Growing a Network of Outdoor and Environmental Leaders

Findings from the Pilot Year of The Network for Network Leaders

September 9, 2023

PREPARED BY

Informing Change

PREPARED FOR

Justice Outside and The Lawrence Hall of Science

"This has been a powerful cohort. The sessions and exercises we employed have had a profound impact on me as an individual. These positive impacts are having ripple effects on my network. Furthermore, the knowledge and understanding I've obtained has helped me as a leader to facilitate a more inclusive and equitable network."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

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OVERVIEW

The Implementation Team

In 2020, through support from the **Pisces Foundation**, **Justice Outside** and **The Lawrence Hall of Science** ("The Lawrence"), collectively "the Implementation Team," collaborated on a multi-year project to design a scalable model for building individual network leaders' capacity to strengthen the **outdoor and environmental education field** ("the field").

Drawing on prior research and exploratory evaluation findings produced by Informing Change, the Implementation Team designed and implemented a pilot model for a 'backbone' network in 2021. This model aimed to engage network leaders from across the country with the goal of advancing justice and equity in the outdoor and environmental education field.

The Network launched in March 2023 and concluded its pilot year activities in August 2023.

Application Process & Participants

The Implementation team interviewed 32 of 33 applicants and selected 19 leaders based on a careful review of their application materials scored by two members (one each from the Justice Outside and The Lawrence).

Leaders represent 12 states working at various sub-national and regional levels. Nine leaders identify as leading an established regional network, six lead an emerging or newly developed network, two belong to both an established and emerging network, and two leaders would like to launch a network.

The Network Theory of Change

In the pilot year, The Network Implementation Team focused on achieving two **outcomes** as described in the theory of change (see **Appendix**):

- Leaders develop capacities to influence their networks and make the outdoor and environmental education field more inclusive and equitable.

- Leaders share and learn equitable outdoor and environmental education approaches and practices that can be implemented in each leaders' context.

To achieve these outcomes, the Implementation Team integrated **two strategies** to achieve these outcomes:

- Supporting personal and professional relationship-building and wellness

- Strengthening knowledge and capacity about anti-racism, equity, and justice

Pilot Year Activities

The Network consisted of:

- A three-day, in-person kick-off event held in Oakland, California

- A series of virtual engagements, including:

  - Two professional learning workshops (p. 11–12)

  - Affinity spaces (p. 13)

  - An open space conference (p. 14)

  - Individual coaching opportunities*

At the time of writing, some leaders were still in the process of receiving coaching, so that activity is not included in the report.

The Evaluation Partner

Beginning in 2020, Informing Change, the evaluation partner, informed The Network's design through an exploratory phase where we gathered perspectives on the needs of network leaders of color in the field, conducted a landscape scan of comparable networks, and worked with the Implementation Team to draft the theory of change and conceptual model design for the backbone network.

In the summer of 2022, we conducted additional focus groups with other network leaders in the field to hear feedback on The Network's design and proposed evaluation approaches. Evaluation activities began at The Network's launch in March 2023.

The Evaluation Questions

For the pilot, we sought to understand three broad questions:

1. What works and what can be strengthened in The Network design?

2. How is participation relevant and useful to members of The Network?

3. In what ways can The Network contribute to the outdoor and environmental education field long-term?

We explored these evaluation questions drawing on the methods described to the right.

Survey

We sent each participant (19 total) a unique survey link in June 2023 and gave them approximately three weeks to respond. We received a 90% response rate (16 complete responses and 1 partial). We did not hear from two participants.

Focus Groups

We conducted two focus groups with ten total participants in July 2023. The focus groups built upon the results of the survey and dug deeper into participants' goals for joining The Network, how their goals were met, and how they have applied or are planning to apply learnings.

Observations

The evaluation team observed the entirety of the three-day, in-person launch and all programmatic events. We did not observe the affinity spaces, out of respect for participants. We also recorded observations and participated in debrief meetings with the Implementation Team.

Gots and Needs

We reviewed the "Gots and Needs." These are short form open-ended questionnaires that participants complete anonymously after each program event. They are distributed by the Implementation Team.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

The Network was a very meaningful experience for participants.

According to participants, The Network was a unique and deeply meaningful experience. The sense of community, openness, and validation that participants described was unlike other networks and spaces in which leaders have participated.

The Network participants described other networks they have been involved with as superficial, costly, polarizing, or "business-driven." Although they did find value in participating in these other networks, they shared that the experience in The Network was distinct. Notably, The Network felt like an authentic experience that focused on individuals as leaders, and **genuinely elevated participants' leadership as people of color**.

For example, one participant described these other groups—particularly those that included an equity and justice focus—as "*having a problem with understanding [equity and justice] and navigating it. Because as you elevate one group the predominant white group feels threatened, and they feel like we are taking something from them rather than celebrating the diversity, which is our communities and our work.*" By contrast, they noted that The Network was a space that was more supportive to the issues BIPOC leaders face.

"It was really about us as leaders, and as BIPOC leaders, and the struggles, and the obstacles, and the challenges that we face."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

"I just want to show appreciation and admiration, because it is the first cohort and it went really, really, well. I think it's very radical in terms that I haven't seen something like this in the past. The intentionality is really impressive to me and really inspiring."
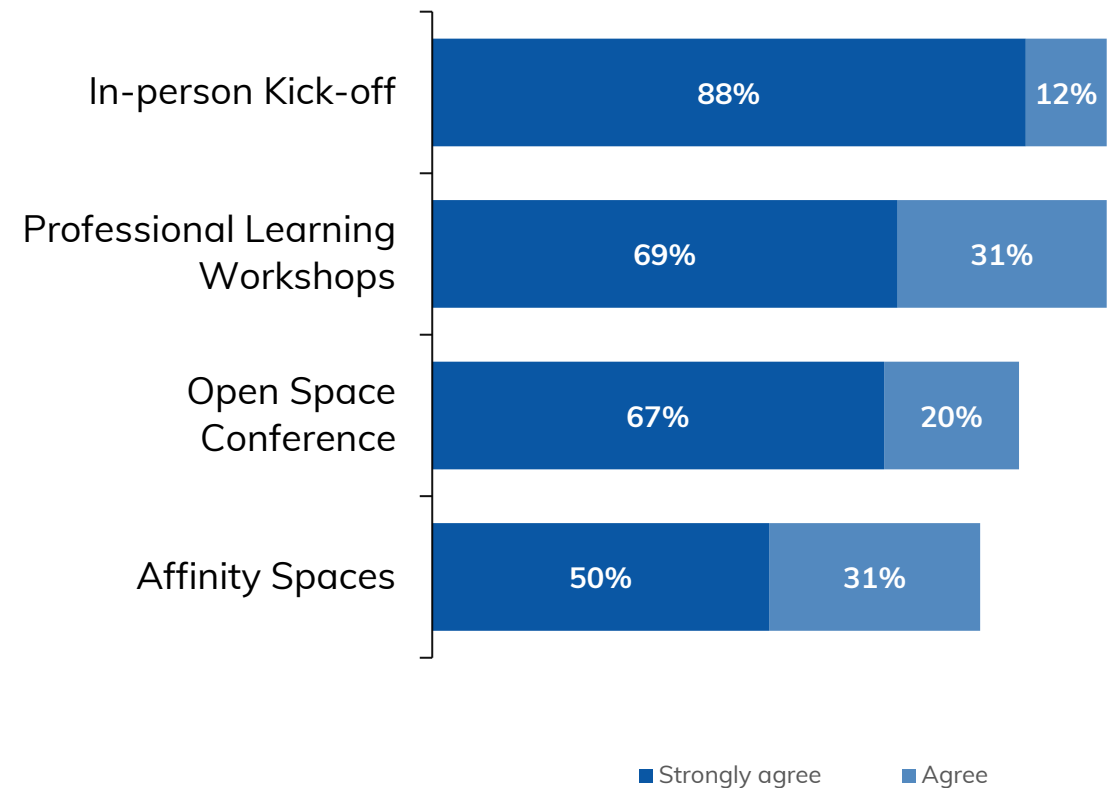
- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

Facilitation played an important role in participants' experience.

