

# On the Path to Equity



Resource Media staff photo

Though an equity journey never ends, Resource Media is at a point where we can now see how far we've come. We are proud of the organization we are becoming, but even as we acknowledge progress, we do so with deep humility for the work ahead. We know we operate amidst deeply-rooted racist structures and systems. Read below to learn more about our ongoing transformation and the work ahead of us.

## Getting Started

Challenging institutionalized racism is a daunting task, and white people inculcated in the dominant culture are ill-equipped to lead the way. When Resource Media started this work in 2013, our staff was 90 percent white and our work was largely focused on environmental and conservation issues, with relatively little focus on environmental justice and other social justice challenges. At the time, our staff lacked the relationships and expertise to support that kind of work. To start our journey, we needed a guide, and we found one in Natasha Aruliah, a British Columbia-based equity consultant.

## Transforming Culture

Early work focused on addressing aspects of white dominant culture that made Resource Media unwelcome to people with marginalized identities. Our equity consultant spoke with past employees who identify as people of color about their reasons for leaving the organization and shared the feedback. This was an exercise in vulnerability for the organization and a way to get staff more comfortable with discomfort. We then focused on the individual work required to build a personal understanding of race and oppression. Empathy, listening and vulnerability are critical to building the

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trust and stronger relationships needed to deepen understanding across cultures and differences. Through readings, discussions and trainings, we have explored white fragility, power and privilege, understanding and managing triggers and bias, the history of racism and other forms of oppression and the many ways white dominant culture impacts people of color.

## Leadership from Within

Early in our journey, a staff equity committee formed to provide internal leadership and strive for continuous progress. The committee has created new hiring and onboarding guidelines, our [Equity Impact Program](#), an equity statement, community agreements, policies around hiring outside vendors and consultants, and more. Through the committee, we built muscle around distributed decision-making, leading to creation of additional committees in early 2019 responsible for decisions related to marketing and development, policy and governance, operations and internal communication and relationship-building—all with equity baked into their approach and rotating membership to ensure all staff are called upon to lead.

## Infrastructure to address Racism and Oppression

POC, white and LGBTQ caucuses provide critical internal infrastructure for difficult conversations and the hard work of addressing institutionalized racism and oppression. Annual, anonymous 360 manager reviews



Resource Media's POC caucus

are one of many mechanisms for feedback given power dynamics. A bi-annual staff survey is an additional mechanism to gather input and track progress.

## Diversifying the Team

Over the last six years, Resource Media staff has gone from 90 percent white to just over half people of color, and our board has gone from 10 percent POC to 30 percent POC. We have diversified the make-up of our senior management, going from all white managers to a management cohort of three POC and five white staff. And, we're in the process of hiring a new Executive Director. Our most recent internal staff survey showed 94 percent of staff feel welcome given their identities, and 88 percent feel comfortable expressing their identity with colleagues and clients. The survey also showed many staff are unclear about promotion paths, and clarifying this as a focus for future work.

## Bringing Equity into the Work

Along with focusing on transforming internal culture and practices, Resource Media is pushing to bring equity into our work in the field. Highlights include:

- Through our staff-led and managed [Equity Impact Program](#), we use 2 percent of revenue to support organizations representing marginalized communities.
- To build communications capacity in frontline groups, we have piloted several fellowship models and are eager to learn more. We are currently part of the inaugural class of organizations participating in the Rainier Valley Corps Green Pathway program.
- Through [Outside Voices](#), a new Resource Media podcast, we are passing the mic and creating a platform to elevate the stories of marginalized communities to redefine the outdoors and who belongs in it.
- We are building multicultural communications into more of our work, implementing campaigns that have reached and amplified the voices of millennial Latinx communities in the Bay Area, Nepali refugees in Seattle's south King County, African American rural communities in North Carolina and

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elder Asian American communities in Seattle's Chinatown. These are just some of the communities whose specific needs are centered through our growing multicultural communications practice.

- Follow along in the [Equity section](#) of our blog.

## What's Next

We understand our work is far from complete. Resource Media is currently focused on:

- Changing internal systems and structures to better support our equity commitment and the health, well-being and advancement of staff.
- Using relationships with funders, nonprofits and public sector partners to ask, who's not at the table? Who has access to power and funding? Which organizations and individuals are most impacted, and how can we ensure they are part of decision-making?
- Creating more sophisticated ways to measure our equity progress and exploring better ways to fund this invaluable work.
- Amplifying voices of staff leaders so they can be recognized for their thought leadership outside the organization.



Resource Media's [Outside Voices](#) podcast, hosted by Sarah Shimazaki (pictured 2nd from right) aims to redefine what it means to be outdoorsy through storytelling.

Photo courtesy of the Outdoor Industry Association. From left to right: Brittany Leavitt (Outdoor Afro), Kate VanWaes (American Hiking), Amanda Jameson (Big City Mountaineers), Bam Mendiola (Bamorg.com), Sarah Shimazaki (Resource Media) and Monserrat Matehuala (Brown Girls Climb).

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## EQUITY IMPACT PROGRAM IN ACTION

Over the last two years, Resource Media has used Equity Impact Program funds to support a dozen small projects. As an example, after 200 US asylum seekers were transferred to a federal prison from SeaTac International Airport in summer 2018, our staff sprang into action, securing approval for a small project to support the Northwest Immigration Rights Program (NWIRP) in its quest to build a bail fund. Leveraging a generous \$300,000 seed fund from Together Rising and NWIRP's robust network of supporters and name recognition, Resource Media created a multi-stage social media campaign to drive awareness and fund donations. After four-and-a-half weeks of intense activity, together we raised \$516,000 in bond funding, which was used to immediately to free 56 people from the federal prison in Tacoma.