



Equity and Interdependence Update

Fall 2020 / Winter 2021

Executive Summary

- **[iBme Equity Consultant Framing](#)** - iBme's Equity Consultant Raquel Castro Corazzini remarks on one year of in-depth equity and interdependence assessment and provides perspective on iBme's position in the mindfulness education for youth movement. To submit feedback for Raquel's one-year review, please click [here](#).
- **[Expansion of Collaborative Leadership \(CL\)](#)** - iBme is deepening implementation of its [collaborative leadership system](#) within the administrative staff, committees, retreat staff, and board in order to increase distribution of power and make decision-making more collaborative and transparent. Seven committees have been identified to accomplish this goal.
- **[Organizational Equity and Interdependence Assessment](#)** - We review the outcomes of our organization-wide survey, focus groups, and key informant interviews and detail recommended policies and practices.
- **[Looking Ahead Together](#)** - Since its founding, iBme has been blazing a trail in immersive mindfulness programs for youth, while challenging the status quo for organizational management and dominant cultural norms and prejudices. In this section we detail recommended policies and practices and share our initiatives for the 2021 fiscal year.

iBme Equity Consultant Framing

iBme Consultant Raquel Castro Corazzini remarks on one year of in-depth equity and interdependence assessment and provides perspective on iBme's position in the mindfulness education for youth movement.

Reimagining and co-creating a just and liberated world includes:

- 1) Understanding the history of racism and the system of white supremacy in order to address past harms and institutionalize accountability in our community for collective change.
- 2) Implementing interventions that use an intersectional analysis, impact multiple systems, center Blackness, and build the collective cultural, economic, and political power of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC).
- 3) Applying the practice of love, along with disruption and resistance, to the status quo when necessary, particularly when that path is most difficult.

Each of the above actions are integral to iBme's transformation. As you read through this update, keep in mind that racial justice, as well as any other social justice effort, is an ongoing journey that requires constant upkeep and learning. Key to moving towards justice is building individual and collective will to take risks, act boldly, and trust the change process. Vu Le of [Nonprofit AF](#) states with profound wisdom:

True equity requires us not to just throw around concepts at summits and sprinkle terminologies on websites and strategic plans, but to reevaluate our beliefs and practices and definitions and board and staff composition and leadership and hiring practice and funding allocation processes and who is at the table and who set the table in the first place, etc. It requires us to change our ways of doing things.

In the last year, iBme has continued to work to rethink the way it engages community members. This includes town halls, focus groups, surveys, one-on-one feedback sessions, and community conversations. Though at times it has been challenging to hear critical feedback, the organization continues the work of formalizing its ability to receive and act on feedback.

To submit feedback for Raquel's one-year review, please click [here](#).

Expansion of Collaborative Leadership (CL)

iBme has more fully embodied our envisioned Collaborative Leadership model of governance and greater distribution of power. We have solidified the system with seven standing Committees that embody leadership and power roles at the organization. At this time, we have made the full shift from a traditional hierarchy to a distributed model of leadership with this new structure of standing Committees. These Committees collaborate with iBme staff to attend to the six aspects of collaboration we have defined in our work together: 1) vision and values; 2) decision making; 3) information sharing; 4) resource allocation; 5) feedback; and 6) conflict engagement. Each Committee has selected one Representative who will serve on the new Board for the organization, embodying our belief that our Board should be representative of our entire community. This approach aligns with our Equity goals, and, more importantly, expands our shared capacity compared to a traditional structure, which limits involvement to a few who have money and power/influence.

The seven Committees we have created are: 1) Staff Team (those with “employee” designation); 2) Equity & Interdependence; 3) Systems; 4) Communities of Color; 5) Teachers Advisory Council; 6) Youth Advisory Council; and 7) Finance & Legal. Six current board members have transitioned over to being members of these Committees and will continue to serve on the Board in the short-term, representing the respective Committees on which they sit, as a way to keep things as stable as possible during this period of significant transition. We expect to fully complete the transition to the new Board structure by the end of our 2021 fiscal year.

We also want to name that there is not clear cohesion/agreement around when the Collaborative Leadership system will be “complete” and what this will look like. There are members of our community who strive to entirely decentralize the organizational structure; they see this step as one of a few large ones. There are other members who envision that this iteration of our model is closer to “finished”, with only tweaks still necessary. We feel confident that with vision mobilization framework and strategic visioning together, we can reconcile these different visions and develop a shared path forward.

