

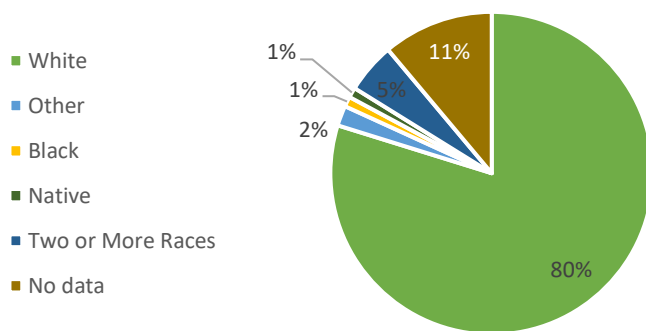
# 2020 Community Understanding of Systemic Racism in Environmental Education

On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, Upham Woods hosted a discussion on systemic racism in environmental education which was attended by educators and curious community members around the state. Participants were surveyed in order to evaluate the event, gauge our community understanding of systemic racism in this field, and determine areas for further research and next steps. This discussion was a planned activity to follow through with commitments outlined in the [“Message to Our Community” disseminated by Upham Woods on June 5<sup>th</sup>](#).

## Demographics

Upham staff capped registration for the discussion at **100 participants** with **64 people** ultimately attending the event. **28 people** completed the survey shared after the event. Most participants who registered were white, with **8 times more white people than people of color** registered. While most participants were affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, other organizations and interested community members attended.

Racial Demographics of Registrants



Organizational Affiliation	%
UW-Madison Extension	39%
UW-Madison	4%
UW-Stephens Point	7%
Schools	14%
Nature Center	4%
Milwaukee County Parks	3%
Foundation	3%
Other	26%

Organizational Affiliations within “other” include: state and local governments, retirees or non-affiliated folks

## Event Details & Evaluation

The event used **ZOOM** as the virtual platform for the meeting since it had collaborative features like break-out rooms, participant screen annotation, and a group chat. All of these features were used throughout the **2-hour** meeting. The meeting was **broken into several sections** beginning with tone-setting (introductions, Indigenous recognition, community guidelines, purpose & background), then small group discussions, then case examples and of systemic racism in the field, followed with small group discussions, and closed with how environmental education can address these problems and what resources are available.

The goals of the meeting were to:

- (1) Better understand where our community understanding is on this topic so that we can better equip ourselves to meet that need
- (2) Establish a thinking community dedicated to creatively addressing eco-justice in environmental education.

To achieve these goals and provide direction for the meeting, organizers posed two questions:

- (1) How does environmental education perpetuate racism and injustice? And, how have your privileges perpetuated environmental racism and injustice within environmental education?
- (2) How has the legacy of environmental education determined access and inclusion today?


Strengths	Challenges	Recommendations
The small group discussions were the most valued by participants followed by the community guidelines.	Pacing of the meeting was challenging because there was so much content to cover.	Invest time in setting expectations. The case examples were considered “effective” by participants but more time in small group discussion was needed.

# Community Understanding

This data is informed by the 28 survey responses completed after the discussion and is specific to Wisconsin’s environmental education field.

## KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING

**82.4%** of respondents reported that they are “knowledgeable about the history of environmental education in Wisconsin.”

 **Almost 1 in 4** respondents reported that they **did not understand** how the history of environmental education in Wisconsin is connected to current inequities in the field.

All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understand how policies and institutional practices can perpetuate racism and injustice in environmental education.

### Policies & Practices described by participants as perpetuating racism in Wisconsin’s environmental field

1. The emphasis on neighborhood recreation
2. Over-representation of white folks at all levels
3. Focusing on issues that mostly interest white upper and middle-class audiences
4. The proximity of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities to hazardous waste sites

### Action Steps identified by participants:

1. Further cross-organizational collaborations (i.e. Wisconsin Association of Environmental Education)
2. Strengthen recruitment for diverse candidates
3. Invest time in relationship-building with communities
4. Organize work groups around this issue
5. Institutionalize land acknowledgements

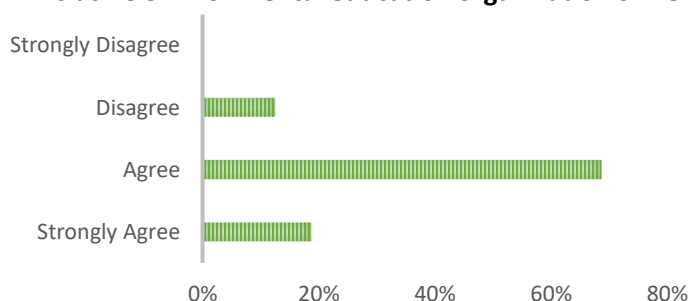
## CONCERN & ACTION

All participants shared that they were **concerned** that the field perpetuates racism and that they were **committed** to creating a more inclusive field.

However, **almost 1/3** of participants **disagreed that they had the resources and support** to do so.

Despite the lack of resources, **all** reported that they **plan to use their professional role** to create a more inclusive field.

### I know how to use my current role to work toward an inclusive environmental education organization or field.



# Inclusion and Accessibility Results from 2019 Status & Needs

Of the **93.1%** of respondents who considered their organization’s facilities to be **accessible or somewhat accessible** to visitors with disabilities, half (**50.5%**) have **never conducted an accessibility survey** of their site. The most **common accessibility-related training** that staff receive focus on **physical disabilities** (65.1%) and ways to encourage **communication and interaction among all participants** (50%).



Provide **training on diversity, equity and inclusion**.

Reported Accessibility to Visitors with Disabilities	Yes	Somewhat	No
Facilities	43.6%	<b>49.6%</b>	6.8%
Programs	38.1%	<b>56.3%</b>	5.6%

**40.3%** of organizations have **content or resources available in other languages**

You can find the full status and needs report from 2019 here: <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/environmentaleducation/>

**Upham Woods staff will issue the 2021 status and needs assessment for Wisconsin environmental education in the new year. We will continue to explore issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion with a particular focus on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.**

**Acknowledgements:** Thank you to all who attended the session and completed this survey. We would also like to thank The University of Wisconsin-Madison and the staff of the Office of Access, Inclusion and Compliance who reviewed this work. Thank you to the organizers: *Danica Hendrickson*, Doctoral Student, EdD Leadership & Innovation, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University, *Zaynab Baalbaki*, Milwaukee educator and activist, *Isabelle Herde*, graduate student at the Nelson Institute at UW-Madison, *Dr. Justin Hougham*, Associate Professor and Affiliate of the Nelson Institute, & *Zoë Goodrow*, Research Specialist at Upham Woods.