

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion in British Columbia's Environmental Movement



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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
About this Report	2
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Hacking the Non-Profit Industrial Complex: Structural Limitations of JEDI & Solidarity Work	5
Political & Legal Constraints	6
Funding Constraints	7
Hacking the NPIC	10
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion: Pitfalls & Best Practices	13
White Supremacy Culture in ENGO Spaces	15
Tokenization in the ENGO Sphere	16
Civic Participation	20
Issue Framing	22
The Politics of Relationship-Building	25
Solidarity Work: Pitfalls & Best Practices	26
Pitfalls of Solidarity Work	27
Best Practices for Solidarity Work	30
Conclusion	34
Addendum	35
Terminology	37



Acknowledgements

The authors and supervisors are grateful to the interviewees who generously gave their time, experience and energy. Funding for this report came from the Faculty of Arts at the University of British Columbia.

About this Report

This report was co-authored by Rajdeep Kaur Dhaliwal and Kate Hodgson, undergraduate research assistants working on behalf of Dogwood under the supervision of Jessica Dempsey and Laura Benson. Dempsey, then Vice Chair of Dogwood's board and a professor at the University of British Columbia's Department of Geography, and Benson, Director of Administration & HR on Dogwood's Executive Team, conceived of the project to be in service of the organization's strategic planning process.

Dogwood has identified Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI) and decolonization as key priorities. To that end, this report aims to identify some of the best practices and potential pitfalls for non-profit organizations who seek to incorporate JEDI into their organizational DNA. Because Dogwood's Theory of Change involves partnering with Indigenous communities on issues of common concern, we also undertake an analysis of best practices and potential pitfalls for solidarity-building across lines of class and racial difference. This report should not be read as an instruction manual for JEDI or solidarity-building, because these processes are neither formulaic nor transferable from one context to another. Instead, this document aims to introduce Dogwood to some of the contradictions inherent within EDI work; to situate the questions with which Dogwood is grappling within the history of environmental organizing in British Columbia; and to provide Dogwood with resources as they deepen their commitment to JEDI in their internal and external relationships. We also hope that this report will prove useful to other ENGOs who are seeking out best practices for JEDI and solidarity-building in their own organizing.

In overseeing this project, the supervisory team reproduced several pitfalls and harms that the authors and interviewees identify in the report. Dempsey and Benson



have included a brief Addendum to reflect on these mistakes and set a few commitments for future work.



Introduction

It is widely known that the environmental movement in Canada and British Columbia has enabled, and been enabled by, the settler colonial project. Mainstream environmentalism was founded by conservationists who sought to protect “wilderness” for recreational purposes, often at the cost (or even with the overt intention) of dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their own lands. Because of this conservationist bent, the traditional environmental movement found its initial base of support in largely white and affluent communities. This base remains largely unchanged in the present day.¹ While a systematic mapping of the demographics of the sector has not been conducted, one 2017 study on the Canadian environmental movement found that only 5.1% identified as Asian or Middle Eastern, 5.7% as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis, and 3.9% as belonging to other ethnicities or nationalities.² In recent years, the Canadian and British Columbian environmental movements have entered a period of reckoning with their past and present: forced on the one hand to interrogate their complicity in the settler-colonial project and eager on the other to grow their power and relevancy in racialized communities, many ENGOs have begun to fold the principles of decolonization, anti-oppression, and solidarity into their work. Environmental groups like Sierra Club and Dogwood, for instance, have struck “Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” working groups in an effort to challenge the racism that remains prevalent in many environmental spaces. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Indigenous organizers, ENGOs are also beginning to recognize their moral and strategic mandate to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities resisting extractivism in their territories.³ Initiatives like Protect the Inlet, a coalition between First Nations communities and ENGOs formed in opposition to the TMX Pipeline, are emblematic of this shift. While these commitments to JEDI and solidarity-building are significant improvements over ENGOs’ overtly racist and often classist beginnings, there remains a large gap between ENGOs’ rhetorical embrace of JEDI and solidarity-building and the integration of these concepts into the DNA of the ENGO

¹ Vasey, D. 2014. “The Environmental NGO Industry and Frontline Communities”. In *A Line in the Tar Sands: Struggles for Environmental Justice*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

² Williams, E.A. 2017. “Content and Prevalence of Environmentalist Stereotypes in Canada: A Psychological Perspective.” Open Collections. Available at <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0354453>

³ Vernon, C. 2014. “Gitga’at People Singing for Their Lives in Face of Enbridge Pipeline Threat.” *The Georgia Straight*. April 03. Available at <https://www.straight.com/news/caitlyn-vernon-gitgaat-people-singing-their-lives-face-enbridge-pipeline-threat>



sector. This document aims to lay out some of the common problems that predominantly-white ENGOs like Dogwood encounter when committing to JEDI and solidarity, and to equip Dogwood with some tools to begin muddling through the contradictions and messiness so inherent to this work.

Methodology

Over the course of this research project, we reviewed over 50 primary and secondary sources on the pitfalls and best practices of JEDI and solidarity work in the environmental movement, with a non-exclusive focus on environmental organizing in Canada and British Columbia. We conducted two interviews with members of the Dogwood Executive team, and seven with experts that have professional and lived experiences with environmental organizing, Indigenous solidarity work, JEDI, and the nonprofit sector. We recorded all interviews via note-taking, and filmed eight interviews with consent. In order to maintain social distancing during COVID-19, all interviews were hosted via Zoom. This report includes key learnings from our literature review alongside insights gathered from our interviews.

Hacking the Non-Profit Industrial Complex: Structural Limitations of JEDI & Solidarity Work

Before we can address best practices for JEDI and solidarity-building in the environmental movement, we first have to unpack the structural bounds within which Dogwood operates. Dogwood is a nonprofit society, which means that it is regulated by the B.C. Societies Act and the fiscal constraints of foundation and donor funding.⁴ Dogwood is inadvertently entangled in what scholar-activists like Ruth Wilson Gilmore have coined the “Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC), “a system of relationships between the State (or local and federal governments) the owning classes, foundations, and non-profit/NGO social service & social justice organizations that results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements.”⁵ In short, Dogwood’s

⁴ For more information on the legalities governing non-profits in BC see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/business/not-for-profit-organizations/societies>.

⁵ Gilmore, R.W. 2017. “In the Shadow of the Shadow State.” In *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, edited by INCITE! Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373001-003>.



political efforts are circumscribed—at least to a degree—by the interests of the Canadian & BC governments and the wealthy elite. Dogwood has taken significant steps to lessen government and foundation influence over their work through their decisions to remain a nonprofit society, to prioritize funding from individual donors instead of foundations, and to ground their work in a theory of change that prioritizes people-powered organizing over top-down lobbying efforts. Without detracting from these critical efforts, this section will situate Dogwood’s work within the larger ecosystem of nonprofit organizing in Canada, and highlight areas where Dogwood may still be limited by the constraints of the NPIC.

Political & Legal Constraints

The nonprofit sector has historically been groomed to fight for instrumental changes within the political system, and—according to Gilmore—these limitations are very much by design:

The shadow state...is real but without significant political clout, forbidden by law to advocate for systemic change, and bound by public rules and non-profit charters to stick to its mission or get out of business and suffer legal consequences if it strays along the way.⁶

Gilmore writes from an American context, and her critique of the NPIC (signified here by the “shadow state”) concerns the role that nonprofits have played in providing education, health care, and other essential services to communities in the wake of market failure and government austerity, while simultaneously being barred from challenging injustice at its roots—namely, capitalism, colonization, and white supremacy.⁷ Canadian ENGOS have their roots in political advocacy, rather than direct service provision, and so Gilmore’s analysis doesn’t map perfectly onto their particular circumstances. Despite contextual differences, however, Gilmore’s findings still ring true for Nadine Nakagawa, a community organizer, activist, and city councillor for the City of New Westminster. According to Nakagawa, “nonprofits and charities are kept from doing political advocacy work, and...that’s actually choices from the government to keep organizations that are

⁶ Gilmore, p. 46, see note 5.

