

From: **Kira Kelley** [REDACTED]
Date: Sat, Nov 6, 2021 at 2:35 PM
Subject: An Exit Interview of Sorts
To: Celdf-staff-internal [REDACTED]

Hi all,

if CELDF wants to meaningfully participate in "building a decolonial movement" (per our website) I would encourage those who remain to think deeply on what that means, and how perhaps the current operations of this organization and many of the people in it actively thrive on white supremacy and colonizer culture. CELDF embraces this toxicity both internally and when dealing with the communities we purport to serve. The hypocrisy between what we say we're trying to do and how we operate in practice is one of the main reasons I am leaving this organization.

We fight over which white settler environmentalist guy in our network gets credit for inventing/developing Rights of Nature, but then claim to be learning this strategy from some unspecified "Indigenous people." We charge volunteer community groups exorbitant amounts of money to sit through incredibly dense and highly inaccessible workshops that glorify the U.S. legal system (and then use that money to give bonuses to our highest paid staff). We have minimal commitment to understanding of other theories of change and refuse to diversify beyond our singular tactic: a very specific brand of local democracy embroiled in the settler colonial legal system (which system we also sometimes acknowledge is rooted in genocide when that position benefits us). We withdraw our support from any community who decides not to use this exact strategy on our exact terms. Even when communities face issues that our organizers have zero personal experience or even foundational knowledge in, we still require these local organizers to cede power and control to a paid CELDF organizer in order to access our legal support and other resources.

I've been raising these concerns consistently for over a year now, and nothing has happened except for people getting pissed at me, some organizers have incorporated more social justice buzzwords into their vocabulary, and I hear the occasional surface level critique of racism/colonialism tossed out to perform wokeness. But no matter how fluently we can speak liberatory language when it suits us, CELDF and the employees who run it continue to operate in ways that oppress the rest of its staff and the broader movement as a whole.

We have no routine or even occasional feedback or accountability practices built into our operations, with each other or the communities we serve. To the contrary, the people with the most power and privilege in this organization actively cause harm to everyone else in their frantic attempts to shut down feedback whenever it

is offered. These people flat out refuse to participate in processes that would make power and privilege dynamics more transparent or equitable. They cite their own confusion when problems are brought up, but not in a genuine attempt to seek clarification - has anyone *actually* asked why █████ left with the intent to meaningfully consider the response? All I saw were: complaints that █████ never gave a reason, some incredibly disingenuous and self-centered outreach, and utter defensiveness when █████ was brave enough to try to explain again. Instead of taking our concerns seriously, the people driving the rest of us out shift the blame on those naming our abuse for not being articulate enough to get our point across.

I actually feel like I've been quite clear about my qualms over the past few months/weeks, but every time I speak my piece directly on a call or in an email, the conversation dies. Like the person who literally responded to me when I observed their defensiveness and inability to hear feedback by saying "yeah, you've said that before, but I'm not going to bite."

For those of you feeling defensive right now - your positions of power and privilege in this organization are what have allowed you to delude yourself for so long either that this feedback has never been expressed or that it isn't worth taking seriously. Your power and privilege are also what allow you to remain secure in an organization that you have made unbearable for so many others.

What are the trends in the age, gender, and length of time at CELDF of people quitting verses the people staying? Have any full time staff quit? This organization is losing the people who are being the most exploited, and the future is bleak for you. The only people who are comfortable staying here are the ones making a personal profit off of and taking credit for the people who are fed up with carrying the bulk of the work for pathetic pay, no benefits, and complete disregard from our colleagues.

I've had enough of all-staff emails and calls where part time staff share the projects and movement building they're involved with (that some get paid less than a thousand dollars a month for with no benefits or sick days, are you kidding me) and the full time staff share what books/movies they recommend and what articles they've read, about the work that other people are doing. Sometimes people also proudly report back on which Indigenous people they've got a meeting set up with. But meetings with prospective community groups and other collaborators are fewer and farther between, and rarely amount to much - folks have learned what we're about and are not interested in working with us.

Well, some people still love us! The fact that TERFs have called CELDF their political home for decades says something about how deeply entrenched transphobia really is in this organization. And its pathetic that y'all left it to the only two out queer people in CELDF to do all of the labor and take on all of the risk of

confronting the people in our community groups and on this staff who make our very existence here feel unsafe. Its 2021, and we still have people on this staff who not only believe but will send condescending emails trying repeatedly to prove that having testosterone equates to being a man, and people who have [WoLF](#) members (*founders) crawling all over their social media, and people who think that being trans is an unfortunate consequence of chemicals in the water, and people who pointedly and derisively misgender people. It should not be on me, as the only person in our entire organization who is visibly and publicly outside of the gender binary, to initiate and facilitate all of our conversations around/responses to transphobia in CELDF.

Despite many people lamenting the lack of "diversity" in this organization, many of us refuse to make any public statements that would alienate the significant number of TERFs and egregiously racist people in our networks. Instead, snide comments are slipped into emails (often directed towards me, although no one admits as much when I invite direct conversation about it) calling it "exclusionary" or "divisive" to state our principles explicitly around transgender and racial justice, or "dogmatic" to take a principled stance against liberalism and reformism with regards to the content we choose to promote on our website.

I'm all for diversity of tactics, but that does not mean "all tactics are beneficial and we must share our platform with every liberal who wants to post on our blog." That means being generous in our collaboration with people whose work aligns with our principles, even if we don't fully understand their position or see it as the most efficient/effective, *as long as those tactics are not harmful.*

And this should be obvious: when we invite nazis to our organizing spaces, we automatically exclude from those spaces Jewish people, people of color, queer people, and anyone really who does not want to organize with freaking nazis. That leaves you with a pretty "small tent," if you ask me.

But perhaps we don't actually want to do what it takes to be a part of an authentically intersectional, accessible and powerful movement, because that would require some changes that go deeper than an updated vocabulary, such as relinquishing total control over collective work and actually listening to people.

I'm sending this in advance of my last day at CELDF because I really am down to explore this more with people. I'm done with pulling teeth to try to get through to people on the basics, but if someone wants to put real effort into a conversation I'll show up.

Kira