In addition to the importance of meeting other leaders of color, The Network participants praised the facilitation in The Network's spaces. According to them, facilitators managed to create a space filled with respect and authentic sharing and learning among a group of leaders with diverse racial identities, professional backgrounds, and geographic locations. One participant described the importance of facilitation by saying: *"Every time, I'm blown away by their facilitation skills, and especially how they adapted and evolved their approach based on the needs of our group. I felt really well-supported in terms of meeting [my Network] needs."*

"[The Network] was this really nice mix of sharing tools, and modeling, and leading us through our own journey with professional development without being talked to, and providing a lot of space for connection, and collaboration, and to evolve and change."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

EXHIBIT 1
Participants Who Agree or Strongly Agree the Events Were Well-Facilitated
(n=17)

	Strongly agree	Agree
In-person Kick-off	88%	12%
Professional Learning Workshops	69%	31%
Open Space Conference	67%	20%
Affinity Spaces	50%	31%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree

The Network attracted participants at different career stages with different goals and needed to cater to a variety of needs among participants.

The Network participants come from a wide range of professional and personal backgrounds. In their application materials, leaders described their motivation for joining The Network. These typically fell into three broad categories:

- Growing and developing professionally
- Growing or developing a network
- Being in a community with like-minded individuals

In surveys, we asked participants to reflect on why they joined The Network. The highest-rated reasons included meeting others doing similar work (88%), developing the skills necessary to grow their network (82%), and becoming a better network leader (82%) (**Exhibit 2**).
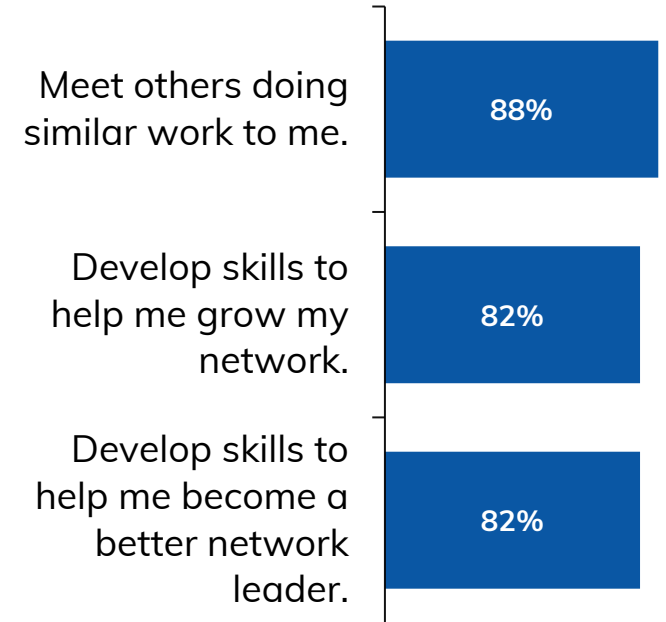
Leaders of emerging and established networks differed in motivations in a couple of ways:

- Compared to leaders of *established networks*, **leaders of emerging networks** were more likely to report joining as a way to learn new frameworks or strategies **to advance equity work as a leader** (89% vs. 63%).*
- Compared to leaders of *emerging networks*, **leaders of established networks** were more likely to state that they were motivated to join as a way of advancing equity in the outdoor and environmental education **field more broadly** (88% vs. 67%).**

Other notable findings include:

- Only 65% of participants said that **feeling a sense of joy and excitement** about working in the outdoor and environmental education field was an important reason for joining The Network, initially.
- Some participants explicitly named **prior experience with Justice Outside and The Lawrence Hall of Science** as motivators for joining because of the work these organizations have done.

EXHIBIT 2
Top 3 Reasons for Joining The Network
(n=17)

Reason	%
Meet others doing similar work to me.	88%
Develop skills to help me grow my network.	82%
Develop skills to help me become a better network leader.	82%

* This was the joint fourth most popular choice and is not shown in the graph above.
** This was the joint fourth most popular choice and is not shown in the graph above.

The Network started with a three-day, in-person kick-off event held in Oakland.

The kick-off event was the most intensive portion of the pilot year. The Network members participated in two and a half days of activities where they connected with each other and reflected on their strengths as network leaders and the needs of their networks.
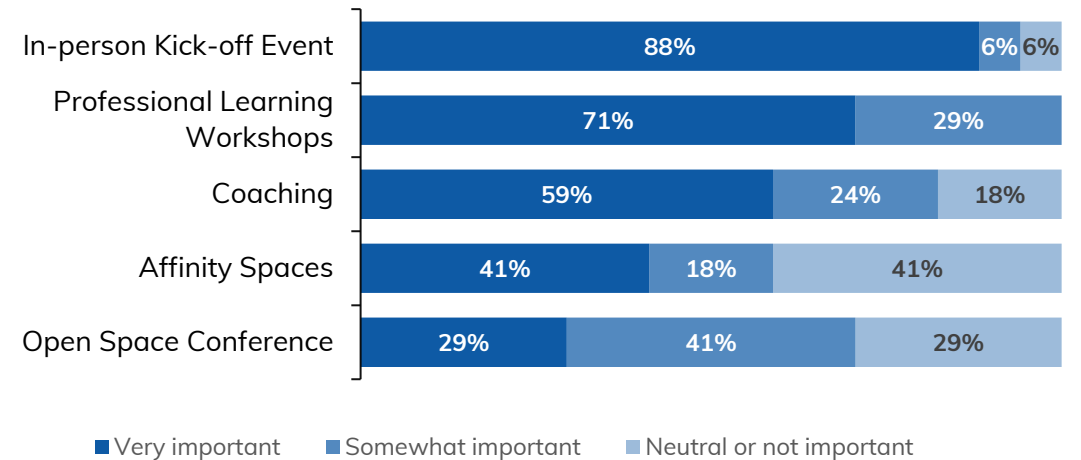
Participants were introduced to the Social Change Ecosystems framework that allowed them to identify core roles and actors within their networks—which roles were filled, and which roles needed to be filled—in the context of participating in social change movements and collective organizing. They also reflected individually and in pairs about their visions for their networks and their role in achieving this vision.

Virtual Engagements

During the in-person kick-off, the facilitation team led participants through various brainstorming and discussion exercises to determine the content of virtual offerings. Participants selected the following:

- **Two professional learning workshops:** Participants rank-choice voted on 13 options for professional workshops developed in a brainstorming exercise during the kick-off event. Based on the results, the first professional workshop featured a panel of Black and Indigenous network leaders who shared their experiences centering BIPOC narratives in their work. The second professional workshop featured Junious Williams, a senior advisor at Collective Impact Forum and long-time social activist and impact organizer. The Network participants learned about foundational practices to achieve community change, the elements of collective impact, and strategies for centering equity in collective impact.

EXHIBIT 3
Importance of The Network's Events in Individuals' Decision to Participate
(n=17)

	Very important	Somewhat important	Neutral or not important
In-person Kick-off Event	88%	6%	6%
Professional Learning Workshops	71%	29%	
Coaching	59%	24%	18%
Affinity Spaces	41%	18%	41%
Open Space Conference	29%	41%	29%

- **Individual coaching opportunities**: Two hours of individual coaching with other professionals in the field to serve as an opportunity for exploring ideas and advancing leaders' work.

- **Affinity spaces:** Affinity spaces provide a space for individuals with shared identities to connect across lived experiences and are intended to spark joy and healing while mitigating power dynamics that can occur in larger, mixed groups. There were two affinity spaces sessions during the pilot, one for racial identity and one for career affinity.

