



Poetry Foundation 2021 DEIB Actions



Discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience

–Poetry Foundation

Our Core Recommendations

At Ethos, we advocate for opportunity for underrepresented and underserved groups in companies. We understand that many of the clients we work with are maturing as companies and are still juggling major priorities around revenue, performance, and stakeholder value.

This means that with every assessment and roadmap we create, we consider the **three to five most essential DEIB initiatives** our clients can launch. We exercise cost-benefit thinking in this process, considering the resources a company has at its disposal, its general goals, its DEIB goals, the current cultural climate and readiness for change in the leadership and employee bases, and the timeline for creating meaningful impact within the system.

Based on our research and findings in the [Equity Audit](#), we have listed the most impactful DEIB initiatives we identified for the Poetry Foundation towards the beginning of our recommendations, with additional recommendations following them.

These recommendations were originally developed in December of 2020 and have been reviewed by board members and employees over the course of the last six months. Several of these recommendations have either been [completed or put in motion](#).

Complete List of Recommendations

Completing

Add Diversity to the Leadership Team and Board of Directors

Uniformly, interviewees and survey participants identified diversifying the leadership of the organization as the most valuable and impact-driving change the Poetry Foundation could make. The organization has primarily had White man-identified leaders at its helm for its history, which does not represent the community it supports. Importantly, in order to support that community, its leaders must understand it.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- The Poetry Foundation and Korn Ferry partnered to hire Michelle T. Boone in an open, deliberative search designed to expand the communities the organization sourced candidates from.
- The Board of Directors is involved in increasing diversity inside of the board as it brings on new members. Three BIPOC board members have joined the board since the beginning of 2021.
- The Poetry Foundation and Ethos rebuilt the interviewing and hiring process to minimize bias, expand sourcing, and create more opportunities for candidates in underrepresented and underserved groups.

Acknowledge Past Concerns with Empathy

In our research, employees expressed that resolution and healing would not be possible unless experiences were seen and validated by those in positions of power within the Poetry Foundation. The simplest and most effective intervention is for the organization to acknowledge concerns employees shared.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- The Ethos team led three caucused healing sessions with Poetry Foundation employees to share their and open the pathway for restoration and repair.

- The Board of Trustees set time to directly address past concerns with employees; the first two sessions have already taken place or are scheduled.

In Progress

Build an Internal People Operations Team

At an organization the size of the Poetry Foundation, it is common to find at least two team members solely dedicated to People and People Operations. Given the amount of complexity and nuance of roles, People-related initiatives to run, and reported instances of HR-related issues tied directly to social identity, expanding the internal People Operations Team seems like the appropriate next step in professionalizing the Poetry Foundation.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- To proactively and more fully address the needs of employees, the Poetry Foundation is investing in additional HR firm resources to significantly increase People Operations capacity and provide an additional designated resource to employees.

Strengthen the Middle Management Layer

The skills needed to be a manager are different from the skills needed to be an individual contributor. An organization cannot expect someone to show up with all those skills fully formed, and yet we do for our managers all the time. Specific management training will help improve the experience of this manager cohort's eventual reports and their own confidence in what they bring to the organization.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- The Poetry Foundation is investing in partnering with Ethos to lead a 6-month long management program that blends management fundamentals and DEIB. The first two sessions of the program have already taken place.

Form an Editorial Board

One of the recurring themes that emerged internally and externally across research interviews was that the Poetry Foundation has an opportunity to better engage with and listen to its community of poets. Community members cited a lack of access to the organization and a lack of poets serving on the Board of Directors. Moreover, our comprehensive Magazine Audit showed dramatic disparities in representation, especially of Poets of Color. An Editorial Board creates a vehicle for more voices to shape POETRY, address gaps and blindspots in the selection, curation, and editing of the Magazine, and give more poets leadership and power within the organization.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- While plans for future editorial structures are still taking shape, POETRY ran an international-wide search for Guest Editors to helm the magazine from 2021 through 2022.

Host Open Forum Town Halls

Open Forum Town Halls are anywhere from 60-minute to 90-minute sessions where all self-identified members of the poetry community may engage in question-asking and feedback-sharing with the Poetry Foundation.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- The first open forum town hall will be scheduled following the release of the equity audit report and these recommendations.

Develop a Formal Leveling System

In putting together our compensation audit, we began the process of putting together a lightweight leveling system based on pay bands. We believe a much more thorough leveling system—one that charts clear career paths and expected behaviors by level—is necessary to help employees understand opportunities for progression (if they exist).

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- The Ethos team is partnering with the Poetry Foundation to rightsize jobs, develop levels, and create pay bands. This project launched in June of 2021.

