

# The IDEEAS Working Group at Cornell University: A New Framework of Collective Leadership for Promoting Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Geosciences

Devlin Kelly<sup>1</sup>, Eiden Elizabeth<sup>1</sup>, Bürgi Paula<sup>1</sup>, MacQueen Patricia<sup>1</sup>, Headlam Carolyn<sup>1</sup>, Brill Kyle<sup>1</sup>, Carrillo Carlos<sup>1</sup>, Hamilton Douglas S<sup>1</sup>, Jiang Junle<sup>1</sup>, Barcheck Grace<sup>1</sup>, Hitchcock Peter<sup>1</sup>, and Mahowald Natalie<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cornell University

November 16, 2022

## Abstract

If the university can be thought of as an incubator for ideas and thought leadership, then each department is a learning ecosystem unto itself. The IDEEAS (Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences) Working Group formed organically in Cornell's Earth and Atmospheric Sciences department as a grassroots group with a desire to improve the department ecosystem. Self-selected from the full cross-section of the department, our members comprise students, staff, researchers, faculty, and emeriti. IDEEAS is a non-hierarchical group within the very hierarchical setting of academia, and our work provides a model for disrupting traditional power structures while leveraging their influence to reimagine how an academic unit could and should function. IDEEAS is not a committee; we are a collective. We believe that, irrespective of rank or role, every member of the department community has the capacity to practice leadership. As such, we lead by action. Each IDEEAS project or initiative is organized around an action team, who collectively carry out a community-informed vision of the culture we would like to co-create with the rest of the department. Our commitment to collective leadership empowers constituencies (e.g., students, non-academic staff, post-docs) who have traditionally lacked a pathway to provide input or participate in department-level decision making. IDEEAS is developing formal channels of communication between the group and department leadership in an effort to develop a sustainable ecosystem that will outlive its founders. IDEEAS events combine community building and intentional learning opportunities to promote critical reflection and foster connections. Events included a well-attended kickoff party with facilitated conversation that drew 56 attendees (~40% of the department), and community conversations about implicit bias and structural racism. IDEEAS organizers have been critically responsive during ongoing COVID19 isolation, providing numerous opportunities for social connection and using the disruption as a catalyst to cultivate connection and build community resilience that will outlast the pandemic. We invite discussion and collaboration with those engaged in similar justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work in the geosciences.





PRESENTED AT:



# WHY IDEEAS MATTERS

## Making an Impact

Geoscientists are attempting to tackle the earth's most complex problems. Diverse perspectives produce the most robust solutions, however, **geoscience is the least diverse field in STEM**<sup>[1]</sup>.

It is important to generate conversations about social, historical, political, cultural, economic context and impact of geosciences as a field. We as geoscientists and allies can reimagine both what our work entails and how these lenses may inform and transform research questions and solutions.

Closer to home, creating an inclusive environment is important for each person's success and happiness.

## Grassroots Collaboration

IDEEAS (Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences) formed organically as a **grassroots collective** with a desire to improve the cooperation and support among community members. Self-selected from the full cross-section of the department, IDEEAS comprises students, staff, researchers, pre-tenure and tenured faculty, and emeriti.