⁷ Gilmore, p.45, see note 5.



hyper aware of the problems in their policies from actually speaking publicly.” In Nakagawa’s experience, the Federal government has corralled nonprofits and charities

“we all must recognize the dangers of having an archway approach to movement building. It is the danger of relying on political power-holders, cutting too narrow campaigns, excluding a systemic analysis of root causes, and, ultimately, failing to create a broad-based movement.”

into dealing with the downstream effects of social crises, and succeeded in eroding the political clout of the nonprofit sector. As Lisa Young cautions, “we all must recognize the dangers of having an archway approach to movement building. It is the danger of relying on political power-holders, cutting too narrow campaigns, excluding a systemic analysis of root causes, and, ultimately, failing to create a broad-based movement.”⁸ Dogwood is a nonprofit society, which means that unlike charities there are few technical limits on its political activities (defined under Canadian

law as any activity that seeks to change, oppose or retain laws or policies). While Dogwood has gone to great effort to bypass many of the political constraints imposed on the nonprofit sector, it should be wary—as Nakagawa suggests—of containing its political advocacy exclusively to government-mandated channels and tiptoeing around the root causes of social inequality. Instead, Dogwood should consider how it can use its role in the movement ecosystem to support the emergence of broad-based, people-powered movements working to address social crises at their roots.

Funding Constraints

According to Diana Kamau, an organizer with the UBC Africa Awareness Initiative and student working with UBC’s Equity and Inclusion office, “most of what nonprofits do comes down to funding.” Most nonprofits derive their budgets from some combination of foundation grants, state financing, and individual donations, and the strings attached to each funding source can have an enormous impact on the work that these organizations are able to do. On the topic of foundation funding, Nakagawa notes that

⁸ Young, L. 2015. “Building Solidarity and Growing a Movement : The Story behind the People’s Climate March,” January. Available at <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/99083>



“nonprofits, maybe more than anyone else, have been working in a scarcity mindset for a really long time, and that means that they will shape programming towards funding rather than saying “there’s this program that we know needs to be run.” The end result, Nakagawa argues, is that nonprofits “end up catering to extreme wealth.” Nicole Burrowes and co-authors echo Nakagawa in a biting critique of foundations, arguing that they are “endowed by the profits made from exploiting people of color through capitalism, and anything that threatens the interests of capitalism or the current social order is ultimately targeted by the foundation industry for obliteration.”⁹ The inherent irony of foundation funding is that foundations have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo because they themselves are products of capitalist wealth accumulation. While foundations can (and occasionally do) support radical work, many prefer to pour funding into de-politicized charity efforts (ie. food banks) over systemic solutions to inequality (ie. lobbying efforts for universal basic income).¹⁰

Caught within this contradiction—and constrained by their very real need to secure access to funding—many ENGOs have appealed to foundation funders by distancing themselves from more radical agendas and turning instead to bureaucratic and top-down modes of organizing.¹¹ In an industry characterized by fierce competition for limited funding, ENGOs’ willingness to model their campaign goals and organizing structures after the desires of funders enables them to pull in grants over local “non-professional” (read: grassroots, BIPOC and/or low-income) organizers—many of whom don’t have the luxury of running single-issue campaigns or pushing for change through “official” channels.¹² In his study of the campaign to stop Tar Sands expansion in the Canadian Boreal Forest, for example, Dave Vasey highlights how foundations poured millions of dollars into supporting ENGO efforts to negotiate with industry, while allocating almost nothing for Indigenous communities mounting frontline and legal battles in defense of their treaty rights. These funding inequities are deeply systemic and are traceable in both foundation and government financing. A report released in 2019 by

⁹ Burrowes, N., M. Cousins, P. X. Rojas, and I. Ude. 2017. “On Our Own Terms: Ten Years of Radical Community Building With Sista Il Sista” in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, edited by INCITE! Duke University Press.

¹⁰ Taylor, P. “The Right to Eat: Tackling Racism & Inequality in the Food System”. September 9 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E07C98BpQQY>

¹¹ Vasey, p.69, see note 1.

¹² Almeida, A.F.J. 2017. “Radical Social Change: Searching for a New Foundation.” In *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, edited by INCITE! Duke University Press.



the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, for example, found that ethno-specific community organizations applied for federal funding at significantly lower rates than white-led nonprofits because the application process consumed time and resources they didn't have, and because they assumed that their applications would be denied.¹³ In short, ENGOs' pursuit of foundation funding can feed into "safe" modes of organizing that undercut the ability of ethno-specific community organizations, frontline communities, and grassroots movements to fund their own work.

So what can nonprofits do to prevent funding from defining their goals? Reflecting on the constraints of foundation funding, Jess Housty, an elected Tribal Councillor for Heiltsuk Nation and Executive Director of Qqs Project Society, notes that "it comes down to being able to build trust-based relationships with funders that extend beyond the scope of one project, and where they trust you to deploy the money where it needs to go, and to develop evaluation measures that might be messy from their point of view, but actually capture where the real change is happening." Trust-based relationship-building with foundations, according to Housty, opens doors for organizations to push back against the narrow and outcome-driven evaluation measures that are so characteristic of foundation grants. Housty also offered a specific suggestion for Dogwood to consider joining the Indigenous Philanthropy Circle, an organization that works to decolonize funding requirements for Indigenous communities and the nonprofit sector.

Another route that ENGOs can take to reduce their dependence on foundation funding (and the route that Dogwood has ultimately taken) is to invest in building independent donor bases. In 2018-2019, 50% of Dogwood's funding has come from individual donors who contributed monthly amounts or one-time gifts. While this reliance on individual donors has allowed Dogwood to maintain their focus on people-powered political organizing, the overwhelming whiteness of that base comes with its own pitfalls. Reflecting on the xenophobic undertones that she registered in Dogwood's 'Stand Up To China' campaign, Kimberley Wong, a queer Cantonese diasporic woman who

"The process of developing a campaign...is essentially testing racism....what white middle class or upper middle class people think, and what they like."

¹³ Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector. (2019). "Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector". https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/CSSB/Reports/CSSB_Report_Final_e.pdf



supports programming for Hua Foundation, suggests that the “process of developing a campaign...is essentially testing racism....what white middle class or upper middle class people think, and what they like.” Wong’s concerns were reiterated in our conversation with the Dogwood Executive team, when it was noted that Dogwood’s JEDI work is taking place *in spite* of their donors, and not necessarily because of them. Surveys conducted by Dogwood show that the majority of their base is extremely concerned about the impacts of climate change (87%), and significantly less concerned with the cost of housing (61%), justice for Indigenous communities (60%), and the opioid crisis (42%)—all issues that are highly relevant to lower-income and racialized communities.¹⁴ The whiteness of Dogwood’s donor base, in and of itself, evidently prescribes the organization’s priorities. While there are no easy solutions to this Catch-22 of funding, organizations like Dogwood should consider (as Wong suggests) whether they “can take themselves away from their donors and just...be brave in how they organize and how they develop their campaigns.” In the short term, this may involve Dogwood acting as an entry point for their base to concepts of anti-oppression, racial justice, and decolonization. In the long term, it may require Dogwood to fundamentally restructure itself in service of racialized communities.

Hacking the NPIC

Despite their limitations, nonprofits play a critical role in the movement ecosystem. As Vasey notes, many frontline and grassroots communities seek out relationships with ENGOs because they understand that “integrating ENGO resources, experience, and knowledge with grassroots ideology, organizing structures, and narratives could provide the synergy needed to do the long-term organizing required”.¹⁵ Social movements even create ENGOs—like the Pull Together campaign to fundraise for legal efforts against the TMX pipeline—because they recognize, in the words of our interviewee Diana Kamau, that “for a revolution to happen, multiple tactics need to

“Integrating ENGO resources, experience, and knowledge with grassroots ideology, organizing structures, and narratives could provide the synergy needed to do the long-term organizing required.”

¹⁴ Dogwood. 2020. “Strategic Planning Slides”. Available from Dogwood.

¹⁵ Vasey, 75, see note 1.



be used.” From staff hours to physical space to digital platforms to political access, ENGOs provide key resources that frontline and grassroots movements often struggle to procure on their own. ENGOs’ ability to hire community organizers is a central to their value in the movement ecosystem. But when movements are under-resourced, white and middle class people take on leadership by default because they can afford to volunteer their time—a trend reflected in Dogwood’s base, the majority of whom own homes and hold undergraduate degrees.¹⁶ While there is an enormous amount of work that needs to be done to diversify the ENGO sector, foundation and donor funding remains a critical avenue for low-income, young people of colour to enter into leadership in organizing spaces.¹⁷ It’s for this reason precisely that so many racialized people are advocating for an overhaul of the nonprofit industry—not because nonprofits are themselves without value, but because in order for them to serve their function, BIPOC people need to be at the helm of the sector.¹⁸ And so, short of burning themselves to the ground (an option proposed with little irony by some of our interviewees), nonprofits invested in doing community-based and justice-driven work must learn to push back against the confines of the NPIC in order to do the kinds of work that the broader environmental movement requires of them.