Lastly, our system has been getting attention from external [leaders and organizations](#) who are excited and curious about our innovative approach. We have begun to allocate small amounts of staff time to facilitate [workshops](#) that explore the why, how, and what of Collaborative Leadership. We are heartened by the interest of other organizations and their desire to redistribute power and attend to privilege and decision-making in their spheres of influence, which span nonprofit organizations, government entities, and for-profit corporations. We continue to feel inspired that our vision of a future with more equitable values, power

distribution, and processes will result in more equitable outcomes for iBme and the broader community circles in which we interact.

Dealing with Conflict and Tension

As iBme engages in greater conversations about racism, white dominant culture, and power, and demonstrates its readiness for subsequent changes, Committee members often share their truths and the impact of inequities. This has been challenging because as these truths are heard, sometimes for the first time in group meetings, we do not yet have the infrastructure in place to be fully responsive. In many organizations, including iBme, the process for feedback still needs to be further developed to better address conflict. As iBme travels through this process, it is crucial that the process not stop or slow down. It is our hope that this can be a breakthrough moment for holding space for divergent voices, working collectively on how to be responsive in the moment, and building practices for the long term.

In many nonprofit organizations, the mission-serving culture can reinforce conflict-averse practices. Staff will share that they have insufficient skills for dealing with conflict. Conflict aversion also manifests as an inability to address or allow for differences or disagreements and as narrow bandwidth for expression of emotions within a workplace. Equity and justice work is dense and can generate conflict, and that conflict will escalate, especially if it isn't addressed or gets buried under a false consensus that preserves existing cultural norms that protect feelings and white fragility. Building the fortitude and skills of individuals to work through conflict and shifting the organizational culture to embrace conflict are essential.

With this said, there are some conflicts that require more tailored approaches. In the efforts to fight cultures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, limited attention has been paid to the way communities of color adopt and reinforce these harms amongst themselves and against other marginalized groups. As a result, many multiracial BIPOC communities continue to be challenged to develop authentic and accountable inter-group relationships despite a shared struggle under white supremacy. These challenges often undermine anti-racist organizing among people of color because each community is differently shaped and situated depending on intersectional issues and identities. In instances like these, the organization must take the time to center BIPOC voices from all perspectives and create opportunities for self-examination within communities of color. It may sound like a contradiction, but this is an important step that contributes to honest and open exchange. Each individual of color comes to a coalition with a certain amount of ignorance, skepticism, or distrust of other communities. There are many reasons, such as prior community conflicts, competition for jobs and other resources, deliberate

“divide and conquer” efforts, or, commonly, the absence of relationships and lack of information about each other.

Collaborative Leadership Spotlight

Distribution of Hemera Grant for Teacher’s Loss of Income

As an example of iBme’s Collaborative Leadership system in action, we’d like to summarize our process for distributing the \$10,000 grant we received from the Hemera Foundation to support teacher’s loss of income.

First, a report was run for all teachers comparing expected income (based on our pre-COVID schedule) with actual income (based on our modified COVID schedule). From that analysis, we identified 30 teachers that received less income than expected for a total loss of \$32,465. Second, we sent an email to each of the 30 teachers explaining the grant, the total loss of income across all teachers, and their individual expected and actual incomes. With the grant covering 31% of the total loss, we asked teachers to respond whether they would like to receive a proportionate amount of the funds based on their individual loss as a percentage of the total loss. We asked for no details or rationale for their preference, just a simple opt-in or opt-out. Amazingly, all 30 teachers responded, and in the end, 10 teachers opted in, and we were able to meet 70% of their total loss of income through the grant.

The teachers’ response to the grant and distribution process was universally and overwhelmingly positive. This is a great example of how we were able to collaboratively address a specific need while building positive organizational culture in the process. Everyone felt good about the outcome. Teachers were empowered in the process, and able to express generosity and gratitude for the community. Through this process, we were able to meet 39% more of the need for the teachers that opted-in.

