

Our EDIA Journey: Transforming Community Culture

The Chicago Botanic Garden is committed to a process of cultural change that centers equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA). Culture is at the root of why and how we do what we do, and it is what shapes our practices, policies, and programs. An equitable community culture drives how and why we show up and support one another. We acknowledge that our culture has not been inclusive and equitable, either internally or externally.

To authentically engage with our current and future communities, the Garden has entered into a process of self-examination. This work of building community and building trust must be rooted in our values and our mission. We understand that creating an equitable and inclusive organizational culture requires a sustained effort. To ensure that voices across the Garden are represented in our EDIA work, the Garden established an Employee Advisory Group (ERG) in September 2020 and hired a director of EDIA in June 2021. The director of EDIA works across the Garden to shift decision-making processes at the leadership level so there is a better informed and more equitable distribution of resources and information.

In 2021, the Garden introduced a series of opportunities for staff to connect around EDIA principles and practices. Wellness workshops and community care circles provide a space for staff to connect and learn self-care techniques to manage stress related to current events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice uprisings. Facilitated group dialogues offer opportunities for staff to learn core EDIA concepts, including oppression, intersectionality, privilege, and more. These spaces also help staff build a common vocabulary.

The Employee Advisory Group is committed to providing the map and tools for staff to take their own and collective EDIA journeys. The Employee Advisory Group focuses on the following:

- Encouraging staff learning and community building rooted in 12 core concepts and providing resource guides for supervisors that will provide the tools to build trust and transparency with their teams.
- Creating supportive environments for employee engagement through facilitated and safe shared identity groups.
- Providing staff with a variety of accessible and culturally relevant resources, and ensuring this information is available in both Spanish and English.
- Creating an internal community culture assessment for staff to share perceptions and opinions.

In June 2021, the Garden engaged Hansra Consulting and Advisory Services (HCAS) to lead our planning around EDIA goals and priorities. After completion of the Conscious Ambassador of Trauma Informed Care® certification through HCAS, a team of senior leaders and ERG members collaborated to decide on next steps. Since this time the Garden has certified 90 conscious ambassadors and is creating the necessary conditions for change by broadening the self-awareness of those in positions to make decisions.

We are currently working on a series of projects that are designed to help the Chicago Botanic Garden become a place where all individuals feel respected and appreciated in their full humanity, thus providing our staff with a sense of fulfillment, joy, and belonging. Three teams composed of 30 staff members across departments will work on these projects to help meet our year one EDIA goals. Our consultant Hansra Consulting and Advisory Services will lead the project management and evaluation for each project.