## One EAS, One Community

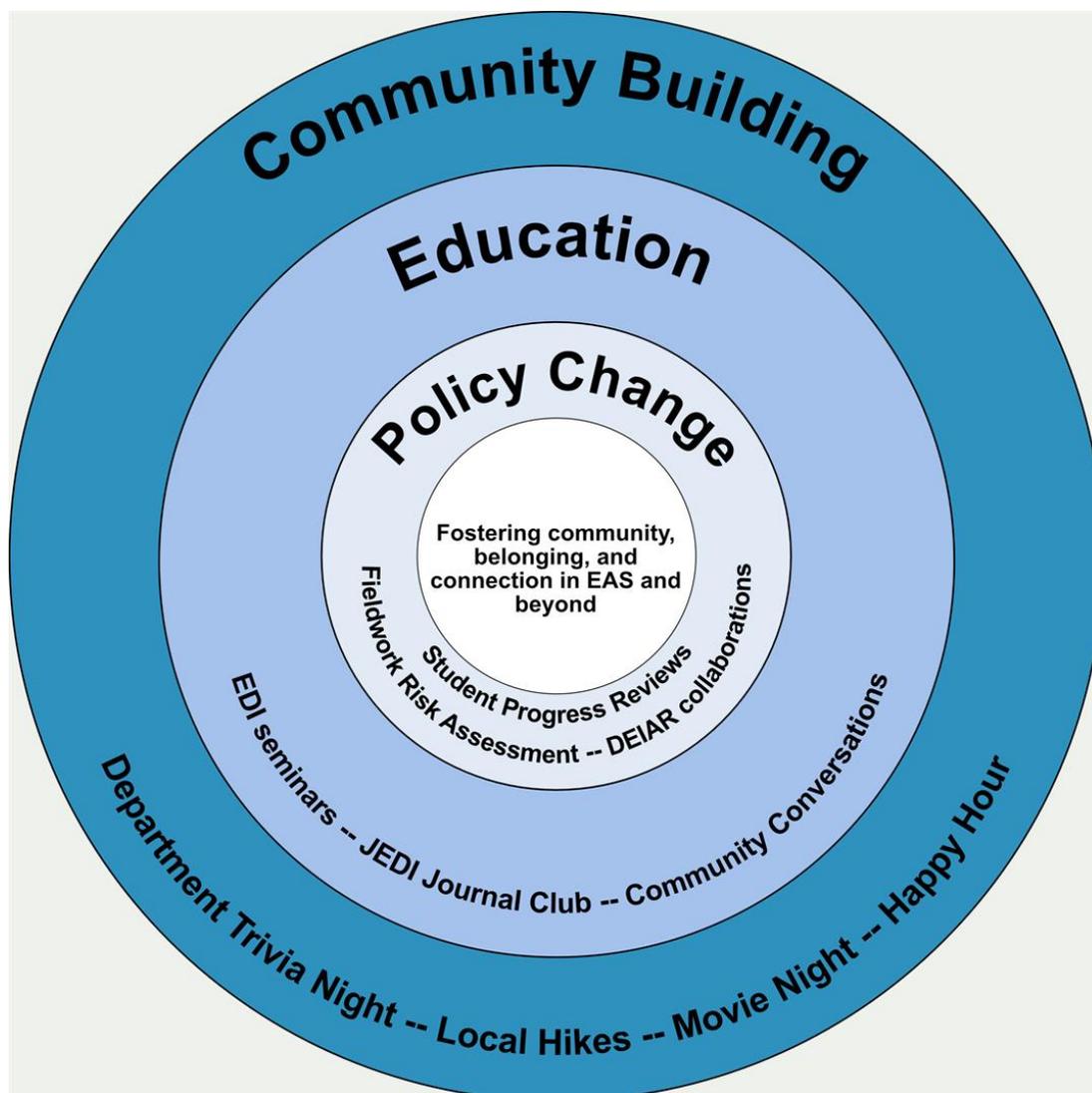
Historically, EAS has been a divided department. The two "sides" of our department – solid earth and atmospheric – formally merged two decades ago, and while it has been 20 years, in many ways we operate as two entities, rather than as **"One EAS."**

## Critical Reflection

IDEEAS intentionally incorporates **community reflection** into social events. For our first event, IDEEAS coordinators organized a getting-to-know-you Bingo game for ~40% of the department and facilitated small group conversations around belonging, inclusion, and community.

[1]Bernard, R. E., & Cooperdock, E. H. (2018). No progress on diversity in 40 years. *Nature Geoscience*, 11(5), 292-295.