Embedded in this conversation about the role of the nonprofit sector is a question about who Dogwood is accountable to. Throughout this paper, we will reference the accountability of ENGOs to frontline communities (primarily Indigenous and racialized communities who are most directly impacted by extractivism, climate change, and other intersecting social crises) and grassroots movements (movements with little access to funding that use popular support and disruptive tactics to effect change). As a rule of thumb, organizations should take direction from those who are most directly harmed by the issues at hand. In the context of extractivism and climate crisis, this category mainly includes low-income and racialized communities – a point made by interviewee Neha Srivastava, a member of Shades of Sustainability. If Dogwood chooses to espouse the principle of decolonization, moreover, then they must hold themselves accountable—first and unequivocally—to Indigenous communities in whose territories they work. Because

¹⁶ Dogwood. 2020, see note 14.

¹⁷ de Almeida, p.192, see note 15.

¹⁸ Tomkin, A.R. 2020. "How White People Conquered the Nonprofit Industry." Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly. Available at <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/how-white-people-conquered-the-nonprofit-industry/>



Dogwood's theory of change relies on equipping local communities with the tools to reclaim decision-making power over their lands and waters, moreover, a question emerged within the Dogwood Executive team about the organization's accountability to its base versus directly impacted communities. Two things should be considered here; first, the material privilege of Dogwood's base, and second, the extent to which Dogwood's base qualifies as a grassroots movement. Dogwood's base is predominantly white and affluent, and so in many respects is removed from the worst impacts of extractivism and climate crisis. Furthermore, Dogwood's base is essentially an extension of Dogwood's own strategy: if Dogwood were to disappear, its base would not necessarily remain intact. For this reason, Dogwood's base arguably does *not* constitute a grassroots movement. If these things are true, then Dogwood must be willing to act against the interests or desires of its base when they conflict with those of directly impacted communities. Dogwood would also do well to consider their accountability to communities they have yet to organize. If Dogwood is indeed invested in building a movement that "reflects British Columbia," then they might question whether they are loyal to their current base, or the base they aspire to have.



Discussion Questions

To what extent does the NPIC circumscribe Dogwood's political activity?

Given that colonial governments are critical actors in addressing climate change, how can Dogwood engage with colonial systems without validating them? Especially when working in solidarity with Indigenous communities, what can Dogwood do to force the state to relinquish its power?

What role does Dogwood see itself playing in the movement ecosystem? How can Dogwood use its resources to support the emergence of broad-based, people-powered movements working to address social crises at their roots?

Who is the "we" in Dogwood's vision, mission, Theory of Change, and beliefs? Is it enough for Dogwood to act as an entry point for white communities to concepts of justice, or should Dogwood invest in building power in racialized communities? Can both happen simultaneously?

Who is Dogwood accountable to, and in what order? Indigenous communities? Other communities who are directly impacted by climate crisis and extractivism? Their donors? Their existing base? The base they aspire to have? How might Dogwood's accountability to these different communities impact the campaigns they produce?

To what degree do different forms of funding (foundation grants, government grants, and individual donations) influence the campaigns that Dogwood develops? What would it look like for Dogwood to "take itself away from its base" and develop campaigns in service of a broader movement?

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion: Pitfalls & Best Practices

Many ENGOs have struck Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) committees in order to confront their exclusionary pasts and work to create organizing spaces that are welcoming to racialized staff and supporters. These efforts, however, can easily slip into performativity: many organizations have written EDI commitment statements, for example, while doing little more than the bare minimum to change their strategic priorities or workplace culture. Commenting on trends in EDI work, Housty notes,

"I often see this work being framed in a pretty superficial way that's very focused on positive new things that we can do, or the positive things we can implement – policies we can put in place, protocols we can change, initiatives we can introduce



– and very little attention paid on what are the things we’re already doing that aren’t working, aren’t ideal, or [are] sometimes directly harmful?”

Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed echoes Housty, arguing that this emphasis on positivity makes it harder for racialized staff or

community members “to speak about racism, as well other experiences of the intractability of institutional inequality.”¹⁹ Rinaldo Walcott

adds on to Ahmed’s critique of EDI, arguing that these processes can inadvertently recenter whiteness: “rhetorics and policies of diversity do not work to undo the power and authority of whiteness; rather, they work to

calm white fears of a transformation that they believe would harm them.”²⁰ In other words, when the structure of whiteness is challenged to dismantle itself, it works to maintain its power through the creation of offices or committees that contain and manage dissent.²¹

“I often see this work being framed in a pretty superficial way that’s very focused on positive new things that we can do...and very little attention paid on what are the things we’re already doing that aren’t working.”

Despite these crucial insights, EDI remains useful and important because it acts as an “antidote to redlining the job market.”²² But to be effective, diversity work remains, as Ahmed suggests “dependent on the ongoing work of committed individuals even when diversity and equity have been embedded within the strategic missions and operational procedures of the organization.”²³ Meaning, individual commitment to diversity is just as critical as organizational commitment because individuals are ultimately the ones to carry out these commitments in the organization.²⁴

ENGOS must remain cognizant of their own exclusionary practices and rectify them in order to create spaces that are welcoming to staff, volunteers, and the communities they wish to serve. Organizations must go beyond performative commitment statements and examine how their organizing spaces have been

¹⁹ Ahmed, S. 2012. *On being included*. Duke University Press, p.156

²⁰ Walcott, R. 2019. “The End of Diversity.” *Public Culture* 31 (2): 393–408, p.400.

²¹ Walcott, p.401, see note 26.

²² Beavers, D. 2018. “Diversity, Equity And Inclusion Framework: Reclaiming Diversity, Equity And Inclusion For Racial Justice”. The Greenlining Institute. <http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Racial-Equity-Framework.pdf>

²³ Ahmed, p. 252, see note 25.

²⁴ Ahmed, p.131, see note 25



constructed to exclude Black, Indigenous and People of Colour from participation. In this section, we will offer potential pitfalls and best practices of EDI work in internal culture and hiring practices, civic engagement with BIPOC communities, and issue framing.

Adapted from the Greenlining Institute: Four Ws for DEI Advocacy

Who are you advocating on behalf of? Who are their allies/similarly impacted communities? Who are you not including in this effort? Have you analyzed this issue from an intersectional lens?

What are you advocating for: diversity, equity and/or inclusion? What area do you want to impact?

Where does this take place? Does it impact a workforce, supply chain, or another area? Will you engage individual entities on their internal practices or advance policies to impact an entire region or industry?

Why does diversity, equity and/or inclusion matter? Why should stakeholders prioritize this, and what are the consequences if no action is taken?

From: <https://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Racial-Equity-Framework.pdf>, p. 5

White Supremacy Culture in ENGO Spaces

In order to advance JEDI, organizations must be willing to examine how their internal culture and hiring practices inadvertently (or explicitly) uphold white supremacy. Many in the nonprofit sector believe that anti-racism and diversification are labour-intensive and costly, and use these perceived barriers as excuses not to engage in the work. Andil Gosine skewers this rational, arguing that diversity work is not predicated on funding, but rather institutional will.²⁵ According to Ahmed, institutional will is the antidote to institutional habit, in which certain people, having become accustomed to the power they hold within their institutions, resist any attempts at change.²⁶ Commenting on the expression of institutional habit in the ENGO sphere, interviewee Nakagawa notes:

“People who would broadly define themselves as progressive don’t recognize the racism embedded in their practices, and when they invite people to tables that they have built, and which they own, literally own, but also own the space, and the culture and own the practices of, I guess there’s things that are invisible to them

²⁵ Gosine, A. 2003. “Myths of Diversity: Canadian Environmentalists Don’t Want to Talk about Racism—but Too Often That Means the Uncritical Acceptance of Popular Diversity Myths.” *Alternatives Journal* 29 (1): 12.

²⁶ Ahmed, p.123, see note 25.



that they aren't willing to do the work of looking into. So I think that often, racialized people end up getting very harmed”.

According to Nakagawa, white supremacy is baked into the very DNA of nonprofits. It's present in the way organizations host meetings, in the way they hire, in the campaigns they prioritize, and in their lack of attention to cultural safety. For Housty, all these facets of white supremacy culture need to be addressed before racialized communities will feel comfortable engaging with ENGOs: “there's always that struggle around ‘how do we diversify,’ when the real question is ‘how do we become the kind of organization where people of colour want to work and feel safe working?’” Similarly, Srivastava emphasizes how attention to cultural safety and strong facilitation are prerequisites for ENGOs looking to engage BIPOC communities. But too, as interviewee Diane Kamau, a conflict dialogue assistant at the UBC Equity and Inclusion office, cautions “issues are long standing so it's going to take long term solutions that we have to keep coming back to, keep arguing about, and keep creating space for constant revision and review.” One tool that organizations can use to challenge white supremacist culture, Kamau offers, is to think of conflict and dialogue (meaning disagreement not abuse or discrimination) as normal and worth having particularly between different organizational levels. Within the framework of Deep Democracy, an organization can create pathways for people in junior positions to raise issues directly with those in positions of leadership. It takes more than a checklist to eradicate white supremacy culture, because white supremacy culture is pernicious and embedded in all white-created social structures. Challenging white supremacy culture, then, must be an iterative process based in deep listening, ongoing learning, and productive conflict.

