



## 2024-2026 SUMMARY DEIJ PLAN

### **Riverkeeper's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice (DEIJ)**

Riverkeeper strives to support our partners to increase their power and effectiveness regarding decisions affecting their environment and health. Historically, the better resourced and predominantly white environmental movement, including Riverkeeper, has done this kind of work through its own lens and motivation as opposed to based on what Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities and organizations have articulated as their own needs. We are working to change this dynamic and have committed ourselves to the ongoing path of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice work.

We began this journey in 2018 and our DEIJ Committee of staff and Board members produced Riverkeeper's first three-year DEIJ Plan in 2021. Since the creation of the plan, Riverkeeper has grown and learned much through trial-and-error as we embarked on this critically important yet challenging work. In 2023, the DEIJ Committee reviewed the goals and our progress through the Plan, and updated the Plan for the next three years. The 2024-2026 Plan articulates overarching Internal and External Goals, followed by sub-goals, objectives and specific actions that we hope to achieve over the next three years.

The Summary DEIJ Plan below is a condensed version of this longer plan. Please note that some of the goals and objectives listed are already well underway, or refer to work we've been engaged in for years, while some represent new or emerging priorities. Riverkeeper will continue to update the DEIJ Plan on a three-year basis going forward.

## INTERNAL

*Riverkeeper will promote a 'just workplace' internally. We understand a 'just workplace' to be a place that is inclusive and welcoming, where differences are valued, where professional development and job growth is encouraged, and everyone—with prioritization of staff members from historically marginalized groups—is inspired, energized, empowered and part of a mutually supported collective that takes care of the water and each other. This is an initial blueprint for a 'just workplace' that Riverkeeper will refer to and reassess over time as an organization. Over the next three years, Riverkeeper will work towards this vision of a 'just workplace' by improving our internal organizational culture, developing transparent and inclusive structures and systems, and ensuring equitable internal policies. The organization commits to allocating existing funding and finding new funding to support this plan.*

### Culture Goal

Riverkeeper will have an inclusive, welcoming and empowering workplace.

#### Objectives + Actions

- Ensure there are established practices to work through interpersonal conflict, including acknowledging harm and doing repair work as needed.
- Support a collaborative process for ongoing development of a 'just workplace' blueprint.
- Hold regular and accessible meetings, retreats, trainings, and experiences (e.g., affinity groups as needed/requested) that build connections within and across teams.
- Support professional development for all staff (e.g. networking and convening, leadership development, professional training).
- Create and/or change physical spaces in order to prioritize accessibility and staff needs (e.g., American Disabilities Act accessibility, nursing room, private space).
- Acknowledge and celebrate culture and identity (e.g., holidays celebrated).
- Create voluntary opportunities for staff to learn more about DEIJ (e.g., book club with BIPOC writers, lunches at the office with outside guests, work time devoted to lectures or workshops organized by others).

### Structures + Systems Goal

Riverkeeper will have transparent and inclusive internal power structures and decision-making systems that are grounded in trust, mutual respect and collegiality.

#### Objectives + Actions

- Transparently assess and identify strategies to address historic and existing power structures -- internal and external -- that impact our decision-making systems. In particular, address how the legacy of systemic discrimination of various marginalized identities in the broader society and in the environmental movement (especially white supremacy and misogyny) shows up in our organization, and take steps to actively respond.

- Clarify Riverkeeper’s internal power structure and decision-making systems—for key decisions, determine who is making the decision, how it is being made, what kind of input is being solicited and when, and where decision-making should be made more inclusive.
- Bring forward opportunities for staff and Executive Team to be further trained in DEIJ best practices, such as inclusive decision-making, systemic power inequities, skill building and education, communications/language, and conflict mediation.

### Policies Goal

Riverkeeper will have equitable policies for all staff and board regardless of their identities and roles within the organization.

#### Objectives + Actions

- Ensure that compensation, promotion, benefits, and recruitment policies are equitable by continuing to:
  - Reassess equity bands and benefit offerings on a regular basis.
  - Expand clear promotion pathways across the organization.
  - Reevaluate and develop robust two-way feedback systems between management and staff that involve accountability, clarity and transparency; including performance reviews and employee engagement surveys
  - Evaluate and update the Riverkeeper Employee Handbook
  - Evaluate the existing anti-retaliation policy
  - Reassess allocation of healthcare costs on an annual basis
  - Evaluate job descriptions for exclusive language and criteria
  - Evaluate job posting procedures and channels for recruitment advertising, and develop recruitment guidelines
- Ensure equitable staff workload policies and practices (i.e. implement a new project management tool across the organization).
- Establish equitable purchasing, contracting, and gift acceptance policies.
- Ensure that there is an inclusive structure on the Riverkeeper Board to implement DEIJ Goals as they pertain to the Board.