- **An open space conference:** An open space is a self-organizing model for conversations where participants propose topics and collectively decide on an agenda for which topics to address.

## The in-person kick-off was a moment of joy of connection for participants.

Almost all participants (88%) said the kick-off event was "very important" in their decision to join The Network—more than any of the other offerings of The Network—and the importance of the gathering was felt differently by different participants.

One person shared that it was meaningful to conduct activities in-person that increased their sense of "unity" and of empowerment within the field of outdoor and environmental education. Another individual felt the time in-person was useful because the co-creation and openness of the space differed starkly from other highly hierarchical experiences they have had in other environments. Another person highlighted that they have not encountered many funded opportunities in the outdoor and environmental education sector to do something like participate in The Network.

Every single participant who attended the event said it contributed "a lot" to their **sense of joy** and all but one participant left feeling **connected to other members of The Network** (**Exhibit 4**). At the end of the in-person experience, participants were left feeling energized, supported, and clearer about the needs and strengths of their networks.

EXHIBIT 4
Contribution of the In-Person Kick-Off to… (n=15)

	A lot	Some	A little or none
Sense of joy as a network leader	100%		
Feeling of connection to other members of The Network	93%		7%
Leadership growth and development	87%		13%
Building your professional network	73%	20%	7%
Understanding of inclusive and equitable approaches for your network	67%	33%	

■ A lot ■ Some ■ A little or none

"[The kick-off event] was so meaningful to build new relationships with other leaders. In addition to the many things I have learned from everyone, I think this space also provided me with some clarity on where I can heal from the challenging aspects of this work. I was beginning to lose faith in my ability to do this work in a healthy, sustainable way, so thank you so much for the energizing opportunity."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT
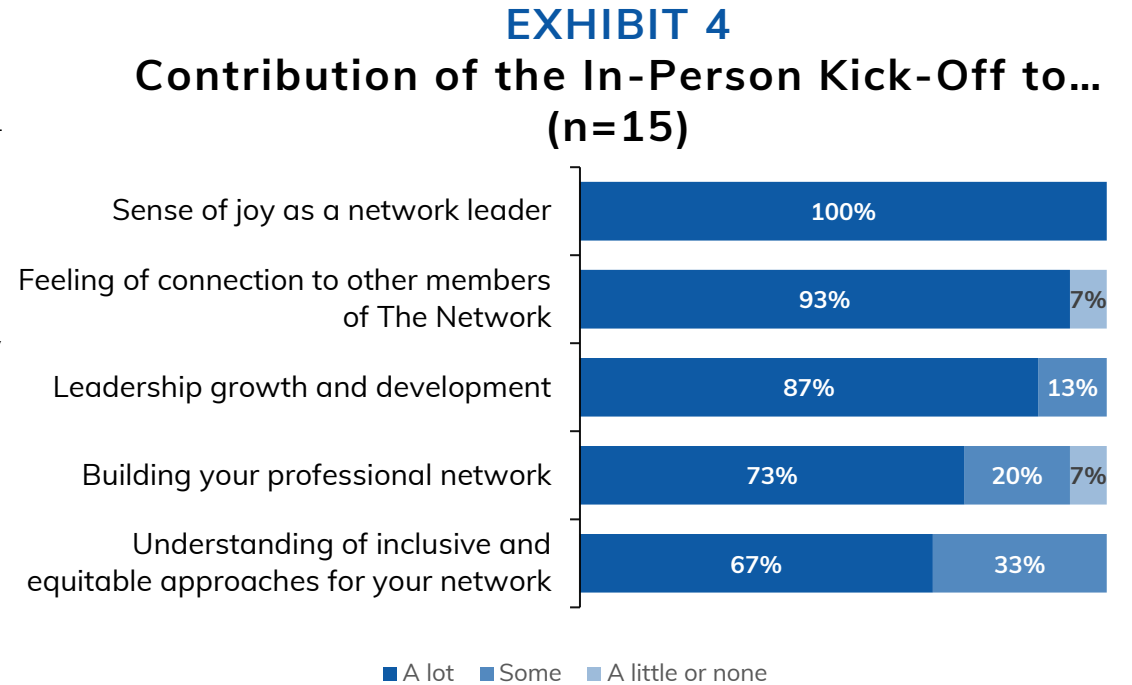
Centering Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Outdoor and Environmental Education Work

The first professional workshop featured a panel of Black and Indigenous network leaders who shared their experiences centering BIPOC narratives in their work. The panel discussed issues of access to outdoor spaces, their relationship to land and people on that land, and shared ways in which to practice leadership while caring for themselves and their community. Panelists shared concrete examples of lessons learned in creating programs to meet the needs and desires of their communities.
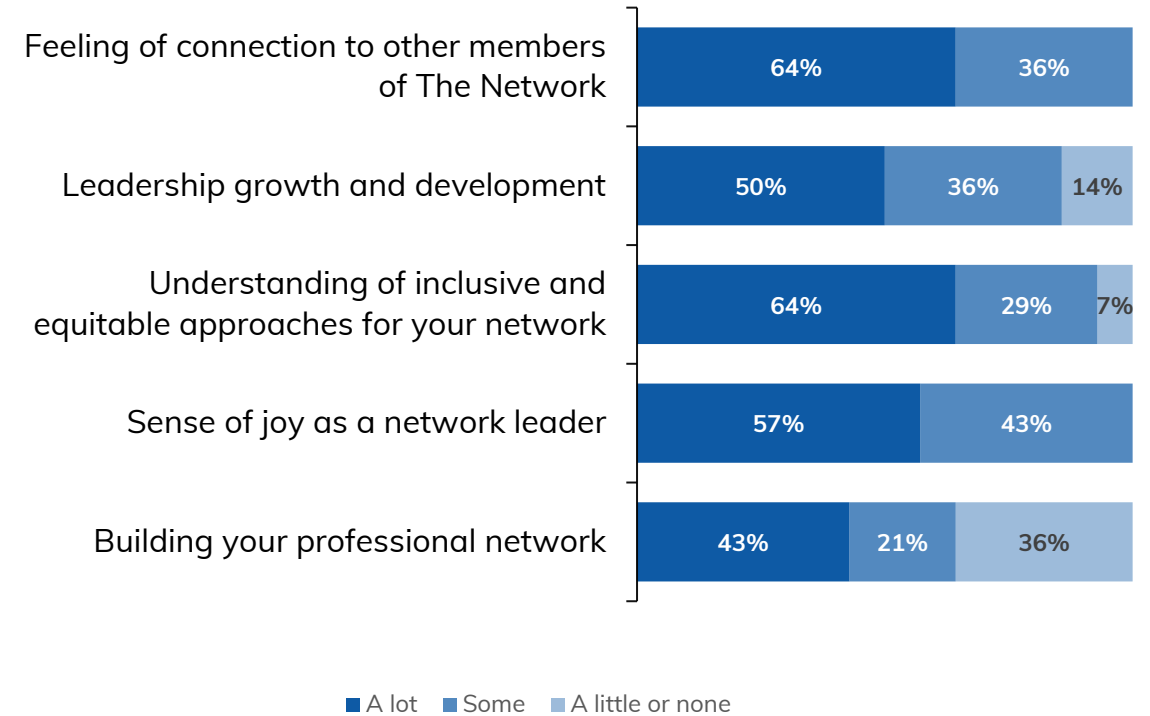
For almost all participants (93%), this workshop contributed "some" or "a lot" to their understanding of inclusive and equitable approaches for their network. It also contributed to every single participant's sense of joy as a network leader (**Exhibit 5**).

Participants described learning about:

- Transportation alternatives to increase outdoor access.

- Overlooked aspects of organizational culture and operations to centering BIPOC narratives.

- The importance of BIPOC representation within organizations.