“there's always that struggle around ‘how do we diversify,’ when the real question is ‘how do we become the kind of organization where people of colour want to work and feel safe working?’”

Tokenization in the ENGO Sphere

When ENGOs encounter public criticism for their lack of diversity, many attempt to curate an image of racial equality by thrusting a small handful of BIPOC staff into the fore of



their organizing.²⁷ In addition to letting ENGOS off the hook, this practice of tokenization places a profound burden on the few Indigenous and racialized individuals who occupy the spotlight. One of the interviewees in a paper authored by Mari Piggott describes the discomfort of being expected to speak on behalf of his entire community as the only Chinese-Canadian person in so many ENGO spaces.²⁸ Likewise, Nakagawa expresses frustration with the expectation ENGOS place on their BIPOC staff to stand in either for their own communities or for all racialized people. Unless specifically selected to represent their communities, Nakagawa insists, racialized staff members should only be expected to bring their lived experiences to the table. Beyond the personal cost of having to organize in majority-white spaces, Kamau notes that racialized staff are often saddled with the job of spearheading EDI in the workplace.

“when you’re hiring BIPOC, you’re hiring the entirety of the work that they’ve done to gain trust from their communities, and you’re hiring all of the experience and labour that they’ve done in the past to educate folks like them.”

Ajay Puri, a community organizer, equity facilitator at UBC and co-founder of RangiChangi Roots and Bridge to a Cool Planet, emphasized that especially when racialized staff are in the minority, the weight of this uncompensated emotional labour can result in deep exhaustion and burnout, and can ultimately lead BIPOC staff to leave movement spaces entirely. When hiring racialized people, Wong encourages ENGOS to reconsider the value of particular

competencies: “when you’re hiring BIPOC, you’re hiring the entirety of the work that they’ve done to gain trust from their communities, and you’re hiring all of the experience and labour that they’ve done in the past to educate folks like them.” According to Wong, racialized staff need to be compensated—and compensated well—for the emotional labour and relational access they provide to ENGOS. This applies particularly in the context of hiring, because racialized people are so often overlooked when their resumes don’t reflect the competencies that white hiring committees are used to prioritizing. Offering up one example, Kamau noted that ENGOS love to say that they value Indigenous knowledge before hiring white people to extract that knowledge from

²⁷ Definition of Tokenism by Oxford Dictionary Available at <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/tokenism>

²⁸ Quoted in Piggott, M. 2018. “Do you Have to be White to be Green? Exploring Race and Colonialism within Mainstream Environmentalism in Vancouver.” Quest University.



Indigenous communities. If white people really understood the value of Indigenous knowledge, Kamau argues, they would hire Indigenous people to do the work. While ENGOs can take steps to mitigate against racial bias in their hiring practice (as Dogwood has done by removing names from resumes), the issue remains that the people doing the hiring are racist. Rather than stopping at a colour-blind approach to hiring, Kamau suggests that ENGOs fundamentally reconsider which assets they designate as being valuable in the workplace.

When only one or two racialized people are employed by a particular ENGO, the practice of tokenization coincides with the model minority myth: often, ENGOs will choose to hire racialized people who they deem “the right kind of minority,” meaning that they are unassertive of their differences and seen as less of a “threat” to the whiteness of the organization. As Nakagawa explains, “it makes white people more comfortable to have the nice WOC at the table rather than the angry one who’s gonna name white supremacy.” Ultimately, the symbolic act of hiring one or two racialized people reproduces an exclusionary practice that determines which kinds of diversity can be “celebrated as standing in for collective representation.”²⁹ In addition to the personal pressure it generates, tokenism can also prove profoundly dangerous: as Damien Lee cautions, the act of identifying and amplifying Indigenous staff can make those individuals visible to the state, increasing their susceptibility to harassment and policing.

To move beyond performative diversity, Kamau emphasizes that “there’s a need to

“you need at least three people at the table to start to make a difference, because one person of colour is going to be silenced and marginalized and harmed.”

hire a plethora of diverse folks.” As Kamau argues, one racialized person can’t stand in for all racialized experiences: there are things that an Indigenous staff member would be equipped to do that a white person wouldn’t, and same for Black and POC staff members, and same for people across the spectrum of gender and sexuality. Hiring a diversity of BIPOC staff can spread out the labour

that would otherwise fall to a single staff member, and it can also increase their safety and efficacy in the workplace. According to Nakagawa, “you need at least three people at

²⁹ Walcott, p.397, see note 22.



the table to start to make a difference, because one person of colour is going to be silenced and marginalized and harmed. But if you could get three people of colour, then you could perhaps get people amplifying each other and validating each other” (Nakagawa).

In addition to hiring a diversity of racialized staff, ENGOs need to ensure that racialized people are afforded power within their organizations. When Dogwood had to make staffing cuts due to budget constraints in 2018 and 2019, racialized staff were the first to go because they had all been hired in junior positions. To prevent this from happening again in the future, Wong expresses that “it is important to hire [racialized] folks in leadership positions” and in positions with job security.

“ENGOs will not meaningfully diversify until they hire racialized people in their most senior positions and give them the resources and budget to do the work they deem necessary.”

Nakagawa echoes Wong, arguing that ENGOs will not meaningfully diversify until they hire racialized people in their most senior positions and give them the resources and budget to do the work they deem necessary. As Ahmed’s research shows, hiring diversity champions in positions of leadership can have a significant impact on the diversity of a workplace overall: “if commitment is located in the body of a leader, it is also something that must spread to others through forms of influence, promotion and drive.”³⁰

Discussion Questions

How might Dogwood play into practices of tokenization? Is there an implicit expectation that Dogwood places on racialized staff to speak on behalf of their entire communities? Educate white staff members on EDI? Hold relationships with BIPOC communities, even ones they don’t represent?

Which staff members in Dogwood hold relationships with Indigenous and racialized communities? Is it one person, or many? How can Dogwood build its relational capacity?

When hiring new staff, what assets does Dogwood consider valuable? How can Dogwood ensure that racialized staff are paid—and paid well—for their emotional and relational labour?

³⁰ Ahmed, p.133, see note 25.



Civic Participation

If ENGOs want to reach beyond their traditional base, they must re-evaluate their core assumptions about civic engagement. There are a number of systemic barriers that prevent BIPOC communities from engaging in civic life. According to Nakagawa, “a lot of people believe that politics is decided by those who show up without recognizing that those who show up is a manipulative process of disenfranchisement.” In their survey of Hispanic participation in Toronto’s environmental movement, Hilary Gibson-Wood and

“a lot of people believe that politics is decided by those who show up without recognizing that those who show up is a manipulative process of disenfranchisement.”

Sarah Wakefield show that “un-reflexive notions of community participation fail to recognize the fundamental material inequalities that dictate opportunities for participation in civic life.”³¹ In other words, many forums for civic engagement simply aren’t accessible for racialized and low-income communities. People who speak English as a second language or who have different ways of expressing themselves orally, for instance, might feel uncomfortable signing up to speak at a city council meeting.

Undocumented migrants, Temporary Foreign Workers, and Permanent Residents might not be enfranchised to participate in referenda or elections. Many Indigenous people refuse to participate in settler elections because they don’t recognize the settler state as legitimate, and in Wong’s Cantonese-Canadian community, there is an anxiety attached to participating in protest or direct action. Many racialized communities, Kamau notes, simply don’t have faith in political systems because those systems have never served them. The whiteness of the traditional environmental movement also perpetuates itself: when racialized people don’t see themselves represented in environmental spaces, or when information about an issue is only available in English, or when ENGOs exclusively do outreach at Farmers’ Markets in predominantly white neighbourhoods, racialized communities are denied even the opportunity to access environmental spaces. For many low-income and racialized communities, material inequalities also limit their ability to engage in civic life: as Nakagawa notes, many people are simply too busy supporting

³¹ Gibson-Wood, H. and S. Wakefield. 2013. “‘Participation’, White Privilege and Environmental Justice: Understanding Environmentalism Among Hispanics in Toronto.” *Antipode* 45 (3): 641–62.



families, working multiple jobs, and caring for their broader communities to organize for environmental causes that don't feel relevant to their everyday lives.

