

FINAL
Sierra Club Board of Directors Nominee Questionnaire
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Question 1: The mission of the Sierra Club is “to explore, enjoy and protect the planet. To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives.” Why do you want to run as a Director for the Sierra Club Board?

One of the primary reasons I am running for the Sierra Club Board of Directors at this time is that life on the planet is in the great peril and the Club is in the midst of many tumultuous transitions. During these structural and philosophical ruminations and shifts, it is vital that the organization not let this mission lose its primacy as the focal point of all of our energy. Unfortunately, many members I have heard from feel that is exactly what is happening. I recognize the critical nature of the internal changes the Club is undertaking and their importance in truly achieving a just transition to a sustainable future, but I believe we need to do a better job integrating that internal evaluation and change with the external work required by the tenants of our Mission.

Question 2: The function of boards is to provide high-level oversight to organizations. Describe your leadership skills and type of experience you bring to this role, and how will it help you fulfill your position on the board?

Over the years I have served on a number of boards and executive committees, held the role of chair for many of them, participated in several strategic long term planning processes and engaged in several executive hiring committees. My style is generally to lead by example and to delegate to those most willing and capable of successfully fulfilling assigned goals. I believe praise and coaching to be far more effective leadership skills than any other strategies I've seen. That said, I also believe in being informed of all aspects of any organization I am involved in so that I can sense problems brewing under the surface before they become unmanageable. I believe in free, transparent and open communication — both vertically and horizontally — within an organization. I also believe in respecting confidences, unless communications fall within the bounds of the mandatory reporting requirements of restorative accountability. Board members should lead, but they must first be respected and trusted.

Question 3: Sierra Club recently adopted new values (Anti-racism, Balance, Collaboration, Justice and Transformation). Can you give an example of a time when you have lived out these values?

Well, I'm not certain I can cover all four in one example, though perhaps my time as a secondary science educator at New Roots Charter School — a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School located in Ithaca, New York — might encompass all five values. Though I retired from teaching, I still volunteer at the school, which is tuition free and accepts any student from a five county area. The school “engages students in learning actively, thinking critically, and solving problems creatively and collaboratively, developing the knowledge and skills to be 21st century solutionaries for a sustainable future.” I was an advisor for both the Green Team and the LGBTQ+ Group. Emphasis was on placed the health and success of the whole person as well as the cohesiveness and empowerment of the community. Instead of punitive disciplinary policies, mediation and restorative justice were practiced and decisions were made via a collaborative group process. The BIPOC members of the school community are a powerful motivating force for transformation and greater connection and collaboration with the wider community — which was (and is) a graduation requirement for all students. I incorporated many of the experiences from New Roots into my work in the Sierra Club.

Question 4: Sierra Club is committed to equity, inclusion and justice in all aspects of endeavors and at all levels, internally and externally.

a. How do you incorporate active anti-racism into your leadership with volunteers and staff?

Right at the moment, the lead volunteers and staff in our Chapter are predominately Caucasian, not by active choice but simply by default of who showed up. I and other volunteer leaders in the Chapter are actively seeking to engage BIPOC members to step into leadership roles. Until that is successful, we are working collaboratively with a number of environmental justice organizations and Indigenous Nations around the state, with their voice being given priority while we take the supporting role.

Currently, we are working in collaboration with several other groups to improve Indigenous engagement in the regulatory process — i.e. meaning the developers and the regulatory agencies seek Free Prior and Informed

Consent from the First Nations before they start the permitting process.

Being particularly sensitive to colonizing language — the language of oppression — in all interactions is another way of bringing to light the insidious nature of white supremacy and patriarchy, so I try to highlight that whenever I can for volunteers and staff.

b. How do you ensure an equitable and just transition to tackling climate change?

This question could be interpreted many different ways. First, those people who work in industries driven by fossil fuels and nuclear power need to be retrained and ideally be able to find comparatively compensated employment in the new sustainable economy. Schools and communities that have relied on taxes from those same industries must be provided alternative means to replace that source of revenue. Those communities — environmental justice communities — that have born the heaviest negative impact from the sources of and results of Climate Disruption must receive the largest share of relief (this is basically how the just transition is defined in New York State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act). The same holds true for nations — those nations responsible for the largest portion of the damage should be responsible for equitable compensation to those most harmed.

Question 5: One of the significant ways Sierra Club accomplishes its mission is through political engagement. What can Sierra Club do better to develop a more energized and robust grassroots movement that will participate in the political process?