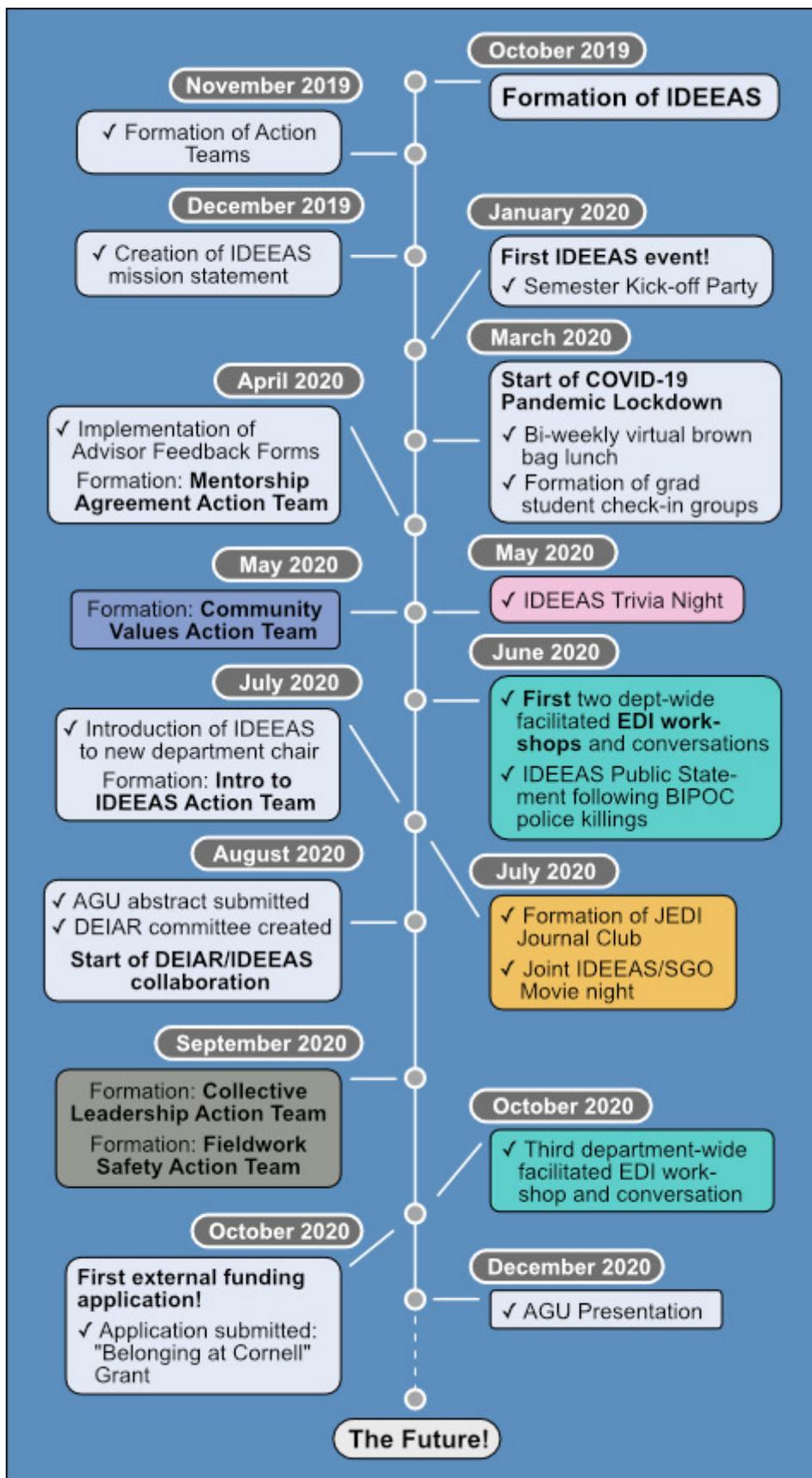
## OUR VISION



### Mission Statement

Our mission is to foster **inclusion, belonging, and community** in EAS among students, administrative staff, research staff, faculty, professors emeriti, and alumni. We actively promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and access as core values. We promote these values by bringing equity, diversity, and inclusion **learning opportunities** to the EAS community and create frameworks to ensure **equitable access** to department educational, research, and professional opportunities. We will continue to foster an environment to **cultivate respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives**.

# TIMELINE

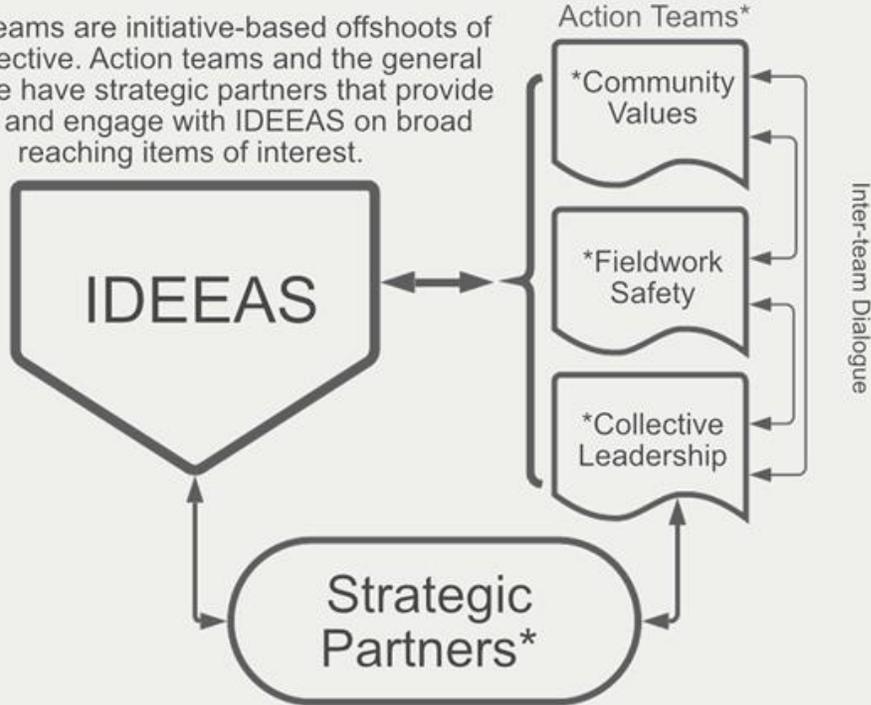


A timeline of IDEEAS's existence. Colored boxes correspond with the the initiative descriptions in the slides.