Rather than asking racialized communities to participate in forums that aren't designed to include them, Gibson-Wood and Wakefield use the lens of participatory justice to explore how forums for civic engagement might be designed to serve racialized communities. The base assumption of participatory justice, as articulated in the seventh of the seventeen Principles on Environmental Justice articulated in 1991 at the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, is that those most impacted by extractivism and climate crisis should have their needs and perspectives prioritized at every level of decision-making.³² At its most cursory level, participatory justice can involve having free bus waivers and childcare for events, holding meetings in easily-accessible locations, and ensuring that participation is possible in multiple languages.³³ It should be noted that many ENGOs seem to think that outreach in racialized communities is predicated on their ability to translate materials and host multi-lingual events. In the context of British Columbia, however, a vast majority of racialized people are English speaking. And so, while translation is critical to reaching some communities, it should not be used as an excuse to not engage with BIPOC communities more generally. Furthermore, assumptions about racialized people and their (in)abilities to communicate fall into racist myths.

These material barriers to access, however, are only one small part of the picture. If ENGOs want to engage BIPOC communities in the political process, Nakagawa argues that the conversation needs to be taken out of white spaces entirely. In her words, "to include, we have to be willing to exclude." On the question of what civic engagement could look like in her own community, Nakagawa reflects;

"to include, we have to be willing to exclude."

"As I walk around my community, I notice a lot of basketball playing going on, and I noticed that it is almost primarily racialized youth. How would they want to talk about civic engagement on the basketball court or on the sides, rather than trying

³² "Principles of Environmental Justice". 1991. People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, Available at <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/ej-principles.pdf>

³³ Gibson-Wood & Wakefield, p.647, see note 32.



to get them participate in white spaces, and in white ways? It's going to people and recognizing where they're at and recognizing that you could advocate from a basketball court in your community. Like that could be a civic engagement thing, and is super valid because that is community building, rather than saying 'oh that's ridiculous when we're talking about the climate crisis,' it's not ridiculous, it's important".

Nakagawa calls on ENGOs to fundamentally reconsider what constitutes civic engagement. For her, civic engagement means meeting people where they're at, creating spaces for them to express their needs and desires amongst themselves, and using that as a starting point for future organizing efforts. Wong echoes Nakagawa's analysis, describing how civic engagement in her community can look like helping an elder cross the street, hosting friends for hot pot in her kitchen, or doing an art build in a Chinatown community centre. For her, the central tenet of community engagement is to "[meet] people where they are, and in a way that respects their culture." The perfect illustration of this approach was an ad campaign that Hua Foundation ran during the 2018 Proportional Representation referendum targeting Chinese voters by comparing wasted votes to wasted rice. If ENGOs are serious about engaging racialized communities, they must be willing to blow open their conception of civic engagement, and learn to take direction from BIPOC communities themselves on what these new forums for civic engagement might look like.

Issue Framing

When ENGOs like Dogwood take stock of their demographics and find that their engagement with racialized communities is lacking, their first instinct is often to figure out how to make racialized people care about 'their' issues. Nakagawa condemns this logic, saying; "this idea that 'you got to come into our movement and we'll teach you about the climate crisis' is inherently white supremacy in action." There is a pervasive and dangerous belief among many in the environmental movement that racialized communities are disengaged

"this idea that 'you got to come into our movement and we'll teach you about the climate crisis' is inherently white supremacy in action."



and misguided, and would engage with the issues if only ENGOs could figure out how to reach them. Contributing to this notion, Wong notes that environmentalists have a habit of framing climate action as “the most important issue, as if everything else fell behind that.” Wong’s perception is substantiated by a 2011 study which reviewed the websites of 49 ENGOs for content relating to poverty, multiculturalism, inequality, disability, immigration, and gender. The study revealed that 28 (61%) of these organizations made no mention of these topics at all, and that all 49 avoided any mention of disability.³⁴ The problem, Nakagawa emphasizes, is not that people don’t know about climate change or don’t care—it’s that the climate crisis (and *particularly* the ecocentric framing of the climate crisis championed by the mainstream environmental movement) is not the most urgent issue facing people in her community. Rather than insisting that racialized and low-income communities show up in defence of Arctic glaciers or electric vehicle charging stations, Nakagawa emphasizes that ENGOs need to flip the switch by showing for racialized and low-income communities and fighting for things like accessible public transit, retrofits for low-income apartment buildings, and other social services that mitigate and protect against the worst impacts of climate change. As Wong notes, ENGOs must be careful to avoid approaching these issues with a self-serving lens. If, for instance, Dogwood began to do outreach in racialized communities and found out that affordable transit was a key issue, but then used that information to send targeted emails rather than changing their campaign priorities to reflect what racialized communities were calling for, that would constitute little more than what Wong terms “data colonialism.”

At the same time, Nakagawa warns ENGOs against reducing their intersectional analysis to the few places where climate change neatly overlaps with other social issues, like climate-induced migration or environmental racism. As Kyle Powys Whyte theorizes, climate change is merely a *symptom* of the interplay between capitalism (a system of property relations that prioritizes private ownership and profit) and colonialism (a system that seeks to dispossess and control Indigenous lands)-- a relationship he terms the “capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression.”³⁵ If climate change can only be meaningfully addressed by dismantling capitalism and the settler state, Harsha Walia argues that

³⁴ Haluza-DeLay, R. and H. Fernhout. 2011. “Sustainability and Social Inclusion? Examining the Frames of Canadian English-Speaking Environmental Movement Organisations.” *Local Environment* 16 (7): 727.

³⁵ Whyte, Kyle Powys "White Allies, Let's Be Honest About Decolonization." Yes! Magazine. April 03, 2018. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/decolonize/2018/04/03/white-allies-lets-be-honest-about-decolonization/>.



environmentalists have a moral and strategic responsibility to align with other movements for change:

“How can the environmental movement alter itself so that it understands that the struggles of other people are about climate change? So it’s not about including communities - more poor communities, more communities of colour - into the climate movement, it’s about how does the climate movement see that the struggle for labour rights is fundamentally about food security; that the struggle for Indigenous land sovereignty is fundamentally about protecting the land; that the struggle of refugees is completely tied up to violence on the land”.³⁶

This work of drawing connections between different movements for change is already taking place in many pockets of the environmental and climate justice movement. In 2019, 350 Canada supported a youth-led campaign called Our Time that mobilized to win a Green New Deal for Canada in advance of the Federal Election. Breaking from a traditional “single-issue” approach to climate change, the Our Time campaign drew explicit links between climate action, good work, racial justice, migrant rights, and Indigenous sovereignty. The Leap, a Canadian and American organization founded by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis, similarly works to build an intersectional climate movement by tackling issues like housing, migration, and racism. Far from losing focus, these organizations’ intersectional approaches to movement-building allow them to connect with the lived realities of racialized and low-income communities, and, in so doing, to reach beyond the traditional base of the environmental movement.

“How can the environmental movement alter itself so that it understands that the struggles of other people are about climate change?”

Discussion Questions

How does Dogwood currently define the scope of its issues? How might that scope be widened to include issues with direct relevance to the lives of racialized and low-income communities?

Do Dogwood’s current campaigns reflect the intersectional nature of the climate crisis? If not, what is holding Dogwood back from adopting a more intersectional approach?

³⁶Quoted in Piggott, see note 28.



The Politics of Relationship-Building

Dogwood's JEDI document acknowledges that the environmental movement will only succeed if it builds power and relevance in BIPOC communities. In our interviews with the

"if it's about the issue and not the organization, sometimes it's more effective coming from community."

Dogwood Executive team, however, there was a recurring tension regarding Dogwood's role in this work. Given that Dogwood remains an overwhelmingly white-led organization, members of the Executive team rightly wondered whether Dogwood should play the role of building relationships in racialized communities, or whether they should cede that space to ethno-specific community organizations. Our interviewees had mixed perspectives on this question.

Referencing her work with Hua Foundation, Wong states "the trust within that neighbourhood between different people is important to recognize because sometimes, organizations just can't do that work. Sometimes, they aren't

the ones who are supposed to." Nakagawa expresses a similar sentiment, suggesting that "if it's about the issue and not the organization, sometimes it's more effective coming from

"If you're just building power in white communities, that's racist, that's not acceptable."

community." According to both Wong and Nakagawa, white-led ENGOs should not necessarily be the ones to build relationships in racialized communities if they can amplify

existing efforts instead. Where community organizations are already doing the work, Nakagawa further prompts Dogwood to consider "what would a shared learning experience look like with an organization that works with racialized people that is actually beneficial and not just in service of Dogwood?" (this is a question that we will address more fully in our discussion of ENGO solidarity efforts). At the same time, Nakagawa asserts that choosing not to engage with BIPOC communities for fear of overstepping is also a form of racism: "If you're just building power in white communities, that's racist, that's not acceptable." In order to build relationships in racialized communities, then, ENGOs must be willing to put in the work (as detailed in previous sections) to challenge white supremacy culture, hire racialized staff in positions of leadership, expand their definition of civic engagement, design campaigns that carry relevance in the lives of



racialized people, and, when invited, build meaningful relationships with ethno-specific community organizations.