EXHIBIT 5
Contribution of Professional Workshop #1 to…
(n=14)

Category	A lot	Some	A little or none
Feeling of connection to other members of The Network	64%	36%	
Leadership growth and development	50%	36%	14%
Understanding of inclusive and equitable approaches for your network	64%	29%	7%
Sense of joy as a network leader	57%	43%	
Building your professional network	43%	21%	36%

■A lot ■Some ■A little or none

One participant shared they planned to meet with their board to move away from focusing purely on regional representation and toward creating an inclusive organization. Another participant noted how the dominant narrative that outdoor and environmental education work is "so White and White dominated" should be challenged: BIPOC individuals have been part of these movements for generations, and the presence of so many BIPOC leaders working in the field coming together in The Network was inspiring and a testament to BIPOC involvement in outdoor and environmental movements.

Collective Impact 2.0 and Strategies for Centering Equity

The second professional workshop featured Junious Williams, a senior advisor at Collective Impact Forum and long-time social activist and impact organizer. The Network participants learned about foundational practices to achieve community change, the elements of collective impact, and strategies for centering equity in collective impact.

Participants felt inspired and called to action during the workshop. The conversation included issues such as:
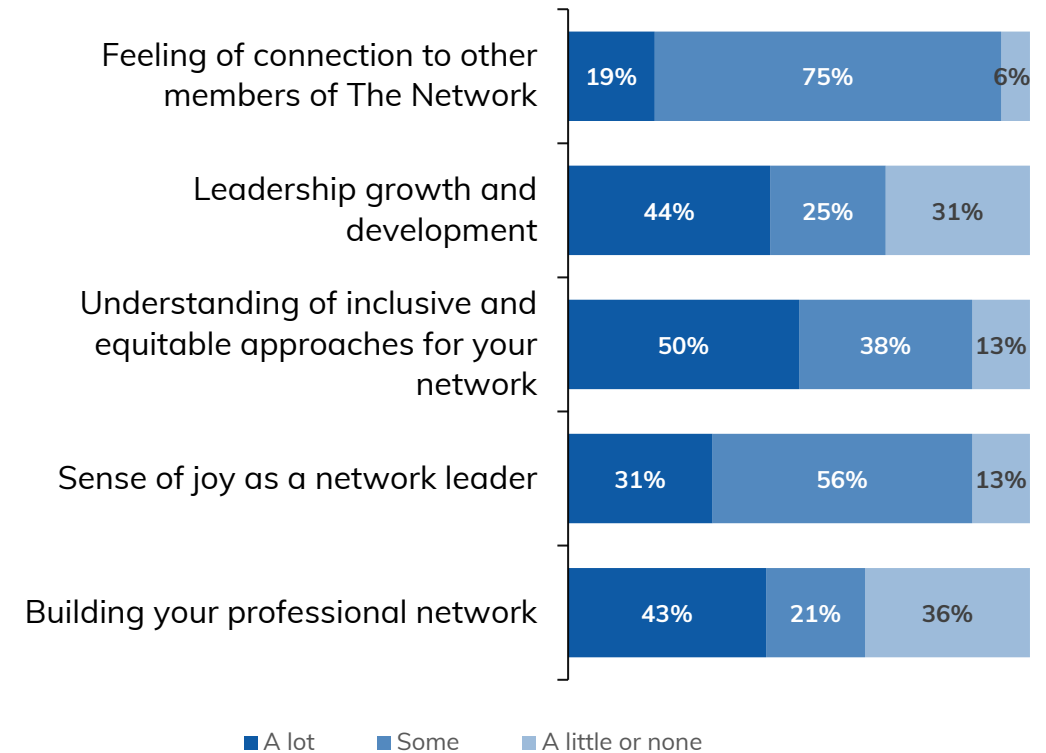
- Funding
- Building community across race
- Shifting power to bring more community voices to decision-making tables

Two participants shared they planned to bring these ideas to their organizations and inter-agency working groups. Participants were eager to distill the major concepts from this workshop to apply to their work; some asked for specific articles or ideas to frame these discussions within their organizations.

We observed a high level of engagement in the workshop Zoom chat—participants were sharing resources, ideas, and describing concrete ways this working fit into their work. One participant was in the middle of a grant application where they describe using collective impact as a method, and this workshop helped clarify how to frame the use of collective impact as a lens rather than a method.

In the Gots and Needs, participants describe feeling inspired to make changes to job descriptions, build relationships with other organizations, and think more critically about their board recruitment and its involvement with the organization.

EXHIBIT 6
Contribution of Professional Workshop #2 to… (n=16)

Feeling of connection to other members of The Network: 19% A lot, 75% Some, 6% A little or none

Leadership growth and development: 44% A lot, 25% Some, 31% A little or none

Understanding of inclusive and equitable approaches for your network: 50% A lot, 38% Some, 13% A little or none

Sense of joy as a network leader: 31% A lot, 56% Some, 13% A little or none

Building your professional network: 43% A lot, 21% Some, 36% A little or none

■ A lot   ■ Some   ■ A little or none

Affinity spaces **contributed to leaders' sense of joy** (**Exhibit 7**).
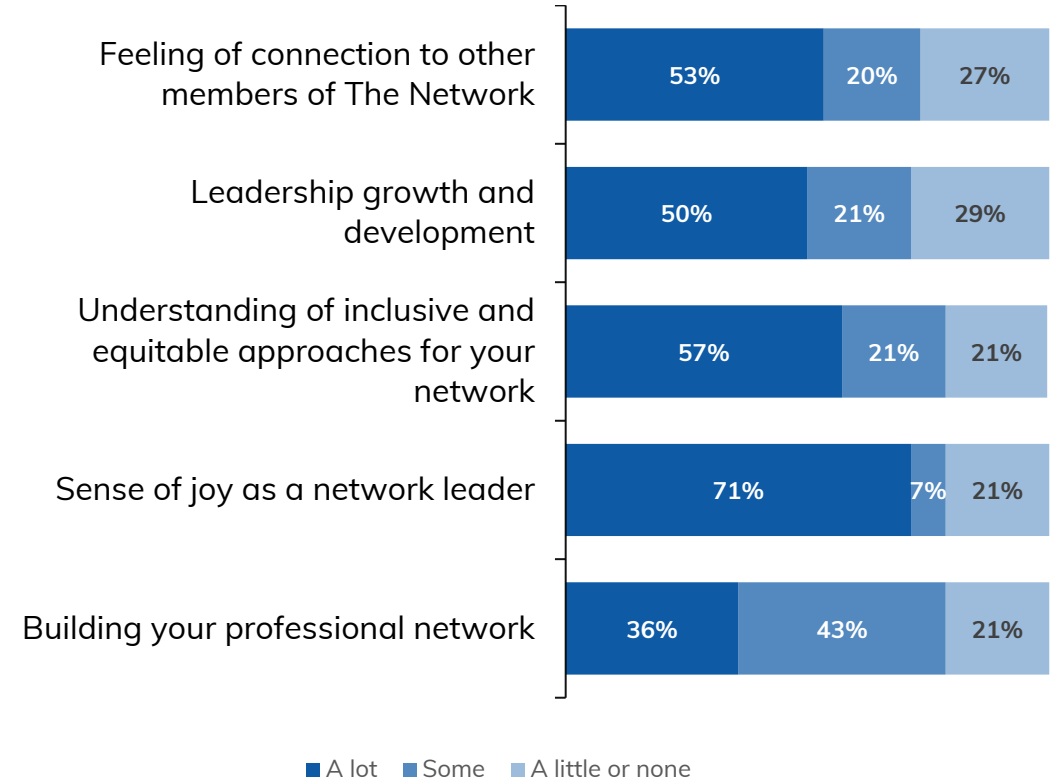
Participants who responded to the Gots and Needs also agreed that creating affinity spaces strengthened their connection to others with whom they shared the space. One participant shared the they *gained "validation and support."*

At the same time, some participants felt isolated during racial affinity spaces if they were the only person of that racial identity. Because there were only 19 participants, it was challenging to create spaces where all identities were represented. Other participants felt that they purposefully wanted to be in similarly structured spaces that allowed them to interact with individuals with identities different than their own because their network involves work with communities that have many different racial identities.

