as workers, including benefits and non-monetary job satisfaction.
- **Sustainable career paths** are needed to address the pervasive culture of overextension in job expectations. Insufficient management support and lack of opportunities for long-term career advancement leads to burnout among environmental educators. People > Programming requires us to create structures and institutional norms for professional development for environmental educators.
- **Insufficient Mentorship** compounds challenges related to professional development, advocacy for fair wages, and navigating complex discussions surrounding pay equity, leaving environmental educators ill-equipped to address systemic disparities. People > Programming

requires us to invest in professional development and networking for environmental educators across the field.

Increase Communication / Transparency

- **Lack of transparency** surrounding organizational pay scales and local thriving wages is a disservice to frontline environmental educators and fail to accurately represent the cost of supporting the people that carry out programming to funders.
- **Publishing salary structure and compensation policies** communicate budget allocation and resource prioritization to funders as well as peer organizations that lifts the boat for all environmental educators.



December 2023 convening on Centering People and Re-Envisioning Environmental Education Models at Berkeley

Ecosystem of action

Different organizations serve different communities and needs, thus the issues they face and the subsequent actions to be taken to provide high-quality jobs will look different and operate at various scales. The funders, executive leadership, and frontline educators have different capacities and power for change. We have synthesized some overarching ways forward, tied together by the shared recognition that the people providing environmental education are as important as the programming itself – funding a thriving staff enables quality environmental education programming.



Funding Organizations

- **Investing in people:**
 - Recognize that funding sustainable jobs for staff in organizations helps achieve programming outcomes
 - **Community-building:**
 - Need for funders to continue conversations with peer grant-makers on how to maintain pay equity for grantees
 - Facilitate networks between grantees to exchange organizational structures and positive solutions
 - **Diversified grant-making structures:**
 - Respond to organizations calling for large, multi-year grants to be able to build teams and programs
 - Collaborate with peer funders to strategize support (e.g., one to fund general operations, one to fund program support)
 - **Continuing the conversation:**
 - Provide avenues for grantees to feedback to grant-makers on fiscal mapping
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- **Sustaining funding:**
 - Prioritize a thriving wage for staff with grant-funders and budget appropriately for local cost-of-living adjustments
 - Eg. hiring third-party auditors to review for pay equity every 3-5 years, have facilitated conversations between executives and staff on job satisfaction and staff well-being every year
- **Structures can be liberating:**
 - Build structured career advancement stages that is supported by investments in people through professional development
 - Have transparent salary scales with an explicitly stated philosophy
 - Eg. benchmarking old employees to new employee salaries, no-negotiation hiring models
- **What makes a good job:**
 - Recognize that the needs of employees of different lived experiences, career stages, and life stages differ
 - Non-monetary elements of a work environment can be equally important in retaining employees that can further the mission of the organization (see above sections)
- **Collective communities:**
 - Collaborate with peer organizations to continue keep conversation on pay equity as a priority with funders
 - Exchange organizational structures and work models for staff welfare and advancement



Executive Leadership



Frontline Staff

Environmental education can only exist because of the work of people on the ground interacting with communities in need. We recognize that many of these staff are entry-level and often pursue this line of work out of passion and altruistic desire. We see you as more than just labor, but pivotal change agents in shaping the state of environmental education to a more equitable future that benefits yourself and future generations.

- **Collective advocacy:**
 - Unionize to negotiate and advocate for member needs
 - Build affinity space that can allow you to thrive in the identities you hold and areas of professional development
 - **See your whole self:**
 - Environmental education may be a calling but jobs do not require the staff the sacrifice personal well-being, reject the urgency of prioritizing work over life
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Looking Ahead

We recognize that radical change in how environmental education is structured requires time to fruition, but collective and concerted action can change the tide of the current status quo. This is not easy work, but it is needed for an equitable future. The challenges we face are not insurmountable but rather opportunities for collective action and positive change. By committing ourselves to transparency, communication, and sustainability within the field, we can create a more inclusive and equitable professional landscape for all.



Resources

- eeGuidance for Equitable Pay and Hiring in EE:
<http://www.southeastee.com/eeGuidance.html>
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