

The Power of Communal Coaching: Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens

In mid-2020, after the murder of George Floyd, and under the new leadership of President & CEO, Gretchen Ostherr, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens were seeking to take greater action for integrating the values of **inclusion, diversity, equity and access (IDEA)** across the organization - both internally and externally.

Their leadership team hoped to create operating principles, a focused organizational statement, effective policies and procedures, and a comprehensive training process for staff and volunteers. They had made important strides by creating an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access committee, and had made an organizational commitment to this work. Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens looked to do a deeper dive into their core principles in order for the Gardens to become a welcoming place to work and visit, and they understood they needed an expert to guide them through the process of action.

The Gardens hired **Up With Community** because they were looking for a thoughtful partner who understood that diversity, equity and inclusion, leadership development, and strategic planning need to be integrated with relationship building for wider organizational growth. Up With Community's interdisciplinary approach would offer a holistic pathway for organizational change. They were also interested in the benefit of Up With Community's landscape mapping approach: taking the time to conduct one-on-one interviews with staff, document review and team observations to create a personalized training plan that would fit the needs of their organization.

Values-Based Tools for Teams

After the mapping process, UWC could pinpoint the strengths of the Gardens's organizational values, as well as identify what tools could be most useful for achieving their long term goals. UWC delivered these tools in an all staff training session providing the insights the Gardens needed to adapt their new learnings across teams.

After the all staff training, UWC met with cross-functional teams, and encouraged them to apply the training towards specific projects. This strategic practice helped teams to reinforce workshop teaching in real time while also working towards benefitting the culture

as a whole. The tools and processes the team developed not only taught them to work together efficiently, but deepened their equity practices. “What I didn’t notice right away is that the processes we were learning also created a space for equity to thrive,” Gretchen Ostherr, President and CEO, reported.

In addition, UWC worked with the leadership team to draw from their initial IDEA Committee goals, such as aligning their board more deeply with their values, in order to strengthen relationships throughout every part of the organization. The board proactively applied their learnings, and integrated the tools throughout their board activities and policies. The board were committed partners in both learning and action.

After some time with their values-based tools and learnings, UWC encouraged Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens to use these new skills independently. For the Gardens, this meant taking their training model to seasonal staff and volunteers. This allowed the organization to build the muscles they need for continued growth while simultaneously creating clearer processes for everyone to follow. Staff at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens have excelled at putting their learning into practice, and creatively expanding their learning year after year.

Creating an Independent Coaching Model

Ostherr said this whole-system approach gave staff the power to build their own focused training model. The thoughtful, incremental work built the knowledge, skills and capacity of staff to lead work without external support. As needed, UWC remains available for ad-hoc support, or for specific, new training topics, and staff at the Gardens are effectively implementing their IDEA values throughout their work in new and expansive ways.

“The brilliance of UWC’s approach,” said Ostherr, “is how to work together well. We’ve learned that being inclusive and being equitable is best for the overall effectiveness of our organization.”

Ongoing Impact

With a customized training model in place, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens is now seeing the impact of their learnings through their seasonal guests to the gardens. Marissa Stewart, Human Resources Director said, “When processes are repeated, and staff and volunteers can reinforce their learnings, they see the impact on the guest experience. I believe we are really creating a place of belonging.”