"I really appreciated both spaces for different reasons. The racial affinity space allowed me to be vulnerable and open and share challenges unique to my racial identity, which was tremendously valuable. The work experience space was a great resource share opportunity, with a lot of suggestions relevant to current challenges and opportunities."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

EXHIBIT 7
Contribution of the Affinity Space to...
(n=14)

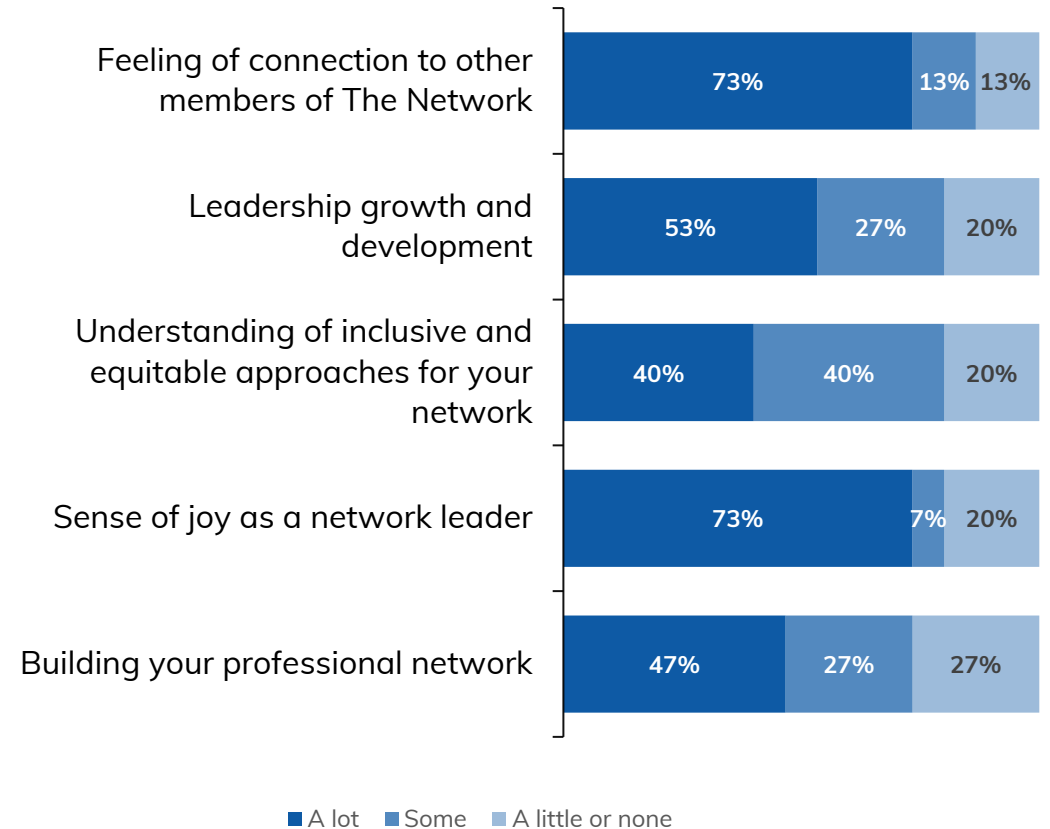|	A lot	Some	A little or none
Feeling of connection to other members of The Network	53%	20%	27%
Leadership growth and development	50%	21%	29%
Understanding of inclusive and equitable approaches for your network	57%	21%	21%
Sense of joy as a network leader	71%	7%	21%
Building your professional network	36%	43%	21%

■ A lot ■ Some ■ A little or none

Almost three-quarters of participants felt that the open space contributed "a lot" to their feelings of connection to other members of The Network (**Exhibit 8**). Participants fully engaged in the generation and decision-making about the topics to discuss. Topics ranged from ideas for maximizing partnerships and maintaining positive relationships, to discussions on preventing burnout and centering wellness, to supporting undocumented immigrants and groups that work with youth.

Some participants noted that the experience of the open space highlighted the importance of learning *from* each other as BIPOC network leaders.

"I love the open space conference. I thought that was super cool that we were using all the wisdom that we already have and come together to learn from each other. I think that's also really special and defies some systemic issues because we're always told that we are not doing enough or that we don't know enough."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

EXHIBIT 8
Contribution of the Open Spaces to…
(n=14)

	A lot	Some	A little or none
Feeling of connection to other members of The Network	73%	13%	13%
Leadership growth and development	53%	27%	20%
Understanding of inclusive and equitable approaches for your network	40%	40%	20%
Sense of joy as a network leader	73%	7%	20%
Building your professional network	47%	27%	27%

■ A lot ■ Some ■ A little or none

Nearly all participants agree or strongly agree that the application and outreach materials were accessible and inviting and that communication with The Network facilitators was effective (**Exhibit 9**).
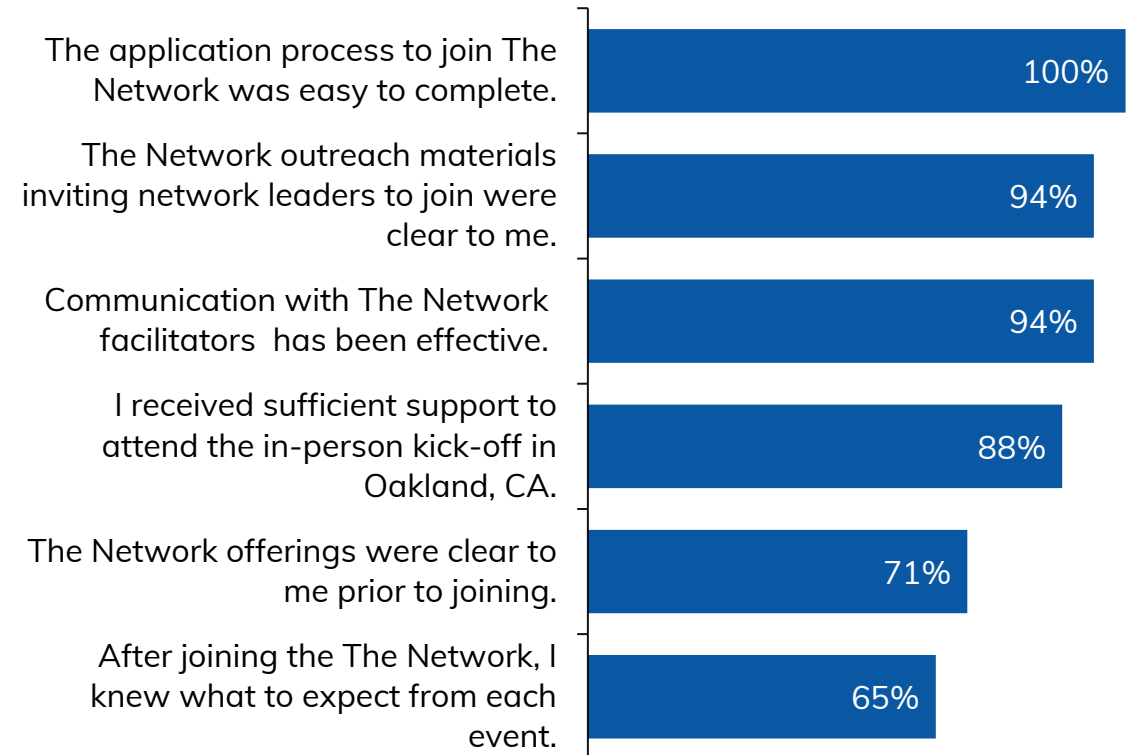
Many participants appreciated the co-creation and shifting to new approaches according to the needs of the group. For one participant, this felt like an important aspect of the experience. They appreciated the facilitation team because "*the team set up a space for us to be brave, we were able to walk a collective journey where we were improvised and created new agenda items as we went along, i.e., the mapping activity we did on the last day, and the powerful conversation that we had after that activity.*"

For some participants, however, the collective design approach was challenging; perhaps because they desired a more pre-determined structure.

