

**REPORT FROM THE TURTLE SURVIVAL ALLIANCE
EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
August 2021**

In August 2020, the Board of Directors of Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) apologized for the serious mistake that was made in the planning for the first Virtual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles. We made a highly regrettable error in creating the speaker line up that was compounded by a failure of our internal review and oversight process. We apologized for this grave error, and deeply regret the damage done to the collegiality of our community.

TSA wishes to emphasize that we decry, in the strongest possible terms, any form of discrimination, harassment, or objectification, including that based on gender, race, age, nationality, ethnicity, disability, religion or religious belief, or sexual orientation. This is a cornerstone of how we operate, enshrined in our employment policies and practices and in those relating to our interns, field colleagues, and volunteers, and in the way that we deal with one another. We encourage anyone who is aggrieved to bring a concern or complaint forward, and for it to be investigated and dealt with appropriately within an atmosphere of zero tolerance. Our Code of Ethics (<https://turtlesurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/TSA-Conflict-of-Interest-Policy.pdf>) and Whistleblower Policy (<https://turtlesurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/TSA-Whistleblower-Policy.pdf>) are posted on our website.

Together with our Symposium co-sponsor, the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG), we would like to thank everyone for having made your voices heard last year. We listened carefully to you, and since have taken a hard look at ourselves internally. As a result, TSA has taken measures to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion and the highest standards of professional behavior in our organization and at our events including, among others:

- (i) forming an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) advisory committee, the mandate of which is posted on our website (<https://turtlesurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/TSA-Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-Committee-Mandate.pdf>), and which includes three fully independent members, i.e., people who are not employed by TSA nor serve on the Board of Directors; with our Symposium co-sponsor, IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG), substantially strengthening our Annual Symposium Code of Conduct to ensure that there is zero tolerance for sexual harassment, or harassment and discrimination of any kind. https://turtlesurvival.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/20200315_FINAL_Symposium-Code-of-Conduct.pdf
- (ii) now making it a condition of registration for the Symposium that all participants read and agree to abide by this Code. We have also implemented a process which includes a review of all proposed speaker and presenter slates;
- (iii) creating a general TSA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement (Attachment 1);
- (iv) implementing a Code of Conduct for all TSA events other than the Symposium, including North American Freshwater Turtle Research Group (NAFTRG) events and TSA social events, which contains the same substantive protections as those in the Symposium Code of Conduct;
- (v) working forward to further support and create opportunities for early-career turtle conservationists, aligning with TSA's commitment to build the capacity of the next generation of turtle conservation leaders; and
- (vi) providing EDI training in fall 2021 to all TSA Directors and senior staff, in addition to the training Directors receive from their employers or other organizations.

Moving forward, we will continue to work to ensure that the duties, responsibilities, and objectives outlined in the EDI mandate are delivered and we encourage input from our membership and volunteers on these issues. We would like to hear from anyone who has suggestions on how we can meet these objectives. Kindly contact Patricia A. Koval, Chair of the Board of Directors (pkoval@rogers.com) or Susie Ellis, Chair of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee (sellis.rhino@gmail.com), for questions or clarifications. We will continue to provide relevant updates as we continue to evaluate, assess, and improve TSA equity, diversity, and inclusion practices to achieve our mission: ***transforming passion for turtles into conservation action***. Thank you for working with us to improve how we appreciate and celebrate our membership's diversity.

ATTACHMENT 1.

TURTLE SURVIVAL ALLIANCE EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) strives to foster belonging and empowerment by celebrating differences, with the firm belief that differing approaches and points of view strengthen our ability to deliver turtle conservation outcomes. We value the strengths present in diversity - in perspectives, race, ethnicity, age, culture, gender, personal beliefs, physical abilities, religion, and sexual orientation. We work to create a supportive, positive, and inclusive environment for our employees, contractors, interns, volunteers, members of the Board of Directors (Directors), officers, partners, and event attendees. The strengths found in diversity and creating a supportive environment for our constituents are critical to our mission: ***transforming passion for turtles into conservation action.***

With input from our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, Directors, and senior staff are working to proactively promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility for underrepresented groups, including but not limited to women, minorities, members of partner organizations, indigenous peoples, and LGBTQ communities inside and beyond TSA, for the benefit of the broader turtle conservation community. We aim to:

- 1) Grow TSA's ability to include a diverse range of cultures, disciplines, stakeholders, and communities more widely in our activities and events, promoting best practices in equity, diversity, and inclusion, including those of our partners.
- 2) Continually strengthen the Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles as a platform for sharing knowledge and supporting professional development for all groups. We will aim to support and provide opportunities for early-career turtle conservationists, aligning with TSA's commitment to build the capacity of the next generation of turtle conservation leaders.

Additionally, we work towards:

- 1) Identifying opportunities to engage with our broader constituency to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- 2) Incorporating equity, diversity and inclusion into the TSA strategic plan, values statement, website, communication tools, hiring practices, and purchasing.
- 3) Serving as a communications vehicle with clear standards for internal and external messaging to staff, interns, volunteers, Directors, officers, and event attendees on EDI efforts and best practices.
- 4) Improving our cultural competency by enabling TSA staff, interns, volunteers, Directors, officers, and event attendees to work across cultures, genders, disciplines, and world views to develop and implement creative conservation solutions that integrate multiple perspectives.
- 5) Ensuring that opportunities are available for staff, interns, contractors, volunteers, Directors, officers, and event attendees to provide feedback to TSA leadership concerning organizational climate and culture.

Internally, we will:

- 1) Create and pursue professional development opportunities for TSA employees, Directors, and officers to deepen and develop better personal understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion at a personal and an organizational level.
- 2) At a minimum, annually assess TSA equity, diversity, and inclusion practices to ensure continued improvement.