## **EXTERNAL**

*Riverkeeper will promote lasting justice in the Hudson River watershed. As an environmental organization following the lead of our environmental justice partners, we understand 'justice' to mean: prioritizing historically marginalized groups most impacted by environmental issues, reducing historic environmental harms, fairly reallocating environmental benefits and supporting community ownership. Riverkeeper will refer to and reassess these guiding principles of justice over time internally and with our external partners. Over the next three years, Riverkeeper will work toward this vision of justice by elevating and empowering historically marginalized groups and developing equitable and inclusive decision-making processes. The organization commits to allocating existing funding and finding new funding to support this plan.*

### **Community Building Goal**

Riverkeeper will develop intentional processes for community and partner relationship building that elevate and empower historically marginalized groups, while still being inclusive of all the communities we serve.

#### **Best Practices**

- Riverkeeper should center and respond to the core water issues and concerns identified by the watershed communities we serve, and ensure that resources—including time, money, media attention and expertise—are allocated with partners equitably, all with the prioritization of historically marginalized groups.
- Project teams should identify and incorporate 'historically marginalized group' indicators into planning for programmatic initiatives.
- New project teams whose work will involve or impact watershed communities should engage in a 'community listening' process. This will allow communities to identify key needs and/or provide feedback that will inform project planning and relationship-building.
- Teams working directly with Native partners should ensure that Riverkeeper's relationships and projects with Native communities are authentic, benefit Native communities and align with Native goals. The DEIJ Committee will support teams in implementing identified Native-priority projects and best practices, including best practices for acknowledging Native land.

#### **Objectives + Actions**

- Prioritize from among the following discrete objectives in support of this goal on a year-by-year basis, focusing on no more than 1-2 at a time:
  - Use the redesign of our water quality monitoring program, and potentially other projects (e.g. Quassaick Creek dam removals) as test cases to inform the development of 'community listening' processes and 'historically marginalized group' indicators for projects – and potentially for Riverkeeper as a whole, looking several years ahead.
  - Explore funding opportunities to support 'community listening' work.

- o Building on our collaboration with the Water Justice Lab, expand our work with youth in Environmental Justice communities on water quality monitoring in response to community-identified needs.
- o Create protocols for how to refer watchdog reports or inquiries for concerns Riverkeeper won't address directly (e.g., air quality, waterfront development, etc.).
- o Develop an equity best-practices document(s) for use in partner selection and interaction, grant budgeting for joint projects, environmental benefit fund distribution, and fiscal sponsorship selection.
- o Establish an annual partner fund to support partner/community groups.
- o Ensure that the Riverkeeper.org website redesign incorporates best practices for inclusive communications.
- o Examine and, where necessary, revise current communications and member outreach processes/language to ensure inclusivity; provide staff support in inclusive outreach and communications strategies.

### Community Decision-Making Goal

Riverkeeper will identify and correct power imbalances in decision-making processes among stakeholders, communities, partners, and agencies. This includes relationships where Riverkeeper is the more powerful stakeholder, and situations where not all stakeholders start at the table.

#### Best Practices

- In our external work, Riverkeeper should ensure that historically excluded groups are at any decision-making tables that the organization is a participant in, and that these groups are deeply integrated into the decision-making and strategy-building process on projects that Riverkeeper organizes.
- Project teams should raise any concerns emerging from a 'community listening' process that pertain to decision-making, power imbalances, and inclusive participation.
- As part of the intake process for new projects, Riverkeeper should consider the involvement of marginalized groups, particularly around decision-making.
- Project teams should identify – on an ongoing basis – opportunities to push for more inclusivity in government agency decision-making processes, and in “created spaces” (e.g., coalitions, working groups) that influence agency decision-making.
  - o Once identified, and where in alignment with programmatic priorities, Riverkeeper will provide external support to communities around participation in these processes. This may consist of hosting webinars, sharing toolkits, and playing an initial advisory role on coalitions and community boards in order to give most-impacted groups the opportunity to be in the lead.
- Project teams should identify – on an ongoing basis – other key decision points that will affect marginalized communities.
  - o Once identified, and where in alignment with programmatic priorities, Riverkeeper will communicate about these decision points, collaborate with affected communities to understand their key concerns and goals, and identify opportunities for public engagement/intervention.

#### Objectives + Actions

- Prioritize from among the following discrete objectives in support of this goal on a year-by-year basis, focusing on no more than 1-2 at a time:
  - Survey existing partners and members to identify demographics, identity, interests, and barriers to participation in Riverkeeper's programmatic work.
  - Conduct an inventory of government agency decision-making forums that Riverkeeper staff currently have access to, identify ways to improve their inclusivity (and where this work is already being done), and benchmark and track progress.
  - Use 1-2 key projects as case studies to identify Riverkeeper's power dynamics relative to stakeholders in order to inform future project development.
  - Research and identify power mapping tools that can be used to highlight potential power imbalances between Riverkeeper, partners and project beneficiaries.
  - Create DEIJ guidelines for project development and implementation. The guidelines would focus on decision-making that involves external voices, and include process recommendations to shift power imbalances.