When asked **what could be improved**, participants suggested:

- Additional clarity about what to expect at each event.
- More clarity from the start about The Network's offerings and activities.
- More opportunities to connect with each other by ensuring contact information was shared early, offering additional times before or after the gathering for informal connections, or establishing an online platform to connect.
- More events like professional workshops, coaching hours, cross affinity topic spaces.

EXHIBIT 9
Participants Who Agree or Strongly Agree the Event Logistics Were Well Executed (n=17)

The application process to join The Network was easy to complete.	100%
The Network outreach materials inviting network leaders to join were clear to me.	94%
Communication with The Network facilitators has been effective.	94%
I received sufficient support to attend the in-person kick-off in Oakland, CA.	88%
The Network offerings were clear to me prior to joining.	71%
After joining the The Network, I knew what to expect from each event.	65%

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

Participants are increasing their personal and social capacities to create more welcoming and inclusive networks.

We asked participants about changes in their understanding or knowledge of the necessary capacities to increase their leadership and make their networks more equitable. **The Network was most helpful in teaching participants about approaches to center joy and healing (Exhibit 10).**
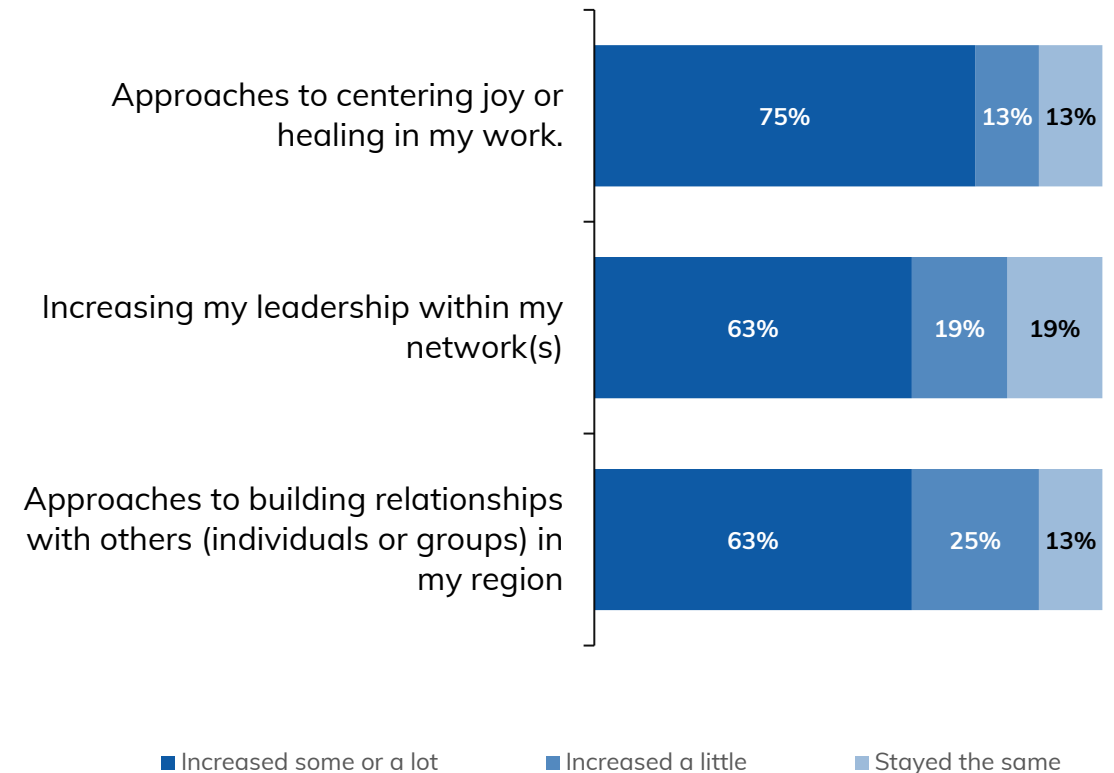
The Network was designed and facilitated to model these principles, and participants appear to find this relevant and transferable to their own work and networks. This was particularly true for leaders of emerging networks— 88% increased their understanding of how to center joy "a lot" or "some" (compared to 63% of leaders of established networks).

In focus groups, some participants told us they had joined The Network with the goal of feeling less isolated and tokenized within their networks and their own organizations, and because they felt a responsibility to "be good stewards" of the networks they had created. The Network met these goals by bringing together a group of leaders who had knowledge and experiences to share *and* providing a space for relationships to flourish.

"The space that the team created for us felt so healing, felt like we could connect at that heart level, and see each other in the work that we do."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

EXHIBIT 10
Changes in Understanding of…
(n=16)

Approaches to centering joy or healing in my work.
75% | 13% | 13%

Increasing my leadership within my network(s)
63% | 19% | 19%

Approaches to building relationships with others (individuals or groups) in my region
63% | 25% | 13%

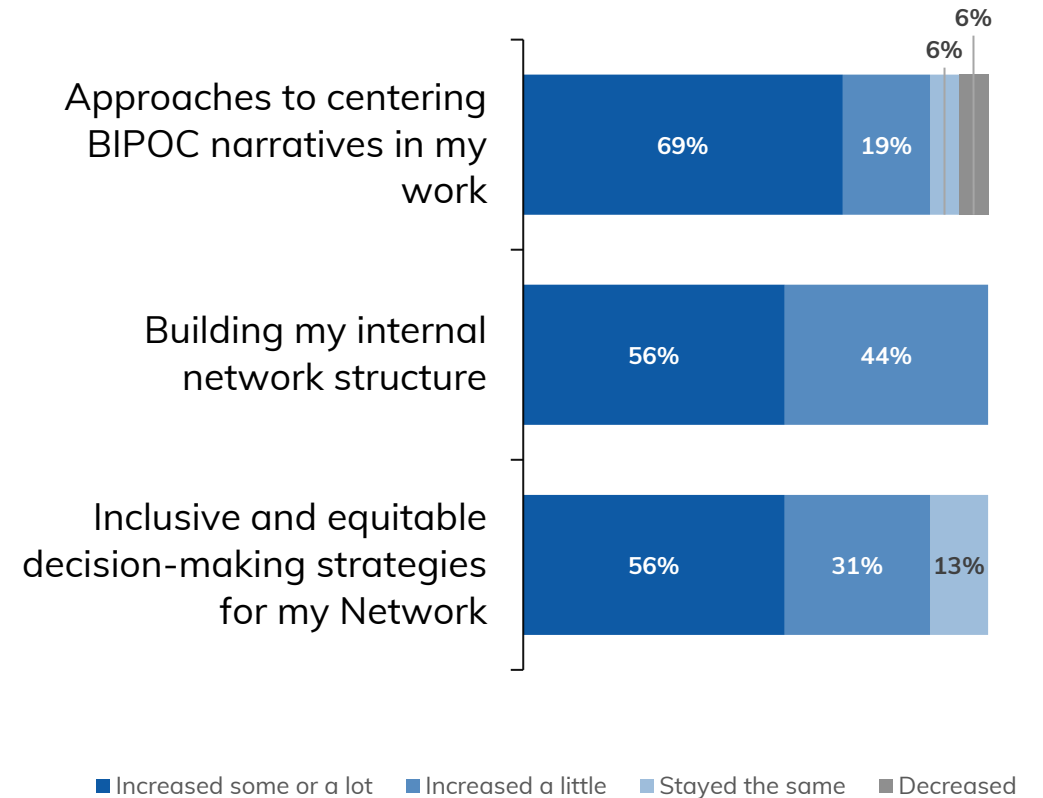■ Increased some or a lot   ■ Increased a little   ■ Stayed the same

The Network has increased participants' awareness of ways to center the experiences of BIPOC communities and expand the scope of their networks.