Discussion Questions

How can Dogwood make traditional forms of civic engagement (e.g. canvassing, petitioning, city council meetings, rallies, elections) more accessible to racialized communities?

How does Dogwood define civic engagement? How might Dogwood's typical forums for civic engagement exclude racialized communities? It might be useful to reflect here on Dogwood's campaign to lower the voting age, the Let BC Vote campaign, and others.

How might civic engagement look different for racialized communities?

Where does Dogwood fit in the movement ecosystem? Who is already being organized, and who isn't? What ethnic communities should Dogwood reach on its own, and what partnerships should it seek out in order to reach others?

Solidarity Work: Pitfalls & Best Practices

As the concept of solidarity is taken up in ENGO discourse, organizations like Dogwood must reflect critically on what the term entails. When ENGOS with primarily white and middle-class bases claim solidarity with Indigenous communities, grassroots movements, and ethno-specific community organizations, the ethics of those relationships are fundamentally different from the ethics of co-resistance between, say, Indigenous and Black communities. The distinguishing feature of ENGO solidarity work is "a recognition of inequitable power relations and an attempt to prefigure different kinds of relationships."³⁷ By their very nature, ENGO solidarity efforts are premised on leveraging privilege in order to win justice for those *without* privilege. Housty identifies how this act of "trading" on whiteness can be of service to Indigenous and racialized organizers:

"Like most things, unfortunately, often you get people's ear when you have the same level of melanin."

"Like most things, unfortunately, often you get people's ear when you have the same level of melanin. I've definitely found that when I've failed to advocate to funders on why change needs to be made in terms of how their granting practices

³⁷ Curnow, J. and A. Helferty. 2018. "Contradictions of Solidarity." *Environment and Society* 9(1): 145-63.



interact with the reality in community, they might not take it from me, but they might take it from a white partner at a 'credible' NGO".

In Housty's experience, having white partners amplify her voice in white-dominated ENGO spaces has allowed her to access resources that would otherwise be unavailable to her. The same goes for garnering media attention: according to Housty, Dogwood helped the Nathan E. Stewart oil spill in Heiltsuk territory stay on the public's radar for several weeks longer than it might have otherwise. Shay Lynn Sampson, a Gitksan community member and organizer with Divest UVic and Indigenous Youth for Wet'suwet'en, similarly addresses the critical role that ENGOs played during the #ShutDownCanada campaign to fight misinformation in the media and amplify the voices of Indigenous leaders on the frontlines. Housty and Sampson both emphasize that ENGOs like Dogwood can be of service to frontline communities by signal-boosting their messaging, offering them skill trainings for things like data management and videography, and providing tangible resources like legal support, software licensing, and frontline supplies.

Pitfalls of Solidarity Work

The very assets that make ENGOs useful to frontline and grassroots communities (their access to funding, relationships to government and industry, organizational capacity, and material resources) can also produce harmful imbalances of power. Housty describes the challenges she encountered when working alongside ENGOs to defend the Great Bear Rainforest:

"We've had a lot of issues over the years with short-lived campaign-based interest in the geography, particularly around the Great Bear Agreement, where there were organizations that raised a lot of money and raised a lot of clout for themselves around that campaign and then, at the end of the day, where are they?"

Despite their commitments to "take leadership from those on the frontlines," ENGOs retain the power to choose which Indigenous struggles to support, and further decide how and for how long to stay implicated in those struggles.³⁸ Moreover, while many Indigenous communities enter into consensual partnerships with ENGOs, others can be

³⁸ Curnow and Helferty, p.153, see note 38.



coerced based on necessity or circumstance.³⁹ Housty noted in our interview that Heiltsuk Nation has an unusually high capacity to build accountable relationships with ENGOs, and wondered whether smaller First Nations with fewer resources would be able to establish the same kinds of boundaries. Housty argues that this power imbalance becomes highly salient when funding enters the picture. Because foundations and donors tend to support discreet, short-lived, and high-clout campaigns over the slow, relational, and messy work that is so often needed to bring about social change, Housty suggests that ENGOs have a tendency to reach for flashy victories and cut and run once those narrow goals have been achieved. The result of this behaviour, Housty notes, is that ENGOs “get you halfway the distance on an issue, then they leave, and they burn the bridges for you on their way out.”

“ENGOs get you halfway the distance on an issue, then they leave, and they burn the bridges for you on their way out.”

From a legal perspective and a political one, ENGOs stand to benefit from allying themselves with Indigenous communities. As the campaign against the Northern Gateway pipeline demonstrated, Indigenous legal and political power are invaluable commodities in battles against resource extraction. While ENGOs understand the strategic need to ally with Indigenous communities, they have arguably not yet done the work to challenge their own colonial and oppressive practices. During our interview with the Dogwood Executive team, for instance, some staff members recalled that Dogwood’s involvement with the Tahltan Nation during their anti-Shell campaign left a “bad taste” for some community members. While the context for this relationship is unclear, it is apparent that Dogwood’s early alliances with Indigenous communities have not been without fault. When there is incongruity or lack of communication around goals, ENGOs’ frameworks and tactics tend to trump those of the Indigenous communities with whom they claim solidarity.⁴⁰ Dave Vasey highlights one such example from the campaign to protect the Canadian Boreal Forest from Tar Sands expansion, in which ENGOs formed alliances with Indigenous communities before excluding them from closed-door negotiations with industry representatives. The result of those negotiations was the

³⁹ Lee, D. 2019. “Windigo Faces: Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations Serving Canadian Colonialism”. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 31(2): 133.

⁴⁰ Curnow and Helferty, p.152, see note 38.



Canadian Boreal Forest Act, a piece of legislation that ENGOs claimed as a breakthrough victory but that fell far short of the goals Indigenous communities were reaching for--namely, for their treaty rights to be recognized and affirmed.⁴¹

In the context of ENGO alliances with Indigenous communities, this form of exclusion can reinforce state supremacy by shifting the conversation away from Indigenous Rights and Title and reducing Indigenous communities to “stakeholders” (rather than sovereign Title-holders) in land-based decision-making.⁴² In her analysis of ENGO partnerships with Aboriginal communities in Australia, Heather Moorecroft describes how the Australian conservationist movement took up the discourse of Aboriginal Rights in order to strengthen their case for the preservation of natural landscapes from resource extraction or human encroachment. In shouldering the cause of justice for Aboriginal people, however, conservationists inadvertently positioned themselves as the gateway toward Aboriginal land reclamation, interrupting the ability of Aboriginal peoples to fight for self-determination on their own terms. Under this framework, justice for Aboriginal people became a means to an end, not the end in and of itself. While the Australian conservationist movement is not identical to the Canadian one, this dynamic is prevalent across different settler-colonial contexts.

Reflecting on her personal experience working with Dogwood, Housty remarks that the relationship felt somewhat incidental: “when there’s a thing happening that they care about, then there we both are.” Speaking to her experience organizing in solidarity with Wet’suwet’en Nation, Sampson notes that ENGOs have a tendency to show up for Indigenous communities when their struggles align with environmental aims, and to disappear when those linkages become less clear. To illustrate her point, Sampson points to the huge outpouring of ENGO support that appeared in response to the battle between the Coastal Gaslink pipeline on Wet’suwet’en territories, and compares it to the relative silence of ENGOs on #1492LandBackLane, an occupation by Six Nations Land Defenders in opposition to the Mackenzie Meadows housing development project. As Jeff Corntassel, Rita Dhamoon, and Corey Snelgrove posit, this selective solidarity has enabled ENGOs to use the co-opt Indigenous struggles in order to employ them as campaign

⁴¹ Vasey, see note 1.

⁴² Lee, p.151, see note 40.



fodder.⁴³ When ENGOs form alliances with Indigenous communities, they must invest themselves in the fight for Indigenous sovereignty, understanding it not as a pathway to environmental protection but as the end in and of itself.⁴⁴

Discussion Questions

What resources does Dogwood have to offer in service of frontline communities and grassroots movements?