Organizational Equity and Interdependence Assessment

iBme’s year-long Organizational Equity and Interdependence Assessment collected quantitative data through an organizational survey as well as qualitative data through a series of individual interviews and focus groups. This data was collected to inform our upcoming training curriculum and identify critical opportunities for organizational growth. The following four themes arose. We plan to further discuss these questions and develop recommendations for furthering our equity and interdependence work moving forward.

- What can we expect to be included in an organization’s roadmap for racial justice?
- How do we deal with conflicts and tensions that will happen in a racial equity change process, especially when the process is complicated by power dynamics?
- What are ways to measure progress and be accountable to the communities and people with which we work?
- What strategies are being implemented and what are their potential impacts?

As part of the assessment, staff and youth were asked to participate in several different ways (listed below). In an effort to document the diversity of identities and lived experiences we aimed to include, we made sure to collect racial and age demographic data from participants, which have also been noted below.

- One organizational leadership survey (40 organizational leaders and retreat staff)
- Three focus groups (2 youth and 8 adults; 7 identified as BIPOC and 3 identified as White)
- Twelve key informant Interviews (3 youth and 9 adults; 5 identified as BIPOC and 7 identified as White)

Survey Findings

We received approximately 40 responses from full-time administrative staff, retreat staff, board members, and committee members to inform the next phase of work as it relates to our equity and interdependence goals. Questions in the survey were designed to identify how individual and organizational behaviors have collective impact. All responses were anonymous to ensure participant confidentiality.

Participants were asked if iBme values Diversity, Equity, and Interdependence. Seventy percent of participants strongly agreed, 20% agreed, and 10% somewhat agreed with this statement. We’ve shared some of the comments below. (Click [here](#) to read more)

- *Philosophically I believe the value is very much there. I think more can be done to put it in practice. This is especially true in terms of white staff and to a lesser degree with white teens. For most white staff members, a deeper dive and more ongoing work is really important. Also, I think that some optional "white awake" or "mindful of race" type of offering for white teens could happen at the same time as any BIPOC offerings on retreat.*

- *I have seen over the years how iBme staff have committed time and energy to the DEI work they have undertaken, have struggled with how best to carry out DEI in all of iBme's programs and hiring practices, and have made continual change to better live the values they espouse.*
- *Have seen iBme put lots of energy into making sure retreats are accessible to those of various racial, socioeconomic backgrounds and work hard to have the teaching/staff teams reflect participants (or be even more diverse than the participants). iBme spoke out early on this fall in support of Black Lives Matter. Organization seems to be interested in continually receiving feedback and improving.*

Participants were asked to provide suggestions on how iBme could prioritize equity and interdependence work. The top three results were: 1) Training and retreats; 2) Affinity groups; and 3) Distribution of readings and regular resources. These practices can help create a lexicon for equity work that is shared by everyone in the organization so that all conversations within and among various sectors of organizational leadership are based on a common understanding.

Training on topics such as implicit bias and structural racism can be part of building a shared language. The need for shared language was further highlighted when **participants were asked if they were clear on and could identify iBme's approaches to living the values of equity.** 23% of participants answered “strongly agreed”, 46% “agreed”, while 23% answered “somewhat agreed, and 8% disagreed”. When asked to explain their answers, most participants felt that though they believed equity was valued, they struggled to name and or identify what those values were. (Click [here](#) to read more.)

- *Within the staff of the organization I would say Yes, however I think that the training for staff and mentors on retreat falls short in this regard and that equity training for Mentors could be improved to ensure especially new staff are brought up to speed with the standards of the organization in terms of addressing equity issues while on retreat.*
- *I've seen the understanding grow over the years. I think some of the differences of understanding may have to do with people being from different regions. For example, many of us working and living on the west coast have been in the practice of indigenous land acknowledgment for a long time whereas that practice wasn't necessarily fully understood as essential by east coasters until very recently.*

When asked if they agreed with the **statement “iBme's feedback and information flow systems allow my voice to be heard when key institutional decisions are being made,”** responses

varied. Eighteen percent strongly agreed, 51% agreed, 23% somewhat agreed, and about 8% disagreed. Here's why. (Click [here](#) to read more.)