All but two participants felt they learned about approaches to centering BIPOC narratives (**Exhibit 11**). This was particularly true for leaders of emerging networks. All leaders of emerging networks (100%) increased their understanding of how to center BIPOC narratives "a lot" or "some" (compared to 38% of leaders of established networks).

All participants increased their knowledge of how to build their internal network structures at least "a little" (**Exhibit 11**). Of all the capacities we asked about, this was the only capacity where *all* participants saw growth. The activities of the in-person kick-off event, and especially the Social Change Ecosystem framework and network mapping, helped participants conceptualize their network structure and identify gaps and strengths.

In focus groups, some participants described their goals for joining The Network as wanting to "broaden my network outside of the more traditional outdoor and environmental education world," or seeking a "better network frame" for their network. Everyone we spoke to felt that the network supported their growth and development through concrete tools or simply by exposing them to the networks, ideas, and questions of other leaders of color.

EXHIBIT 11
Changes in Understanding of…
(n=16)

	Increased some or a lot	Increased a little	Stayed the same	Decreased
Approaches to centering BIPOC narratives in my work	69%	19%	6%	6%
Building my internal network structure	56%	44%		
Inclusive and equitable decision-making strategies for my Network	56%	31%	13%	

■ Increased some or a lot   ■ Increased a little   ■ Stayed the same   ■ Decreased

The Network is supporting participants in building power in their communities and their networks.

We asked participants how The Network is helping their power-building and efforts to concretize community goals and interests. Participants agreed that The Network was supporting their efforts by:

- Investing monetarily in leaders of color. For one participant, this was an important aspect of The Network because it is one way to signal that participants' efforts and networks—and participants themselves as leaders of color—are valuable.

- Bringing leaders together and creating lasting bonds. Participants felt that they could reach out to others in The Network for support with petitions or campaigns, or to brainstorm ways to adapt ideas to their own contexts.

- By modeling what it takes to create a sense of empowerment in a network. Participants appreciated the facilitation of a space that welcomed vulnerability and connection and felt like they could model that for their own networks.
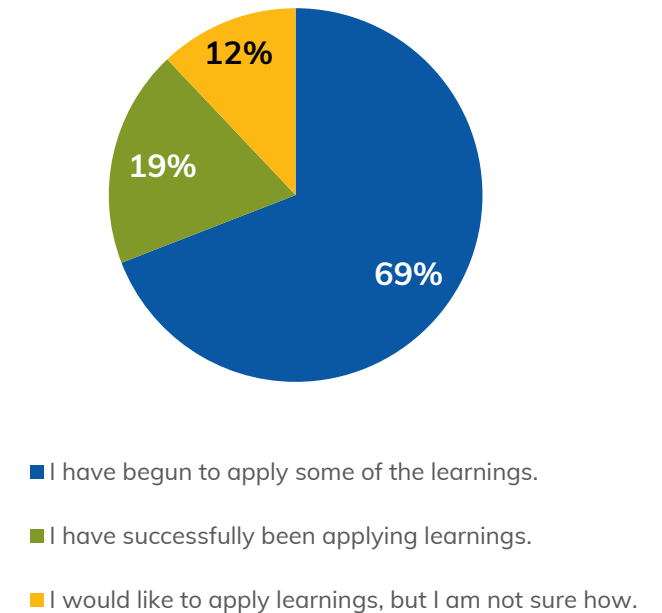
"What comes to mind for me is the fact [Justice Outside and Pisces] did invest in all of us monetarily, by bringing us out to connect all of us. That shows me, and therefore shows my bosses, that there's value to what we're doing, that somebody else believes in us enough to make this opportunity available for us."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

"[The Network] allowed me to justify expanding our scope of work...we're no longer using environmental and outdoor learning. We're going to use place-based, community-based education so that it is based on community priorities, and students are learning in place about their local communities and the ecosystems they currently live in, and what came before and what's going to come in the future."

- THE NETWORK PARTICIPANT

About 88% of participants have begun applying or have already applied some of the learnings from The Network to their networks (**Exhibit 12**). In the survey, participants who said they had successfully applied what they learned all identified as leaders of *established* networks. In the survey and subsequent focus groups, participants shared some of what they have applied or plan to apply:

- Planning to disseminate what they learned in The Network through various conferences and educational events tied to their work.

- Expanding the scope of their work and moving away from traditional environmental education to community-based education based on community priorities.

- Increasing community decision-making within their network. One participant is planning to create an application for a youth mentorship program for students in rural communities and hopes to recruit mentors from The Network.

- Feeling justified in showing care and value to participants in their work networks instead of being transactional. This person spoke with their leadership team and now provides food and other signs of appreciation to members of their advisory board.

- A desire to learn more and affirm Indigenous perspectives. This can start with small things such as learning and valuing the Indigenous names of spaces—whether those spaces are still known by those names or not.

- Applying the Social Change Ecosystems framework in a retreat at their work and are using the learnings to modify how they are conducting the search process for a steering committee hire.

- Participants also report gaining a more nuanced understanding of what it means to center Black, Indigenous, and people of color in their work, and are actively working to create more inclusive networks.

- Recruiting one person from The Network to their network's board.

- Applying facilitation techniques learned in The Network.

EXHIBIT 12
Participant Application Learnings from The Network
(n=16)

■ I have begun to apply some of the learnings.

■ I have successfully been applying learnings.

■ I would like to apply learnings, but I am not sure how.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

We asked participants about the learnings that would be most helpful in advancing their work and the activities that would most contribute to their leadership.

Activities

Participants were clear that **ongoing opportunities to connect with each other** would be the most valuable type of activity (69%) moving forward. Some participants suggested using ongoing meetings to share successes and progress toward their goals, as a space for mutual support, or to create a "bigger movement." One participant suggested a focus on political action and organizing. It is difficult to maintain momentum against very large and well-funded opposition groups.

Participants are also eager for The Network to continue onto a second cohort. Some participants would welcome the opportunity to continue honing their skills through continued involvement in The Network.

Some **suggested more individualized support throughout The Network**, like finding a mentor from the beginning of the program or 1:1 touchpoints to discuss progress toward their goals.

Other suggestions for future activities **include increasing the reach of The Network** through marketing or by finding avenues to **connect with leaders in other networks across the country**. One participant suggested continuing to **share information about conferences and grants**.

Learnings

Participants shared a wide range of additional learnings that would be helpful in their work, but **the most consistent topic was funding**. Participants want to support their networks and find funding streams to grow their work. Participants have a feeling there is not much funding available but acknowledge the need to move away from a deficit mindset.

Many participants are still seeking to bring formal structure to their network and noted that **organizational models and concrete network structure examples** would be helpful. These participants are eager to learn about some tangible organizations or groups that are applying elements like those discussed in The Network. One participant suggested that more information from Collective Impact Forum would be useful. Some participants are also curious about ways to increase participation within their networks and expand their reach. One participant hoped for "actual tools" to engage their community.

Participants want additional opportunities to network and hear from each other. One participant shared that they are exploring ways to demonstrate collective impact with their own network and want to leverage those learnings to secure funding. This person hoped to engage in discussions like that with other members of The Network beyond the cohort.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATION

Future evaluations may want to explore some of the additional and more tactical changes leaders are hoping to achieve.

