

2021-22

# JEDI Reflections

Between May and November of 2022, Dogwood's Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Team undertook a reflection process to assess the organization's progress on its commitments and goals. The team used questions posed in the 2020 report *EDI in B.C.'s Environmental Movement* to prompt reflection. This document attempts to summarize those conversations. You can read more about the methodology in Appendix A.

We believe working towards justice, equity, decolonization and inclusion is intrinsically right — it requires no other justification or motivation. We have a responsibility to challenge oppressive systems (white supremacy, colonial violence, patriarchy, etc.) in all our work, in our ways of being, and in our relationships with one another.

Dogwood also recognizes advancing JEDI values is strategically important. In order to change the balance of power and disrupt the status quo in B.C., more people-power is needed. If Dogwood's base and constituency remains narrow, that will impact what we do, how we are seen, who we can authentically work with and what we are able to achieve. That's why building a broader and more diverse constituency has been our overarching goal for both 2021 and 2022.

Upholding JEDI values is necessary for a thriving team, and a thriving team is necessary for

Dogwood's success. We wish to co-create an authentic, dynamic, caring work culture and team community. An inclusive and accessible environment for staff and volunteers is also crucial for us to attract and retain talented people with diverse lived experiences, including those from equity-seeking groups.

Dogwood exists within colonial and unjust systems of finance, government and social norms. The organization's existence inherently validates these systems, in some ways unavoidably. We can, however, identify systems of oppression with our supporters to spur reflection, conversations and action that can lead to disrupting and eventually dismantling these systems. To begin to dismantle these systems, the majority of people and groups benefiting from them must know they exist and want to change them.

Dogwood's strategic framework, developed in 2020, sought to embed JEDI into every level of the organization — for each individual, organization-wide among our workforce and volunteer base, and at a community and societal level through the work we do.



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This strategy is based on a few key hypotheses. First, that Dogwood can and should act as an entry point for privileged people to engage with concepts of justice and work in solidarity with racialized or marginalized communities. Second, that it is possible to build trust-based, reciprocal relationships and continue a political organizing model that sometimes uses rapid-response tactics. Third, that building a more diverse constituency will also require a diversification of staff, volunteers and messaging, bringing in perspectives and lived experiences outside of white dominant culture that will better inform how we deploy actions to whom, and to what end.

These hypotheses have driven the work Dogwood has undertaken in 2021 and 2022 to fulfill JEDI commitments, goals and objectives. The remainder of this report reflects first on external work, then on internal efforts.

## 2021–22 Results — External

### Bridging

We wish to build or find bridges where existing supporters and allies may join in solidarity with those on the frontlines of the climate crisis. This means also removing barriers that might be preventing communities from entering the bridge from either side. While we hope to open opportunities for new people to cross towards us and for existing Dogwooders to cross towards them, we also see the importance of meeting in the middle, at the intersection of our goals, to find mutual benefit and greater collective power.

Dogwood needs to ask not only how we can bring more people to our mission, but what gifts Dogwood can offer others who share common goals.

Some strengths that Dogwood can offer as potential gifts to others include:

- Organizing skill and experience
- Political strategy, and history of political wins
- Large base of volunteers and supporters across BC — can amplify stories, spread information and mobilize people
- Relationships and connections
- Communications and outreach capacity
- Third party fundraising
- Experience using a unique non-profit governance structure

So, how has it been going? Decolonization training for volunteers, our webinar with Gitksan land defender Kolin-Sutherland Wilson in 2021, and supporters participating in the Wet'suwet'en Peace & Unity Gathering in 2022 are a few examples of work that provided Dogwood's current base of supporters and volunteers opportunities for learning, unlearning and solidarity action.

A rapid response team, formed in 2021 and made up of volunteers and staff, is one attempt at crossing a bridge. The team has mobilized for moments like standing outside law courts when sentencing is being handed down to frontline activists, or acting as witnesses when young Indigenous leaders rally outside big banks.

Dogwood staff have provided analysis of Indigenous rights issues to our audience, amplifying on-the-ground messaging from frontline actions and providing behind the scenes staff support for Indigenous allies when requested — particularly in Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en territory and for the Tsleil-Waututh led rally to reignite opposition to TMX in early 2022.

In 2022, Dogwood hired a Surrey organizer as part of investing in bridges to Sikh and South Asian organizations.

We must keep showing up in order to gradually build trust. Dogwood should listen and be of service to those on the front lines of the climate crisis. In this way, we can actually deploy our resources to uplift and amplify on the ground efforts where it's needed, and build the kinds of deeper connections needed in order to face current crises, and those still to come. The organization has made more space for people throughout the organization to proactively build relationships. At the same time, folks are strengthening relationships through rapid-response or campaign-based partnerships that advance Dogwood's strategic goals. In fact, sometimes rapid response is where Dogwood can best show up with gifts and resources.



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## Redefining ‘civic engagement’ and key issues

Grounding our mission in democracy, decolonization and decarbonization (‘the 3 D’s’) gives Dogwood a framework to approach our climate work from different angles, and allows us to take a wider view of the issues facing different communities in B.C., why they’re happening, and how Dogwood can help foster change.

