PANEL 2

Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion

by **Jennifer Boehme**

Panelists who contributed to this article include Alfred Otieno Achieng', Catherine Febria, Donna Kashian, Andrea Kirkwood, Kevin Obiero, Jess Owen, Ali Shakoor, Paul Sibley, and Ed Verhamme

The global pandemic gave heightened awareness to the well-being of the IAGLR community, as the impacts affected many research programs and personal lives of our members. The fact that these impacts are disproportionately affecting marginalized and underrepresented groups contributes to a growing need to understand dimensions of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) within IAGLR and beyond.

While COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter were top issues during IAGLR 2020 Virtual, IAGLR members had signaled the importance of addressing JEDI within the association a couple years ago in a member survey. As members of the IAGLR family, we are all impacted by what happens to our friends, neighbors, and colleagues. We can no longer remain complacent to issues that negatively affect them nor the communities in which we work and belong. Science-based organizations were called to action in the days and weeks leading up to IAGLR 2020 Virtual. Thus, IAGLR held a panel discussion during the conference both to begin listening to members' experiences and to reflect on how the organization can apply JEDI principles during this critical time and make them a permanent feature of IAGLR practice.

The discussion allowed panelists, who were members of the IAGLR community and its board, to field live questions from members and be an inclusive and open forum for both its people and its science. We seek a path forward to address potential systemic exclusion of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and other underrepresented groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ and those facing ableism) from full participation in the IAGLR community. As we strive toward further expansion as an international society, we must ensure that our actions and practices reflect the diversity of all IAGLR constituencies and elevate the contributions of all.

Panelists considered the goals of inclusion for IAGLR's international members and BIPOC, noting the importance of early education outreach and mentors to break down systemic barriers. Actions by BIPOC in IAGLR are not the answer, but rather non-BIPOC members are encouraged to act, beginning with authentic and concerted efforts to build trust within the IAGLR community and society. A persistent and consistent presence by scientists in the representative demographic was deemed critical for effective outreach to BIPOC communities to demonstrate an interest in and care for community well-being, as well as to draw a link between science and their place in the natural world.

> Commit to expanding networks to include BIPOC, build trust with local communities, and get to know communities of color in your region, understand their perspectives and expertise as naturalists, and the reasons that they are not taking part in the research and science community.

When asked about disparities between the demographics of our communities and those who apply for science opportunities, panelists noted that exposure and access to science and the natural world by BIPOC communities vary a great deal. Wider recognition of this point is needed to encourage organizations to prioritize steps to retain students from all backgrounds. Panelists encouraged members to commit to expanding networks to include BIPOC, build trust with local communities, and get to know communities of color in your region, understand their perspectives and expertise as naturalists and the reasons that they are not taking part in the research and science community. Moreover, panelists also encouraged individuals to begin to understand the colonial history, Treaty partners and Indigenous rights-holders in the regions where we live, work, and recreate.

Panelists also identified the importance of international participants sharing knowledge from other continents, and in particular, noted the need

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to increase participation of women from these other continents. Steps that IAGLR could take to further this goal include examining further options to defray travel, membership, or registration costs for IAGLR meetings, and pursuing partnerships with other societies to co-host meetings outside of North America. Such steps could also be considered for BIPOC members.

Participants raised the need for strategies to share these values with home institutions, including ways for those with privilege to use it to open opportunities to broader groups. The sharing of rewards by government scientists and faculty could provide underrepresented students with grant and workshop opportunities as well as field experiences to foster their training and passion for science. The current assignment of value for JEDI work by academic programs and leadership also presents a challenge. If service work is not a higher consideration for tenure, that limits participation for those seeking tenure even if they personally value service. As a community that values JEDI, we need to work to change this paradigm.

To realize a shared vision for a more just, equitable, and impactful IAGLR, a sustained effort will require all hands on deck within the association and include strong participation from the dominant demographic, white men. Panelists also observed that past promotion of colonial voices and perspectives over others via funding decisions is no longer servicing sustainability and science goals. This presents an opportunity for both top-down and bottom-up action to center research on local knowledge holders and needs. Investment in capacity and leadership by early career researchers through mentorship and investment in partnerships are examples of bottom-up actions that can take place immediately.

For JEDI to be a priority for the association, it was recognized that we as members must share the value of a more just, equitable, and impactful IAGLR society. For next steps, panelists will follow up with the IAGLR Board of Directors with recommendations noted below so that IAGLR can restructure its bylaws and charter as needed to codify its commitment to this important initiative. We call on members to continue to share experiences and knowledge and assist IAGLR in taking action.

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Proposed JEDI action items

Panelists indicated that a more welcoming IAGLR must include concrete steps by both the association and its membership. Their suggestions are listed below.

- Include more BIPOC and international representation in IAGLR leadership
- Support diversity mixers for students
- Be better listeners as scientists
- Center the research and input of diverse scientists on teams and funding opportunities
- Learn the names of Indigenous rights-holders and work towards understanding the relevant treaties in the places where we work, live and research
- Account for community needs when building a research program
- Serve as good role models and mentors
- Include students in future IAGLR JEDI initiatives and encourage people to join this work early in their careers
- Use our privilege to open opportunities to broader groups
- Share rewards via grant and workshop opportunities and field experiences
- Work to change the value assigned by academic programs and leadership to JEDI work
- Provide JEDI seminars at future conferences, including both the annual Conference on Great Lakes Research and the State of Lake conference series