What is the impetus for Dogwood in forming relationships with Indigenous communities? Can you point to any instances where Dogwood has entered into solidarity relationships with a strategy already formed? Where Dogwood stepped away from an issue once their goals had been achieved? What were the consequences of these actions?

Best Practices for Solidarity Work

Solidarity is messy, relational, and rife with contradiction.⁴⁵ This complexity, however, does not excuse ENGOs from engaging with the work. As one of our interviewees, Ajay Puri noted, ENGOs have a tendency to “run away” from relationships as soon as they get called out for problematic behaviours. In his view, ENGOs like Dogwood need to get comfortable with making mistakes, and then they need to continue to show up in service

“Solidarity is leading from behind and doing what is asked of me — amplifying voices, doing the behind-the-scenes grunt work of movement planning and fundraising.”

of frontline and BIPOC-led organizations in *full knowledge* of their fallibility. Maya Menezes, an Indian and Pakistani organizer with Toronto Environmental Alliance and No One Is Illegal, articulates solidarity work as “leading from behind and doing what is asked of me — amplifying voices, doing the behind-the-scenes grunt work of movement planning and fundraising.”⁴⁶ This principle of “leading from behind” was raised again and again by our interviewees, with Housty and Puri both noting that the tenor of their relationships

with ENGOs depended on how willing they were to set their own agendas aside and take

⁴³ Corntassel, J., R.K. Dhamoon, & C. Snelgrove. 2014. Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(2): 1-32.

⁴⁴ Lee, p.135, see note 40.

⁴⁵ Curnow and Helferty, p.150, see note 38.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Sanchez, N. 2019. "People Just like You Are Fighting for Environmental Justice." David Suzuki Foundation. Available at <https://davidsuzuki.org/story/people-just-like-fighting-environmental-justice/>



direction from those on the frontlines. Regarding partnership dynamics between ENGOS and community organizations, Nakagawa notes that “nonprofits want to suck anything in ...coming up underneath those organizations to lift them up is better than trying to get them under their umbrella.” According to Nakagawa, ENGOS must resist the urge to use solidarity efforts as PR material or campaign fodder. Examples from Dogwood’s own history, like their decision to support Heiltsuk Nation following the Nathan E. Stewart spill without claiming credit for their involvement, can serve as blueprints for this work.

While ENGOS can be useful to frontline and grassroots movements, their solidarity remains premised on the idea that white bodies and voices matter more, in a colonial and white supremacist society, than those of BIPOC.⁴⁷ While recognizing that activists need to utilise all possible avenues to create change—including those that are not necessarily transformative—ENGOS must remain attentive to the ways that their solidarity efforts inadvertently reinforce or centre whiteness.⁴⁸ If the ultimate goal is to redistribute power so that predominantly-white ENGOS no longer occupy a privileged position in the movement ecosystem (and, by extension, so that white people no longer occupy a privileged position in the world), ENGOS must be willing to shift the balance of power between themselves and grassroots and frontline communities. As Young details in her analysis of the alliance-building process between mainstream ENGOS and low-budget environmental justice groups for the People’s Climate March (PCM), one of the factors that led to the alliance’s success was an early decision to implement a voting system weighted in favour of environmental justice groups. The redistribution of power can also be financial: Young further describes how the PCM alliance redistributed funds to environmental justice groups so that they could do the work of engaging their own communities, rather than ENGOS trying to do that work in their stead.⁴⁹ Challenging ENGOS’ assumed role as an intermediary between funders and Indigenous communities,

“It’s...important to know when the most beneficial thing is to get out of the way and recommend that institutional funders and big donors give money directly to the community doing the work.”

⁴⁷ Curnow and Helferty, p. 153, see note 38.

⁴⁸ Curnow and Helferty, p. 155, see note 38.

⁴⁹ Young, see note 8.



Housty recommends that nonprofits consider “when the most beneficial thing is to get out of the way and recommend that institutional funders and big donors give money directly to the community doing the work.” In short, ENGOs need to recognize that their resources and experience, while useful, are not critical for social movements to succeed. Once ENGOs have come to this understanding, they can show up in service of those on the frontlines and practice stepping back when their presence is no longer welcomed.

In contexts where ENGOs *are* expressly invited to engage with frontline and grassroots communities, they must take concrete steps to even the power inequities inherent to their relationship. According to Young, the PCM alliance was largely successful because grassroots communities were involved in strategic planning from the very outset of the project.⁵⁰ This practice is something that Dogwood itself addressed in its 2013 Failing Forward Report: according to Will Horter, the former Executive Director of Dogwood, a shortcoming of the Let BC Vote campaign was their failure to bring potential partners into the early stages of strategic planning. The consequence of this shortcoming was that partners were reluctant to buy into the initiative because they felt as though major decisions had already been made. Especially in solidarity-based relationships, it is critical that ENGOs take leadership directly from those most impacted by the issues at hand. Sierra Club BC’s “Growing Into Balance” 2020-2023 Strategic Planning document reflects on their own learning journey in this regard: “part of our evolution as an organization requires us to recognize that we have too often asserted our right to lead and claimed to know all the answers. In our urgency to address ecological challenges, we neglected to address the narrowness of our demographic of staff and supporters. This lack of diversity resulted in our work being informed by limited knowledge and experiences.” As Puri notes, frontline and grassroots organizations need to be the ones to set strategy because they’re the ones who know what their communities need and how their communities can be organized. In order to ensure that the strategy, vision, and goals of directly-impacted communities are centred in coalition-based organizing, ENGOs must relinquish their assumed leadership and engage in mutual and deferential strategy-building from the ground up.

⁵⁰ Young, see note 8,



Relationships are at the heart of organizing. In Dogwood’s own words, the core building block of social movements is “face-to-face, value-based” conversation. If ENGOS are interested in building successful alliances, they must be willing to invest in deep and meaningful relationship-building with frontline and grassroots communities. Returning to the case study of the People’s Climate March, Young credits the multi-month-long, intensely collaborative planning process for the success of the alliance. As she notes, the interpersonal relationships that formed over the course of several months created an atmosphere where feedback was frequent and welcome: “people can grab the ED of a Big Green in the hallway right now and say ‘Hey, what are you doing? Y’all did this thing and

“if the one racialized person holds all of these relationships and they decide to leave, you still need those relationships. So other people in the organization still need to try.”

it’s kinda messed up.”⁵¹ Kamau describes relationship-building as a continuous process that requires mutual trust and investment. Echoing Kamau’s definition, Housty reflects that “organizations who are willing to put in work and build trust, even when the work looks different from year-to-year or when work in our community looks different from the work in a neighbouring community — worth their weight in gold.” Reflecting on how ENGOS might approach this work, Kamau warns against a pattern in predominantly-white spaces in which the labour of

relationship-building is allocated to the only racialized people on staff: “if the one racialized person holds all of these relationships and they decide to leave, you still need those relationships. So other people in the organization still need to try.”

Relationship-building is simultaneously necessary, strategic, and labour-intensive. ENGOS who are pursuing long-term solidarity relationships should thus prepare to invest themselves in building trust with the communities they claim to support.

At the same time, Housty inserts a caveat that Dogwood might not be the right organization to do this particular kind of community work. According to Housty, Dogwood’s strength is in rolling out targeted and highly-responsive campaigns. Given that Dogwood doesn’t have the capacity to build in-depth or long-standing partnerships with specific Indigenous communities, she encourages Dogwood to consider how they might

⁵¹ Young, see note 8.



maintain accountable relationships from within their organizational wheelhouse. From Housty's perspective, accountability within the context of fast-paced campaigning involves knowing the checks and balances: "who decides when something is framed as a win? Who decides what has been accomplished?" Part of this work is in recognizing when relationship-building becomes more of a burden than a help for Indigenous communities themselves. In these cases, ENGOs should take direction from the Nation directly: have they issued a call to solidarity? Have they listed their demands publicly? Have they framed the issue in the media? A perfect example of this was the Wet'suwet'en #ShutDownCanada campaign in February 2020, in which Unist'ot'en released an international call of solidarity and asked for support in amplifying their demands. ENGOs wouldn't have needed to have personal relationships with Wet'suwet'en community members—all they had to do was platform Wet'suwet'en voices, while resisting the urge to use the moment to garner media attention or clout for themselves.

Discussion Questions

How might Dogwood materially redistribute its power (financial and political)?

What is Dogwood's role in the movement ecosystem?

Is it possible to build trust-based and mutual relationships with Indigenous and racialized communities, even within an organizing model that relies on launching rapid-response campaigns?

How can Dogwood decenter whiteness in its mission? Where does educating white people on anti-oppression rank in Dogwood's priorities, and where does supporting Indigenous and racialized communities in building power?