Dogwood’s decolonization work is our strongest attempt at intersectional environmentalism, not just by recognizing the negative impact of fossil fuel infrastructure construction and extraction on Indigenous communities, but also in finding ways for our supporters to stand up for Indigenous rights and jurisdiction more broadly — holding colonial governments to account.

We also expect that our bridging and relationship-building work, if successful, will necessarily broaden and shift the kinds of climate and democracy issues and tactics we pursue as new people and perspectives join our constituency and guide our priorities.

Over the past two years, Dogwood has mobilized supporters to pressure local governments (no gas in new builds; get gas out of class), petition the provincial government stop funding fracking and pushed supporters to participate in the B.C. government’s Oil & Gas royalty review. Dogwood also asked supporters to file complaints with the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) after officers’ violent treatment of Indigenous activists.

The former are examples of more “traditional” civic engagement that have been core to Dogwood’s work for many years (canvassing, petitioning, attending city council meetings, rallying and encouraging participation in elections). But what if some communities, including ‘racialized’ communities, are not attracted to Dogwood’s forms of civic engagement?

Our Organizing and Strategy teams have started piloting new approaches to reach communities beyond our current base of supporters, educating folks about how climate change exacerbates challenges they’re already facing, and finding ways Dogwood might be able to help alleviate some of those stressors.

The VPD complaints action was one attempt to broaden civic engagement and solidarity practices.



But we recognize we need to go further. Nearly one in four people in B.C. are new to this country and have had wildly diverse experiences with politics and community engagement in their countries of origin. Then there are Canadians whose families have been here for several generations, with unique cultural, political and religious traditions. For example, many Sikh families, after being farmers for generations in India, now have deep roots in B.C. They also trace back to the largest democracy on the planet.

Acting as witnesses when invited is also a new form of “civic” engagement. In addition to the rapid response team, Dogwood staff and volunteers were invited to attend a water ceremony on the banks of the Fraser River in 2021. This invitation to be present and learn was a creative way for us to engage and help build bridges.

Dogwood’s organizing program also experimented with deep canvassing — longer conversations with people who might not agree with you — in the summer of 2022. The tactic seemed to be a natural way of easing back into talking to people one-on-one after two years of the pandemic. It was also a chance to remind ourselves that we need to grow our base of speakers of other languages, especially those prevalent in B.C.

***Dogwood is committed to expanding our base of supporters, and developing campaigns that appeal to (and benefit) a wide-range of people and communities. While new relationships are slowly taking root, we have a lot more work to do***





## Building a broader constituency

Since 2021, Dogwood's annual priority has been to expand and diversify the constituency committed to its mission. While new relationships are slowly taking root, we have had to come to terms with the fact that expanding our base of supporters is a lofty goal and won't happen immediately. Most of Dogwood's work over the past two years served to sustain our existing base of support and relationships. When seeking to both sustain and expand our constituency, there are constant tensions over allocating resources,

most of the relationships with Indigenous leaders and groups, increasingly the Campaigns Manager is developing closer relationships with allies fighting Coastal Gaslink and the Trans Mountain Expansion (TMX). Dogwood's staff organizers are deepening relationships with environmental NGO and grass-roots allies, and developing some new connections. Our Vancouver Organizer continues to support the youth leaders of the Vote16 campaign — she and others have relationships with youth climate justice groups. And our Surrey Organizer is now working to make connections and develop relationships in that city.



choosing issues and tactics and avoiding pitfalls like brokering transactional relationships and tokenizing.

As we move forward, Dogwood will need to prioritize working alongside and within non-traditional climate activist spaces primarily for the benefit of the community; secondary will be Dogwood's goal to grow and diversify our supporter base.

The small steps taken so far by staff and volunteers in learning protocols of Indigenous communities has been extremely valuable and instructive. Dogwood continues to tread lightly, partly due to white fragility, but also out of respect. While our Director of Communications & Campaigns previously held

Dogwood cannot develop and maintain relationships with every Indigenous nation, organization or group in the province. Nor with every equity-seeking organization, group or community. How to choose or accept — and maintain — these relationships in a mutually respectful, reciprocal and equitable way is an ongoing challenge that we are addressing by trying, acting, learning, listening and reflecting. Sometimes we do get direct feedback that feels more organic and authentic. But there is likely more effort needed to seek feedback from folks impacted by Dogwood's campaigns and political organizing work.





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## 2021–22 Results — Internal

### Workplace culture & structure

Dogwood has undertaken several efforts to uphold JEDI within the workplace over the past two years, but we have scant information from those directly affected by those efforts. A June 2022 annual staff survey suggested morale was high at the organization, but may not get at the nuances of cultural change.

Observations from members of the JEDI team included: George's interactions with staff suggest a shift from overwork and urgency culture over the past several years; Christina has experienced change over time as a long-time staff member and sees the Executive Team actively striving to advance equity and inclusion; Bonnie sees that Dogwood is invested in trying to change the way the organization works — and there is still room for improvement.