Engage in Regular and Ongoing Education on Antiracism, Gender Equity, Disability Justice, and Queer Rights

The Poetry Foundation has already been involved in providing education for employees around anti-racism and issues of social identity, notably through its partner Enrich. This partnership has been praised by employees, who have not only expressed a desire to continue these sessions but a need for greater education across all areas of social identity.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- The Poetry Foundation has partnered with Enrich and is working to develop an internal Institutional Change Team to make antiracism part of its fabric.
- In addition, staff participated in disability justice training led by Jennifer Bartlett, co-founder of Zoeglossia, on the principles of disability justice, best practices around disability language, and ways to highlight disabled poets.

Develop a New Long-Term Grant Program for Community Organizations

Among the themes surfaced by community members was a need for the Poetry Foundation to develop more formal and codified grant-making opportunities, especially given its larger relative wealth and resources. While the organization has engaged in this, especially in response to the June letter, there is an opportunity to develop a program that is clearly and wholly associated with the Poetry Foundation—like the Ruth Lily Fellows—that supports its peer organizations and helps build bridges to new literary arts organizations. Creating a funded program for multiple organizations at once not only addresses this but establishes the Poetry Foundation as a consistent convener and collaboration-builder.

Progress Update as of June of 2021:

- The Poetry Foundation has distributed \$2 million in [emergency grants](#) to support poetry and affiliated art organizations struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The Foundation plans to announce the new grants and sponsorship strategy by year's end.

To Do

Hire a Sensitivity Reader

Sensitivity Readers ensure better representation on the page, which is a critical need for the organization based on our magazine audit findings. They also commit their reading explicitly to cultural inaccuracies, problematic language and stereotypes, and bias. Since the magazine team is already hiring Readers, we propose adding another Reader who is explicitly designated a Sensitivity Reader.

Status Update as of June of 2021:

- The Poetry Foundation will explore ways in which this function can be fully integrated into content planning and production, and as a new editorial structure is formed standards and practices with respect to cultural sensitivity will be defined, including defining this skill as an expectation of all readers and to determine at what point(s) in the review process should this review occur

Engage in a Collaborative Strategic Planning Process

The organization currently has a mission statement and history overview. However, the organization has not set a future vision statement nor worked on a collaborative mission statement in conjunction with the staff and community. There is also an opportunity to set values, which help set expectations around organizational behaviors. All of these items and other key components of the organization's strategy will be addressed in the 2021 Strategic Planning process.

A healthy and inclusive culture is one where everyone within the group defines a "good life" together. We would go further and recommend that for the Poetry Foundation, defining a Strategic Plan that is explicitly anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-sexist, and anti-heterosexist is necessary as part of its efforts to support and

bolster the poetry community. Engaging in a collaborative process with staff and community members can help the organization evolve who it was into the organization the broader poetry world needs and expects today.

Status Update as of June of 2021:

- The Board wholly embraces this recommendation, and the new president is initiating a collaborative strategic planning process; the Board is creating a strategic planning committee to support this work.

Define the Future of Part-Time Work and Build Benefits Accordingly

We believe that based on attrition numbers, there is a great opportunity to improve the employee experience of part-time workers, especially given they are more likely to come from marginalized identities. However, we found ambivalence in our interviews across levels on the role of part-time workers and how the Poetry Foundation aims to structure part-time work in the future. For example, some believe part-time workers should become full-time employees, while others value the flexibility of part-time work, and still others are unclear on what part-time work looks like in a Post-COVID future. We advocate for providing part-time workers clarity, transparency, and certainty into their futures, which means the organization must determine its philosophy on part-time work, including how it will look in the future, what part-time career paths might be (and whether the trajectory is to become full-time), and how what kind of work will be conducted.

Once these definitions are set and communicated to employees, we suggest restructuring benefits to align with the new standards and practices. Ideas for updated benefits include paid time off adjusted in relation to their typical hours of work. We also believe paid holidays and health insurance for part-time workers create equity, improve retention, and support mutual commitment between part-time employees and their employers. However, no benefits structuring should take place until part-time work is clearly defined.

Status Update as of June of 2021:

- As of June 2021, all staff including part-time employees, are eligible for paid holidays. In addition, the Poetry Foundation has added Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth as paid holidays.
- In addition, there is a need for a strategic reassessment of part-time positions, likely in conjunction with earlier recommendations regarding creation of a people and culture function within the Foundation and development of a formal leveling system. The strategic reassessment should include consultation with staff and benchmark with respect to other cultural and literary institutions. After this reassessment occurs, the Board advises a review of benefit policies.

Reissue the Ethos DEIB Survey

While seemingly a simple suggestion, it is important to establish a consistent measurement system to see if your initiatives are working.

Status Update as of June of 2021:

- The Board endorses this recommendation, and the Equity Oversight Committee of the Board has the responsibility to ensure periodic administration of a DEIB survey.