When we asked participants during the kick-off meeting how they would know if they were advancing toward their goals, many wanted to see **tangible changes in their work**, including:

- Access to increased funding opportunities
- Tracking legislation
- Ideas for software to maintain connections
- Application of specific tools and frameworks

Participants also hoped for **leadership gains** such as increasing their capacities to:

- Create advisory boards
- Develop new leaders within their own networks
- Successfully navigating conflicts

Participants also hoped for changes in their **community engagement:**

- Increase participation and visitation to public lands
- Investing in community-based leadership and hiring local talent
- Collective action and solidarity with each other's efforts
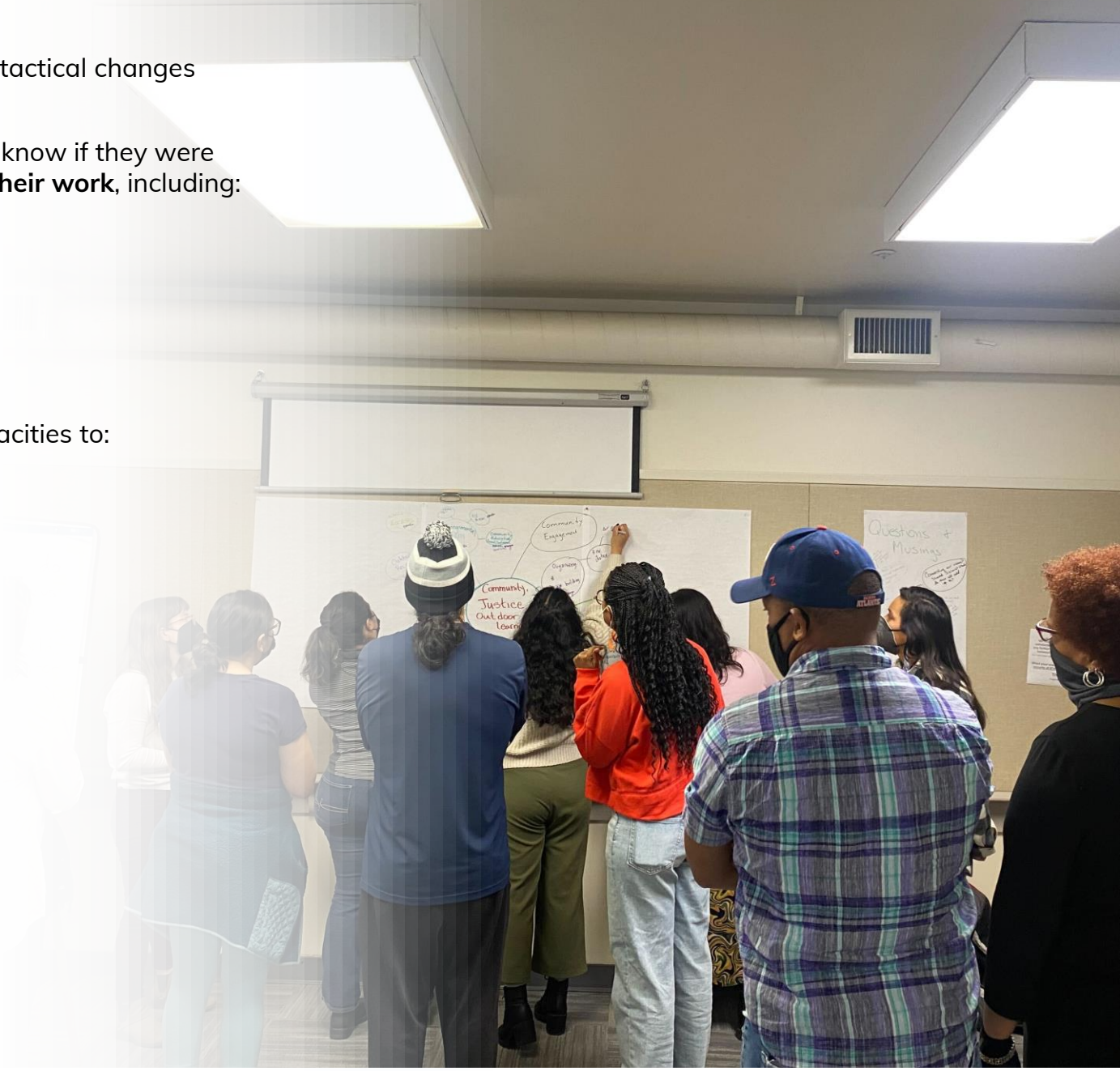
APPENDIX

The Network Theory of Change

CONSTITUENTS

- Leaders of established subnational networks, prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of color.
- Leaders of emerging or newly developed networks, prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of color.

ASSUMPTIONS

- The outdoor and environmental field includes organizations often led by people of color that may not explicitly identify as being environmental education-focused. Resources and support systems for these educators and organizations have often been under-invested or inaccessible.
- The experiences in the field, as well as the approaches towards the outdoors, and the environment from Black, Indigenous, and people of color are essential to develop effective practices and programming and to strengthen engagement with the outdoors within every community.
- The outdoor and environmental field too often excludes or limits the full participation of staff and constituents that identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color.
- Networks are important to field-building, strengthening organizational capacity, developing new insights as well as sharing existing approaches and practices, and sustaining organizations and collaboratives.
- A backbone network for leaders of existing and emerging subnational networks can expand the influence and success of these networks to strengthen the antiracist, inclusive, and equitable outdoor and environmental field through dialogue and shared learning, co-creation and collective action, and relationship-building and social support.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Support personal and professional relationship-building & wellness

- Affinity spaces—particularly based on racial identity
- Mentorship
- Wellness and self-care resources and programming
- Social events

Strengthen knowledge and capacity about antiracism, equity, and justice

- Reflection, discussion, and learning spaces and opportunities
- Topical convenings and events
- Sharing existing and network-developed literature and guidance documents
- Understanding and advancing organizational systems change through antiracist lens

Accelerate networks' capacity to design with justice and equity principles

- Design labs and other co-design opportunities
- Promoting and supporting the implementation of equitable and just approaches

Support member-driven advocacy and awareness-raising

- Facilitate member-driven advocacy efforts
- Support publicity and social media campaigns
- Strengthen member capacity for effective engagement with funders and policymakers

Facilitate learning, strategic shifts, and awareness of the backbone network model

- Conduct ongoing assessment and evaluation of the subnational backbone network model
- Facilitate learning and reflection about the model among the Network coordinators, leaders, and members
- Document and disseminate lessons learned and guidance on implementing the network model

OUTCOMES

- Network leaders expand personal, social, organizational, and structural capacities to influence their networks and make the EE field more antiracist, inclusive, and equitable.

- Network leaders share, develop, and access equitable EE approaches and practices that are co-designed and collaboratively implemented at local, regional, and other subnational spaces.

- Greater retention and advancement of persons of color in staff and leadership positions within their subnational networks and the Network-affiliated EE organizations.

- Increased accessibility, membership, diversity, and community representation within and across EE-related networks nationally.

- Increased access to a replicable and sustainable model for a subnational backbone network that supports network leaders and the organizational capacity of their networks.

ULTIMATE IMPACT

To expand vibrant and thriving subnational networks that advance a more equitable, just, and influential outdoor and environmental field, centering the experiences and knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of color.

- *"I'm all about celebration, as you all can tell because we give so much...We give so much of ourselves, and this work is hard, and it's draining. So for me, in my work, I take a moment to celebrate everyone before we get to the business of the work at hand. I celebrate our successes, however small they may be."*

- *"I wanted to find a connection with individuals who are like-minded or were in their own way focusing on similar efforts. I think that I can say that everyone had their own way of making me feel positive about what I want to do. I learned a lot."*

- *"What was most meaningful to me was a lot of the authentic sharing that people did when we were talking to each other, or when we would partner up with each other, that you might not be able to share at work with your coworkers about the struggles you encounter at work."*