Tokenization has happened at Dogwood and is something we must remain vigilant about. The focus should be on how staff with privilege — whether they are in the majority or not — are behaving and relating with their colleagues. These are the people who must work to prevent tokenization and adjust expectations.

Among white staff, most share a desire to improve themselves and take responsibility for learning, and for the impacts of their behavior, not intentions. Two areas where we have tried to tread with care are the current Surrey organizing position and the makeup of Dogwood's JEDI team.

Our Surrey organizer was hired because she is highly qualified and had existing connections in the community. Where we need to take care and improve is ensuring that the rest of Dogwood staff are not making assumptions, generalizing about a certain group of people or expecting any one staff member or volunteer to speak for everyone who shares their identity.

After our strategic planning work in 2020, a JEDI working group was formed with volunteers from staff and board. As a result, the group was all white women. In 2021, the permanent team was structured to have one representative each from the bargaining unit, Board of Directors, Executive Team and volunteer teams. Representatives are chosen by lottery on the assumption that JEDI work is everyone's work and



every Dogwooder might reasonably expect to take a turn on the team regardless of their background, experience or identity. At the same time, those selected may opt out if they do not want to serve on the team at that time or feel it would be a disproportionate burden for them.

Developing and implementing a new hiring policy also gave many staff the opportunity to reassess what we value in applicants and colleagues, questioning “standard” valuations of a person’s record that are often code for bias.

Some other efforts to make Dogwood a place where a diverse array of people want to work include: a new work arrangements policy, allowing for better-supported remote, hybrid or office-based work; developing a program to provide coaching support for BIPOC staff; and implementing the wage and policy changes of the collective agreement. We still have much to do to shift away from white dominant culture, colonial practices and privilege as the default “normal” (middle class, urban, heterosexual, white, nuclear family, etc.).

## The non-profit industrial complex and fundraising

As a non-profit seeking to stretch donors’ money for as much mission impact as possible, we will never be able to compete with salaries in other sectors. Collective bargaining allowed Dogwood to correct some concerning salary inequities that had built up over time, and guarantee that salaries would go up annually. It also opened up conversations about important things like paid time off and benefits. This ensures that all employees are paid decently and our salary structure is transparent, but it allows little room to consider monetary compensation for the additional emotional and relational labour often performed by staff of equity-seeking identities.

Dogwood is not beholden to major donors or grants. For the most part, our development team holds strict boundaries for funding, promoting existing ideas and programs already in the works. New

ideas from funders are considered, but pass through a rigorous process in order to change or add to our mission and strategic plan.

If there’s a tactic or campaign we think would serve our strategic mission, we find the funding regardless if a major third party contributes. In those times, when the moment or movement moves us, we do take ourselves away from our base. Ideally, these are self-fulfilling endeavors: taking on new campaigns/actions not familiar to our base can bring in a more diverse set of supporters who may want to fund that work, as well as bring along and motivate our existing base.

While it’s true groups like Dogwood would cease to be necessary if B.C.’s most pressing issues were solved, there appears to be no shortage of new battles on the horizon. Staff members work earnestly; there is no perverse incentive to fail in order to protect our own job security or livelihoods. This value-based determination is built into our culture allowing us to set audacious goals, and then take bold steps to achieve them.

Existing as a non-profit only circumscribes Dogwood’s political activity insofar as the need is infinite while the money we are able to raise is finite. We don’t believe that being part of the non-profit industrial complex is hampering our activities currently, but it is important to keep asking ourselves whether funding sources align with Dogwood’s mission and values; and whether we are shying away from working for system change or from disruptive political tactics?

Indeed, we are committed to continuing to ask ourselves all these reflection questions annually to keep Dogwood accountable to its JEDI beliefs, goals and commitments.

# Appendix A

## Methodology

Dogwood's permanent JEDI team was established in October 2021 with the purpose of advancing Dogwood's external and internal JEDI work, and holding the organization accountable to its commitments and goals. The team also seeks to track progress, setbacks or hurdles in JEDI work in an honest, transparent and thoughtful way.

Bonnie Sauder served as the representative from Dogwood's volunteer teams and Laura Benson as the Executive Team representative. Until spring 2022, Ingrid Kastens and Adam Bailey served as the Board and staff representatives, respectively. George Radner and Christina Smethurst replaced Ingrid and Adam for the remainder of 2022 and participated in this inaugural JEDI reflection process.

The team decided to use the discussion questions contained in the EDI report as the prompts for reflection. We edited down these questions, then divided them up between team members based on areas of representation or expertise. We used the draft 2021–22 Annual Report as baseline data about results and outcomes.

Each member wrote reflections from their perspective, then discussed those notes with the full team at a series of meetings. Then each person summarized the discussion notes for their assigned questions. If you'd like to read even more, you can find the original questions and full discussion summaries [here](#). Finally, Laura attempted to combine all those summaries into this report. The full team reviewed the draft report, then shared with staff, board directors and volunteer leaders for their feedback.