How can Dogwood hold itself accountable to Indigenous communities while engaging in campaign-based organizing? What is Dogwood's responsibility to Indigenous communities beyond the scope of bounded campaigns?

In the absence of personal relationships, how can ENGOs hold themselves accountable to Indigenous communities?

Conclusion

As Dogwood embarks on their strategic planning process, we would like to conclude with a handful of reflections on how to approach the slow, messy, frustrating, contradictory,



and entirely necessary project that is EDI and solidarity work. First, we would like to encourage Dogwood to read this report with a spirit of courage and possibility. As Housty noted, this most recent resurgence of Black resistance has inspired a wave of knee-jerk commitments to EDI in the nonprofit sector. Because ENGOs can cause real harm by not going all-in on these commitments, Kamau emphasizes that this work cannot be superficial: “if you really want JEDI and are committed to carving out equitable, diverse spaces, you need to be ready to have a complete reorganization.” In this spirit, we invite Dogwood to approach their EDI commitments with an openness to the possibility of deep transformation in their structure, culture, and organizing. Second, in the words of Nakagawa, the ENGO sphere needs to “cede power to gain power.” We encourage Dogwood to consider their proximity to privilege, both within the movement ecosystem and in broader society, and to carefully consider the degree to which they are willing to relinquish that privilege in pursuit of EDI and solidarity work. Again, in this regard, we invite Dogwood to be bold. Third, we encourage Dogwood to remember that this work is a profoundly complicated process that extends far beyond the scope of one strategic planning period. Recognizing that there are contradictions in EDI and solidarity work that can never be neatly resolved, we offer Dogwood the invitation to “remain unreconciled” in their pursuit of justice and decolonization. As Curnow and Helferty explain, “remaining unreconciled ...[points] us toward an approach that does not gloss over the racialized, colonial roots or ongoing damage the movement is implicated in. It points us to work that does not seek absolution but sits and works within the realities of racialized settler colonialism while constantly attending to the ways in which our work is implicated in the very logics many of us attempt to work against.” We encourage Dogwood to sit in the deep contradictions of this work, and to embrace these iterative tensions as the pathway to justice.

Addendum

By Laura Benson and Jess Dempsey

This report contains many crucial insights and poses incredibly challenging questions for Dogwood and the rest of the environmental movement. We are grateful to all who



participated in interviews and to Rajdeep and Kate for working on this project from start to finish. To us it came together swimmingly, particularly because the project was conceived of quickly when new funds became available at UBC to support students during the pandemic. We were and still are in awe of Rajdeep and Kate's abilities and the final product.

But the project - with us at the helm - fell right into many of the patterns identified in this report itself. As the leaders of a white-dominated team, we failed to create any structures, practices and supports for this intensive and emotionally exhausting work, inexcusably unaware of the disproportionate emotional toll placed on BIPOC people who have experienced many racist harms first hand. This failure on our part harmed Rajdeep as the sole person of colour on the project team and for that we are sorry and take full responsibility. Paraphrasing Ajay Puri, the authors note "when racialized staff are in the minority, the weight of this uncompensated emotional labour can result in deep exhaustion and burnout, and can ultimately lead BIPOC staff to leave movement spaces entirely". This leaving impoverishes movements and must stop.

In her interview for this report, Jess Housty noted that while ENGOs tend to focus on the question 'how do we diversify', the question we should be asking is "how do we become the kind of organization where people of colour want to work and feel safe working?". The making of this report shows we have a long way to go, both at Dogwood and within the academy, including in Dempsey's research team. We take responsibility for these harms, commit to learning from them and doing better in the future, to become the spaces where diverse teams are supported and empowered to build better movements and organizations. We have to dig in and re-commit again and again.

Our hope is that the experience of this report and the findings of the report itself, can serve as a catalyst for change at Dogwood, at other B.C. organizations, and within the University - particularly to shift the way students of colour are supervised and supported. We also recognize that Dogwood sharing and publicizing this report could very easily become a performative act rather than a step towards larger change. So, with all this in mind we want to make at least these specific commitments for now:

- Providing support plans & resources for any Black, Indigenous or Person of Colour coming onto a white-dominated team (this commitment applies to both Dogwood and Jess Dempsey's research team at UBC).



- Starting with the examples referenced in this report, Dogwood leadership - including the board - will develop a reflection paper to hold the organization and ourselves accountable for past instances of harm. The goal of this piece will be to serve as context for Dogwood's new strategic framework.
- In consultation with staff members, their union, the board of directors and volunteer leaders, Dogwood will establish a permanent structure for advancing and monitoring Dogwood's commitment to becoming a more just, equitable and decolonized organization.
- In the interim, for the remainder of its strategic planning process, Dogwood will form a JEDI working group with representatives from leadership, staff, board and volunteers, to integrate this report's analysis questions and findings, Dogwood's previous commitments and decolonization learning into Dogwood's strategic framework.
- Dogwood's new strategic framework will include further commitments for change based on the lessons of the past, insights from this report, previous commitments to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, and other learning Dogwood has undertaken about decolonization and anti-racism.

Dogwood will continue to invest in working with peers in the environmental sector to advance justice, equity, decolonization and transformation within our organizations and beyond.

Terminology

BIPOC: The acronym 'BIPOC' stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. While the origins of the term are ambiguous,⁵² many activists hold that it is meant to unite all people of color in the work for liberation while acknowledging that not all people of color face the same forms of injustice. By specifically naming Black and Indigenous people, the term 'BIPOC' recognizes that Black and Indigenous people face the most severe consequences of white supremacy, classism and settler colonialism.⁵³

Diversity: Dogwood has defined diversity as "the unique differences between us... based on which we may experience advantages or encounter barriers to opportunity."⁵⁴

⁵² Grady, C. 2020. "Why the Term "BIPOC" Is so Complicated, Explained by Linguists." Vox. June 30, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/30/21300294/bipoc-what-does-it-mean-critical-race-linguistics-jonathan-rosa-deandra-miles-hercules>.

⁵³ "What Is BIPOC?" Sunrise Movement. <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/bipoc-gnd-crash-course>.

⁵⁴ Dogwoods' definitions were adopted from the TREC webinar, "Laying the foundations for DEI work in your organization" and the Kalil Jamison Consulting Group report "The path from exclusive club to inclusive organization."



Equity: Dogwood has defined diversity as “an approach to ensuring everyone has equal access to the same opportunities; recognizes that advantages and barriers exist”.⁵⁵

Frontline communities: In this report, the term ‘frontline communities’ describes those who experience “first and worst” the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, and extractivism. Frontline communities tend to be racialized and poor.

Grassroots movements: In this report, ‘grassroots movements’ are defined in contrast with the NPIC. We understand grassroots movements as movements that are people-powered and use various forms of bottom-up decision-making. Grassroots movements typically don’t have access to large donor bases or foundation funding, and are not created by nonprofits--although they may create or work alongside them.

Inclusion: Dogwood has defined inclusion as “celebrating, valuing and amplifying perspectives, voices, styles and identities that have been disadvantaged/marginalized.”⁵⁶

Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC): the Non-Profit Industrial Complex is a term used to describe the system of relationships between the State, the owning classes, foundations, and non-profit/NGO social services and social justice organizations that results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements.⁵⁷

Whiteness: A polemical rubric for analysing the way in which the white peoples of Europe constructed and perpetuated a discourse which uses skin pigmentation as a political marker and privileges their own skin colour above all others. It is a polemical term in the sense that although the term race has been around for centuries, it was rarely if ever applied to white peoples, as though to say only people of colour have race. As is also obvious, the very notion of people of colour implies that being white is somehow the standard against which skin pigmentation should be measured and judged. But by the same token, it is the existence of those racialized others that gives whiteness its meaning. Critical analysis of whiteness seeks to expose the falseness of its position as the ‘natural’, ‘normal’, or ‘given’ term in any debate about skin colour. Whiteness studies is a sub-branch of Postcolonial Studies.⁵⁸

White Supremacy: White supremacy more precisely describes and locates white racial domination by underscoring the material production and violence of racial structures and the hegemony of whiteness in settler societies. The concept of white supremacy forcefully calls attention to the brutality and dehumanization of racial exploitation and domination that emerges from settler colonial societies.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ See note 54.

⁵⁶ See note 54.

⁵⁷ Gilmore, p.43, see note 5.

⁵⁸ Buchanan, Ian. "A Dictionary of Critical Theory." Oxford Reference. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001/acref-9780199532919>.

⁵⁹ Bonds, A, and J. Inwood. "Beyond White Privilege." *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 6 (2016): 715-33.