Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan

In the BLE-LTER, we regard our community as a long-term partnership between our NSF-funded researchers, our team of affiliated collaborators, the northern Alaska communities we work from, and a broader community of school and community groups that welcome our activities.

We believe this community is enriched by fostering a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming environment. We commit to sustaining and enhancing a learning and work environment where individual differences are valued and seen as integral to the success of our program, and where all individuals are treated fairly. A diversity of viewpoints strengthens our ability to understand complex systems, to make novel discoveries, and to identify gaps in our understanding that might be hidden from a community lacking diversity.

A strong, diverse research community includes members from a variety of groups defined by factors including, but not limited to, race, nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, language, religion, disability and/or health status, levels of education, veteran status, geographic origins, and socio-economic status.

The BLE-LTER is a relatively new LTER, established in 2017. BLE is unique among LTER sites in that its core field sites are located in the traditional and current lands of the predominantly Indigenous communities of the North Slope of Alaska. Our “BLE team” commits to establishing and maintaining long-standing relationships with these communities based on trust and respect.

The 12 BLE-LTER PIs span seven institutions ranging from the US south (UTMSI, UT El Paso), east (UMass, VIMS), west (Oregon State), Alaska (UAF) and Canada (University of Toronto). Each institution has its own unique community and diversity, and its own history of interactions with native peoples. This document is not meant to replace the diversity, equity, and inclusion plans of each institution. However, the goals and actions outlined within this document are meant to be the guiding principles specific to the BLE-LTER.

Native Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that much our research occurs on the traditional land that is owned and managed by the communities of Utqiaġvik, Nuiqsit, and Kaktovik. Our field sites overlap with Iñupiaq hunting and fishing grounds and sites of cultural and heritage significance. We respect and seek to integrate our science with Local and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TK) held by the Iñupiaq, which results from their connection to this land since time immemorial. Our lodging and labs are located in these villages. We recognize the mixed relationship these communities have experienced with western science and other outside influences over the past century or more. Consistent with our values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, we commit to acknowledge, respect, and make visible our relationship to these people.

Specific Goals

Goal 1: Ensure the BLE is a welcoming and inclusive environment.

1a. Provide resources to BLE students, faculty, staff, and collaborators to raise awareness of DEI topics

- i) Organize regular discussions and presentations related to DEI in the BLE. Establish a culture that encourages participation in these meetings.
- ii) Create and regularly update a folder containing a curated list of resources related to DEI topics.
- iii) Establish a "DEI minute" at the start of each BLE team meeting to continuously promote a research culture that values DEI principles.

1b. Create a process to introduce BLE to all new members (including faculty, staff, students)

- i) Develop and regularly update BLE welcome orientation videos and other materials that include the BLE code of conduct, field and lab DEI awareness, history of the Alaskan North Slope, primer on Indigenous Rights, and introduction to the BLE project.
- ii) Profile or feature the research of those who do not hold leadership positions in the BLE during seminars and BLE team meetings to highlight every BLE researcher within a five-year period.
- iii) Encourage interactive activities (social and professional) among BLE students, faculty, and staff (e.g., field & boat trainings).
- iv) Create student mentoring program where senior students act as BLE mentors to incoming students in the field and year-round.
- v) Provide a directory of contacts.

1c. Ensure all BLE students, faculty, and staff have the opportunity to contribute ideas, opinions and feedback.

- i) Hold monthly BLE team meetings to provide updates and to hold open discussions with the entire team.
- ii) Include a mechanism within all BLE team meetings to allow all members to bring up topics and opinions. Actively create a culture that accepts and encourages input by all BLE members.
- iii) Include one voting student member on the BLE Executive Committee (EC) to ensure students concerns are heard, and to relay meeting announcements to students in a timely manner. The BLE EC consists of all PIs, plus one representative (rep) from Information Management, one post-doctoral scientist rep, and one graduate student rep.
- iv) Regularly seek feedback from BLE members concerning strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement in the BLE DEI plan. Create a mechanism for anonymous reporting and addressing of concerns.

Goal 2: Recruit, retain and support a more diverse team of students, faculty, staff and collaborators.

The BLE-LTER aims to address the diversity paradox in science: "*Diversity breeds innovation, yet the underrepresented groups that diversify organizations have less successful careers.*" Despite higher rates of scientific novelty, this disparity largely occurs as a result of their innovations being devalued or discounted relative to majority groups (Hofstra et al. 2020).

2a. Identify and remove or reduce barriers for the entry and retention of underrepresented minority (URM) groups in BLE research.

- i) Curate a list of relevant resources at all 7 BLE institutions that will assist junior faculty, post-doctoral scientists, and students from underrepresented groups to write successful proposals and prepare manuscripts for publication.
- ii) Develop non-field-based research priorities to expand access to BLE research to a greater number of scientists, including people with disabilities and those unable to travel to Alaska.
- iii) Recruit and mentor K-12 teachers from districts with high proportions of URM to work with us on developing BLE-specific educational resources for both their communities and communities in Alaska (e.g., NSF RET program, PolarTREC interns).

2b. Provide research opportunities for undergraduate students from URM, work to retain the interest of these students in the sciences, and explore additional opportunities for their involvement in the BLE LTER, including reporting and manuscript development.

- i) Explore funding possibilities that will facilitate diversity recruiting (e.g., NSF REU & IUSE Programs).
- ii) Create an annual Research Experience for Undergraduate (REU) program focused on the recruiting, year-round mentoring and retention of students from URM.
- iii) Establish contacts and collaborative efforts with diversity programs associated with professional societies (e.g., Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP); the Ecological Society of America's SEEDS program, the Society of Wetland Scientists Multicultural Mentoring Program (SWaMMP)).

Goal 3: Collaborate meaningfully with local communities on the North Slope of Alaska.

3a. Work with partners to expand year-round opportunities for K-12 students in the North Slope of Alaska, particularly Alaska Natives.

- i) Develop lesson plans linked to BLE science that align with state and national science standards.
- ii) Recruit and mentor high school/recent graduates for paid research internships.
- iii) Recruit and mentor educators (RETs, PolarTREC teachers) to help create and deliver educational resources for North Slope communities; focus on recruiting teachers from Alaskan communities.

3b. Increase representation of indigenous communities in our research community to both complement existing BLE research efforts and expand our science.

i) Actively promote the value of Indigenous knowledge and the cultural practices that sustain TK.
ii) Explore ways to foster research ideas that come from the community.
iii) Explore effective mechanisms to create citizen science programs within these communities.

3c. Promote community building by:

i) Encourage BLE scientists to participate meaningfully in events and activities hosted by local communities on the North Slope.
ii) Hosting events for community members that recognize and respect local values and customs.

Accountability and Oversight

A DEI Committee will be appointed by the BLE Director. The Diversity Committee should consist of no fewer than 3 members, comprised of students, post-doctoral scientists, staff, and PIs. This committee will be responsible for the timely and successful completion of work called for in the DEI plan. They shall evaluate the plan and the data on an annual basis and improve our plan iteratively accordingly. They shall submit a written summary of DEI progress and challenges annually to the director for inclusion in the annual report.

References cited

Hofstra, B., Kulkarni, V. V., Munoz-Najar Galvez, S., He, B., Jurafsky, D., and McFarland, D. A. (2020). The Diversity–Innovation Paradox in Science. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, 9284–9291. doi:10.1073/pnas.1915378117.