A great deal of increased political engagement would be possible with more rapid and timely communication. Every state operates on a different legislative calendar and has different legislative priorities. If we want to increase lobbying and engagement not just at the federal level, Chapters and Groups need to be able to access some means of nearly instantaneous state-wide email blasts for last minute legislative rallies, etc. COREs don't allow for this. We need to adopt or create some means to enable this immediacy of communication.

Question 6: Frontline communities are experiencing the adverse effects of climate change, environmental pollution, and limited access to resources. What types of relationships does Sierra Club need to nurture in order to be effective in advocating for environmental justice?

The first thing anyone must do — Sierra Club, or not — is to go into the community and really listen. Go to a coffee shop, a bar, a laundromat, a barbershop or anywhere local folks gather and simply engage in conversation and then listen. Let the people in the community voice their concerns to see if they are aware of the environmental justice problems known to exist there. If they are, offer assistance; if not, go to plan B. Seek out Sierra Club members in the community — people who may give annually but who haven't really gotten involved much. Talk to them about the issues of concern you know are impacting the community and then encourage those folks to form a community group and offer assistance. The fundamental imperative for this to work is that the initiative must be generated from within the community, not from outside. We can encourage, support, advise, network and provide resources, but the will and initiative must arise from within the community itself.

Question 7: One of Sierra Club's most unique and powerful assets is its vast grassroots network and its ability to address a wide variety of issues and concerns nationwide. What are your priorities to maximize the impact of our grassroots volunteers?

The grassroots volunteers are the foundation of the Club and they must be shown the respect they deserve. They are not assets — they are each unique and infinitely valuable human beings with a wide array of talents and skill sets who lately have felt incredibly marginalized by structural changes planned for the organization. Much of this may be due to miscommunication, but some may also be due to the lingering influences of colonial patriarchy in the way the Club functions. My priorities moving forward would be to emphasize the key legal liability areas where certain structural changes are in everyone's best interest, while simultaneously highlighting how the volunteer leaders still maintain control over Chapter and Group priorities, staffing and finances, etc.

I have also noted, on occasion, an undercurrent of distrust from volunteers toward National staff and a similar undercurrent, though more dismissive, from National staff toward the concept of volunteers. Some of this may stem from the inequity in resource allocation and scope of work: staff are very targeted and focused in their goals and devote their resources explicitly to achieving those ends, while Chapter volunteers focus on a plethora of local, regional and National issues and must parse out their resources accordingly. This inequity must be addressed in order to fully realize the synergy needed to face the challenge posed by Climate Disruption.

Question 8: Good communication strategies are one key to environmental and political success. How can communication and messaging be improved to reach a broader audience, including raising brand awareness?

First, don't always ask for money. Second, allow the Chapters and Groups to send out more COREs. Third, be more selective by tailoring messaging to be appropriate to the geographic region. Fourth, branding is wonderful, but kill the jargon — a little goes far enough. Fifth, make certain you cover all forms of communication, including print — there are still some folks out there who don't have computers. Sixth, Spanish isn't the only second language out there — if you want to be truly inclusive, translating communications into more languages should be undertaken.

Question 9: Volunteer leaders are a critical part of Sierra Club. Traditionally, non-Board of Director volunteers have been closely involved in the national decision-making process for Sierra Club. How would you enhance and grow volunteer participation and ensure that they continue to play a central role in the governance of Sierra Club?

Currently, volunteers feel isolated from the National Club and cut off from the decision-making process. For most volunteers the only communications received are those asking for money or action alert blasts to take actions on particular campaign issues that are often repetitive and not necessarily immediately relevant to each individual member's locale. Now that Clubhouse has been mothballed and Campfire continues to be glitchy and ridiculously obtuse to navigate, most volunteers are uninformed of volunteer opportunities available to them at the National level. Especially now during the pandemic when our meetings are virtual, it would be a very simple thing for Board Members and senior campaign staff to attend Chapter ExCom meetings to listen and learn about the issues on which each region of the country is engaged. This would also be an chance to apprise volunteers directly of opportunities for decision-making input. I would also like to see more non-Board-member volunteer engagement in policy determining work.

Question 10: If you were elected, how would you address the Board's accountability for how Directors work together, treat each other, and fulfill their duty to the organization as a whole?

In order to improve relationships — both working and interpersonal — among Board members, I would recommend a retreat of at least three to four days. Obviously that is highly problematic due to the pandemic, but I think folks on the Board need to be together to work things through among themselves where avoidance is impossible and difficult issues can and must be dealt with and not allowed to fester into more toxic sludge. Think of it as a cleansing retreat. Obviously there would need to be facilitation and parameters, but I'm a safe space, I think a great deal could be accomplished. I also feel overuse of the Executive Committee should be curtailed, and the Board should be fully apprised of all actions being taken or decisions being made on the Club's behalf.