



## Transformation through Practice and Community Building

Center for Whole Communities (CWC) recognizes that how we work is as important as what we do. We understand that it takes practice, commitment, community, and hard work to disrupt dominant culture norms that don't align with our liberation and our values. We offer a practice-based approach to build skills and awareness, alongside developing authentic relationships in a broader community context to support accountability in the change process.

Here are a few examples of our equity-centered leadership development and organizational system change work:

### Cultivating Whole Cities

In 2014, we embarked on our largest system change partnership to date with **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)** – collaborating to conceive and launch the [North America Cities Network](#), an initiative to develop an equity-centered approach to conservation in cities. What began with 10 cities in 2015 has grown into a vibrant network of city leaders and programs spanning the United States. The network has become a model for integrating equity in conservation across the Conservancy, supported by our foundational work to co-develop guiding structures and funding mechanisms such as:

- **Cultural Change** - integrating CWC's [transformative practices \[awareness, dialogue, working with difference, and story\]](#) into work like monthly Caucus Calls and the Racial Equity Leadership Lab.
- [Whole Measures for Urban Conservation](#) and the [Field Guide to Conservation in Cities](#)
  - developed as tools for centering equity in planning and implementation of conservation in cities. These resources have helped ensure that those most impacted by climate and environmental injustices directly benefit from conservation strategies and projects in cities.
- **North America Cities Partnership Fund** - a funding mechanism created to more equitably distribute resources to frontline community groups



In addition to capacity building work at the network level, CWC also engaged in place-based work around the country. For example CWC facilitated an ongoing multi-stakeholder partnership to address extreme heat and health in the greater Phoenix area. The [Nature's Cooling Systems Project](#) included partners ranging from Arizona State University and the Maricopa County Health Department, to small community-based organizations. CWC guided the adaptation of Whole Measures for Urban Conservation to the project, to ensure that community needs were centered, partnerships were equitable, research associated with the project was not extractive, and that all partners had an equal say regardless of size or relative influence.

We hope that the groundwork we've laid will continue to reinforce the Network's deep commitment to ensuring that conservation in cities makes a difference in the lives of those most likely to be impacted by pollution, climate change, toxic air and water, heat and hunger.

### **Vermont Conservation Leaders In Solidarity (VCLS)**

At a time when many white-led organizations and movements are investing in their own learning about justice and equity, CWC spearheaded a vision to create a structure for ongoing collaboration, equitable distribution of resources, and real changemaking. CWC is facilitating an 18 month long equity-based leadership training for a cohort representing white-led Vermont conservation organizations. By design, equal support flows to the Renews Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) Advisory Council, representing BIPOC leaders from grassroots and activist organizations across the state.

This collaborative effort attempts to address systemic inequities in how funding and capacity building resources flow, while honoring the crucial labor of BIPOC leadership in Vermont. It is our intention that these two groups of leaders will intersect and build relationships and connection, as the enabling conditions of trust, reciprocity, and commitment already exist. The VCLS group will strive to be accountable to our BIPOC colleagues, whom we will look to for leadership and wisdom in establishing more just policies and practices around land and conservation in Vermont.

### **People's Food and Farm Bill**

CWC, in partnership with Pie Ranch, University of California Cooperative Extension, Stanford University, 50+1 Strategies, and the Santa Clara County California Planning Department, has received a United States Department of Agriculture Regional Food System Partnership grant to support the development of a "**People's Food and Farm Bill**" for the nine counties that make up the San Francisco Bay Area foodshed. CWC is leading a community engagement process to develop a collective vision and policy priorities for a more just Bay Area food system. We will focus our energies on engaging those most affected by the current food system and those who work within that food system: as one partner puts it, "those with their hands in the dirt." As always, our participation is guided by our commitment to community and reciprocity in all aspects of our engagement.

### **Other system change engagements during 2020-2021 include:**

*Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS; University of California, Santa Cruz); Dairy and Water Coalition (Vermont); Farmers Voices Project (Vermont); Kresge Arts and Innovation Detroit (KAID); Planned Parenthood of Northern New England; Rural Environmental Justice Informed by Community Expertise Project (REJOICE Coalition; Vermont - with Vermont Law School Environmental Justice Clinic, University of Vermont Rubenstein School, Community Action Works, and Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity Mobile Homes Program); Shelterwood BIPOC/queer land based retreat and healing center; and more!*