- *I have felt fortunate to be able to contribute to various conversations about iBme's policies and programs over my years of involvement with iBme. The post-retreat feedback system has also been improved over the years allowing for contributions at that time. Since I am not full-time staff/on the board/etc., I have not expected to be involved more than I have been. I welcome the opportunity to contribute and am open to contributing more, but it is my expectation that key institutional decisions would be made by the staff, board, and relevant advisory committees.*
- *I think the feedback system is radical in its intentions and should allow all voices (that have learned how to use it) to be heard. But I also think it is a new system and has not come "fully online" yet.*

Focus Groups & Key Informant Interviews

The intention of our community-wide focus group and key informant interview series was to foster an environment where all parties felt safe to contribute candidly to the critical discussion regarding real experiences related to equity and interdependence at iBme. In any focus group setting, it is imperative to ensure that all parties display respect for each other's viewpoints and experiences. The questions and topics discussed in the focus groups and key informant interviews enabled iBme to learn more about participants' experiences with respect to equity. Questions focused on whether participants felt respected, experienced a sense of belonging, were able to contribute to work processes, and whether they had an equitable opportunity to contribute to the growth of the organization. Questions included:

- *Do you mask or downplay any aspect of your physical, cultural, spiritual, or emotional identity at iBme?*
- *Do you ever feel left out when engaging in iBme work activities or socially?*
- *Do you face unique challenges that make it difficult for you to get to work or work the hours expected of you at times expected of you?*
- *What could iBme do to better support you?*

Some of the views shared during focus groups and key informant interviews are shared below. (Click [here](#) to read more.)

- *The org’s leadership is finally getting diverse and more voices are being included in the decision making process. - BIPOC Assistant Teacher*
- *I feel more radically accepted than other orgs I have been part of. - White Teacher*
- *There is no support network for people with children. - BIPOC Teacher*
- *Options for gender expansive dorms were very validating. Normalizing. Pronouns by name tags. It was the first environment that equalized the playing field. - White Youth*
- *Not many Asian representations, but I did see other aspects of my character represented in the leadership. - BIPOC Youth*
- *I think iBme is the most inclusive space I’ve been part of. - BIPOC Youth*

Looking Ahead Together

iBme has continued to establish an organization-wide structure more deeply rooted in transparency, shared power, and equity. Creating a culture of accountability by developing effective policies and customs increases iBme’s ability to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all participants and teachers to show up. To help achieve this, iBme’s Equity Consultant Raquel Castro Corazzini has offered recommendations based on the cumulative organizational equity assessment, which are outlined below. In what will be an ongoing process, iBme has already begun to implement strategies to begin to live out these recommendations, which are also outlined below.

Recommendations

- 1. Policy Alignment:** Apply a racial equity framework to current policies and practice. Develop policies that are informed by stakeholders and those who are most impacted. Provide support to staff to implement these policies and create accountability practices through performance measures that include developing racial equity competencies. Review recruiting, hiring, and retention practices to address inequities and racial bias. Some questions to explore while thinking about recruitment practices are:
 - Who is involved in the decision-making process?
 - Who’s decision is privileged?

- What characteristics are being prioritized for those candidates who are defined as a “good” candidate?
- 2. Program and Strategy Alignment:** Create a strong feedback loop with your stakeholders, especially BIPOC. Examine how strategies are expected to lead to results and the spoken and unspoken worldviews and assumptions that undergird the program’s choice of strategies. Review strategy and implementation to understand how racial inequities, white privilege, and white dominant culture may be manifesting. Review the program design and consider questions such as:
- How are decisions being made about the program’s design?
 - What assumptions are being made about the participants’ needs?
 - What is the level of involvement of past participants? Are past participants chosen to be involved with shaping the design? How are they involved?
 - Whose voices are being privileged?
 - Are BIPOC voices centered?
- 3. Leadership:** Ensure conceptual understanding of structural racism, power, and white-dominant culture. Provide support and accountability for productive engagement of conflict and for leaders to build their confidence to speak up about racial justice and act. Evaluate leaders’ own practices for interrupting bias and inequitable practices. Develop a willingness to take risks. Interrupt assumptions about what it means to be a “good” leader.
- 4. Equitable Culture Development:** Look at the unspoken and spoken rules and norms that guide behaviors and practices in the organization and learn how power operates within the organization. The question that comes up as organizations learn more about white-dominant culture and interrogate their own culture (e.g. addressing urgency, superiority of the written word; hoarding power) is how to develop a transformative just culture.
- 5. Evaluation:** Evaluation of programmatic efforts, such as surveys, dialogues, and feedback sessions, are imperative for programmatic improvement and enhancement. Creating intentional opportunities for feedback creates transparency and engagement. With that said, data collection that has a lens of equity needs to go farther than that. There are other elements that must be considered when developing an evaluation process. These would include asking oneself the following questions:

- How is the data being collected and by whom?
- Who is defining success? How are outcomes being defined and are external variables such as grant deliverables being prioritized?
- Which data are informing the evaluation process? Is the data racially and intersectional disaggregated?
- Are the voices of participants who shared a critique or lower ratings part of the evaluation discussion? Are those most impacted by a particular issue sharing their experiences of the impact of the program and determining success?

Strategies Implemented by iBme

Racial Identity Caucusing

iBme has hosted formal and informal spaces for racial identity caucusing committees such as those held by the Communities of Color Committee and the White Anti-Racist Affinity Group. These spaces are helping to deepen work and build skills by using the methodology of racial identity caucuses. In one of our key informant conversations with a white identifying teacher, they simply stated:

“Caucusing can be helpful, the conversations I’ve had with other white people in those spaces has helped me in acknowledging and supporting some of the emotions that naturally occur in racial equity work.”

The value of caucusing is so both white people and BIPOC have intentional space and time to focus on their respective work to dismantle racism and advance racial equity. Caucusing does not happen instead of integrated groups; rather, caucusing can lead to more authentic and powerful integrated groups. Caucusing not only respects the choice of marginalized groups to be together, it also makes the anti-racist work of the dominant culture more visible to more people—an important step in making intentional changes to the culture of iBme. Further, working only in integrated groups puts an undue burden on BIPOC to be teachers and obscures the responsibility of white people to do their own work.

Both people of color and white people need to work collectively and individually for racial equity. They have different work to do, precisely because of their different experiences with and location relative to white culture and privilege. Though there is often resistance to participating in explicit race-identified groups, these formations occur all the time, though usually without intentionality of consciousness. One common resistance to caucusing by white people is, “I don’t like to feel guilty.” Having that feeling is an opportunity to remember one’s humanity and commitment to racial justice. In part, time spent in caucuses ensures that feelings of guilt do

not result in inaction, but rather in reflection and action. Caucusing can be an opportunity to transform a white space into a liberating space to build strengths, skills, and courage for white people so that they will act purposefully toward racial equity.

Equity and Interdependence (EI) Community Conversations Series

iBme has committed to conducting monthly [EI community conversations](#). One of the critical components of our change process is for organizational leaders to participate in trainings and ongoing learning engagements in order to learn (or re-learn) basic equity definitions (e.g. racial equity, racial justice, white privilege, power, white dominant culture, anti-blackness, oppression, system of white supremacy), to better understand structural racism and the history of racism, and to be introduced to and practice using a racial equity analysis.

"Safety is not necessarily the goal; the goal, rather, is creating a dialogic space to share our truths and to listen and learn the truths of others" - Timothy J. San Pedro

These dialogues include amplifying the intersecting identities of those that iBme serves by engaging them in the planning process, literally giving them “the mic,” and centering their stories in the conversations being presented. Examples of past community conversations include: *Racial Justice; Guiding Young People with Care; Sustaining our Communities Futures and Earth through Reimagining the Food System; and Asian American & Pacific Islander Empowerment and Resilience.*

Conclusion

We believe that sharing timely, accurate, and transparent information is a celebration of collaborative leadership. Our plan is to continue in this spirit of information flow so that all levels of leadership have awareness of how iBme is contributing to a liberatory, restorative, and contemplative community of leaders.

We look forward to keeping you informed of the ongoing work we are doing. The voices contributing to this update include Raquel Castro-Corazinni, Arielle Pierre, Tonya Jones, Sarah Wrean, & Jen Heitel. Information gathered in this report has been sourced from: 1) discussions with committee members; 2) iBme’s organizational assessment; 3) consultations with equity professionals; and more. We welcome any thoughts, questions, or feedback on this update. We welcome your feedback. Please forward any thoughts or inquiries to arielle@ibme.com and tonya@ibme.com.