Introducing USDN's 2023 Equity Diversity Inclusion Fellows

USDN is thrilled to present the 2023 cohort of USDN Equity Diversity Inclusion Fellows. The EDI fellows program is an opportunity for diverse new sustainability professionals to gain experience in local government. This is also a supported learning opportunity for host offices seeking to center equity as part of hiring, managing, and project implementation processes.

Evanston IL, Fort Collins CO, and Washington DC were selected as the host offices through a competitive process. Matching funds provided by USDN help to support the fellow stipends. Recruitment was nationwide, and the process was very competitive for every city.

You can look forward to final presentations of their projects on October 24 at the 2023 USDN Annual Meeting!
Marlene Odia, Evanston IL

Equity Diversity and Inclusion Fellow, City of Evanston IL

Marlene Odia is a passionate sustainability enthusiast and urban planning professional with a strong commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. As a native of the Democratic Republic of Congo, she understands the importance of community action and its impact on shaping residents' lives. Having moved to the United States at the age of 16, she brings a unique perspective to her work as she has seen how communities learn to be self-sufficient and interact with different bodies of governance. Over 50 percent of the global population lives in cities, and many issues will continue to arise in city-level sustainability. She believes a multidisciplinary approach is necessary to evaluate those issues and come up with strategies at different scales.

With a bachelor’s degree from University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana in Urban Planning with a concentration in Social Justice and Sustainability, she is driven to create a more sustainable future for the community she serves. Her experiences working with local nonprofits, such as the New American Welcome Center and Habitat for Humanity, have honed her soft skills and allowed her to contribute to community development projects.

Marlene is also a member of the American Planning Association (APA) which provides resources for professional development, including networking and education.
opportunities. She plans on continuing her education and work in the field of community development in the U.S., or possibly outside U.S borders including her own native country.

As a person of color, she is acutely aware of the underrepresentation in sustainability fields and the need for diverse, inclusive, and equity-centered movements. She is all for creating space for the unheard or the underserved. She believes that working with a racial equity lens is essential to eliminating systemic barriers and creating solutions that benefit everyone, especially minority groups who tend to be historically excluded from urban/community projects in the U.S.

Beyond her professional pursuits, she finds joy in social events, reading, playing soccer or tennis, traveling and discovering perspectives that she is unfamiliar with. She values mental and physical stimulation as avenues for personal growth and connection.

She is excited for the 2023 EDI Fellowship program with the Urban Sustainability Directors Network to contribute to the City of Evanston's ongoing Environmental Equity Investigation. This opportunity aligns perfectly with her career aspirations and personal values, and she hopes to be a great asset to USDN's commitment to empowering local governments in tackling sustainability and climate challenges.
Caesar Garduno is very excited to join the Urban Sustainability Directors Network as an EDI Fellow with Fort Collins CO.

Caesar’s academic journey has shaped his unique approach to sustainability. Having studied Economics, Psychology, and Sociology during his undergraduate years, and later Public Policy and Administration at Colorado State University, he has developed a holistic perspective on complex sustainability issues. This diverse background allows him to bridge economic realities with the social, psychological, and administrative factors that drive sustainability practices.

His passion for sustainability and nature is deeply personal. This passion was a significant factor in his decision to move to Colorado, a region rich in sustainability initiatives and leaders who are trailblazers in both sustainability and equity. Living here allows him to stay at the forefront of sustainability practices and collaboration, and it's a constant source of inspiration and learning for him.

For him, sustainability and stewardship begin from within. He believes in living an honest and critical reflection of our actions, and setting an example, especially as we strive for a truly sustainable future for everyone, every being, and every environment.
Caesar Garduno, Fort Collins CO
Community Leadership for Climate Equity Fellow, City of Fort Collins CO

He brings this belief to his role as an EDI Fellow, and he hopes to work with each of you to further this shared mission.

When he’s not championing sustainability, you’ll find him immersed in the outdoors, appreciating nature through hiking, biking, climbing, or wildlife observation. These activities bring him joy and reinforce his commitment to preserving our environment.

He’s looking forward to collaborating with each of you. Please feel free to say hi, share ideas, or ask questions. He is eager to learn from your experiences and to contribute his skills to our shared mission, and sends a big thank you for welcoming him into this incredible network!
As a child, she spent countless summer days on the beach with her dad and 6 other siblings. He taught them the value of protecting Earth early on and fostered their love for the environment. While his efforts to curb her fear of insects ultimately failed, Stephanie fell madly in love with marine life and was even an aspiring marine biologist once upon a time. Like many of her peers, the killing of Trayvon Martin and its aftermath was a pivotal point in her life. It completely changed her worldview and marked her political awakening.

This summer, she is thrilled by the chance to merge her passion for social justice and her love for the environment. She aims to advance the core principles of environmental justice in her work and empower historically marginalized communities. She currently serves as the Equity Diversity and Inclusion Fellow at the Department of Energy and Environment in Washington, DC. She will work alongside the department’s internal Equity Committee and Urban Sustainability Administration, as they update the Sustainable DC plan to advance racial equity, climate justice, and economic justice.