## HOW DO WE FUNCTION?

IDEEAS is a non-hierarchical working group within the hierarchical setting of academia. The IDEEAS ethos rests on the premise that **leadership is a dynamic process a group can enact collectively**, rather than an intrinsic quality that an appointed individual exercises over followers.

Action teams are initiative-based offshoots of the collective. Action teams and the general collective have strategic partners that provide insight and engage with IDEEAS on broad reaching items of interest.



\*One of our strategic partners is the DEIAR (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism) faculty planning committee. Here is an example of how the two groups work together.



## CHALLENGES WE FACED

While our group was unified in our goals to promote inclusion, diversity and equity, there were also differences and difficulties in moving forward.

- Differing Priorities
- Non-hierarchical Structure
- Differing Perspectives
- External Funding
- Fluid Participation

**Differing priorities:** Within the broad goals of promoting inclusion, diversity and equity, some may be more interested in short-term inclusion issues, such as combating feelings of isolation, while others are more interested in long-term equity issues, such as developing the pipelines to be able to recruit and maintain under-represented minorities into faculty lines.

**Non-hierarchical structure:** Universities are traditionally extremely hierarchical structures, where faculty teach, conduct research, and drive much of the university's priorities. How do we work within that framework to include more voices in decision making? How can our group best interact with the university hierarchy? How should we make decisions about priorities and who makes them?

**Differing perspectives:** Older generations frequently focus on how far we've come while younger generations are thinking about how far we have to go but the concept of building community crosses generations. The language of diversity, equity and inclusion emphasizes what needs to change, but can be lost in translation to some, making them feel excluded. How can we communicate broadly to members of all groups?

**External funding:** IDEEAS is a collective and does not fall into an administrative category such as student group or department committee. Most department and campus funding is allocated towards those specified groups. COVID-19 has also increased budget constraints and discretionary funding is more heavily scrutinized. How do we find funding for initiatives?

**Fluid participation:** Each year or semester different people become involved in some projects, or need to step back. How do we best maintain momentum and a feeling of cohesion while the group evolves? How do we make lasting change?



## Initiatives

**Collective Leadership & Governance**

What does our version of collectivism look like?

Our core beliefs:

- Building community requires time and trust
- Relationships > Results
- Decisions in our group are reached through consensus
- Reaching consensus builds trust over time, so the process becomes the product
- Consensus is not static, but must be maintained, so process is also self-reinforcing



## Initiatives

**Community Assessment and Values Statements**

Our community values statement will serve a unifying function and as guiding principles for our interpersonal and strategic decision-making going forward.

EAS Community Assessment goals:

1. Assess the climate in EAS
2. Rethink policies, practices, and norms that impact the department culture
3. Craft a values statement



## Initiatives

**Community Conversations**

We bring in facilitators to help guide discussions about EDI issues in our community.

- Systems Thinking: From Structural Racism to Geosciences  
June 19, 2020
- Uncovering Unconscious Bias: What it is and why it should matter  
June 24, 2020
- Establishing a Culture of Belonging  
October 29, 2020



## Initiatives

**Socially Distanced Social Events**

During these new times of COVID-19, we've hosted a range of events from a virtual department-wide trivia night to socially distanced hikes.



## JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) Journal Club

We host biweekly group discussions on a selected paper or article discussing JEDI topics in the geosciences.

Recent discussions:

- **Creating Spaces for Geoscientists with Disabilities to Thrive**  
Marshall, A. M., and S. Thatcher (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1029/2019EO136434>.
- **10 Rules for an Anti-racist lab**  
Chaudhary, B., and Berhe, A. A. (2020), <https://doi:10.32942/osf.io/4a9p8>.
- **The Diversity–Innovation Paradox in Science**  
Hofstra, B., et al. (2020), <https://doi:10.1073/pnas.1915378117>.



## ABSTRACT

If the university can be thought of as an incubator for ideas and thought leadership, then each department is a learning ecosystem unto itself. The IDEEAS (Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences) Working Group formed organically in Cornell's Earth and Atmospheric Sciences department as a grassroots group with a desire to improve the department ecosystem. Self-selected from the full cross-section of the department, our members comprise students, staff, researchers, faculty, and emeriti. IDEEAS is a non-hierarchical group within the very hierarchical setting of academia, and our work provides a model for disrupting traditional power structures while leveraging their influence to reimagine how an academic unit could and should function.

IDEEAS is not a committee; we are a collective. We believe that, irrespective of rank or role, every member of the department community has the capacity to practice leadership. As such, we lead by action. Each IDEEAS project or initiative is organized around an action team, who collectively carry out a community-informed vision of the culture we would like to co-create with the rest of the department. Our commitment to collective leadership empowers constituencies (e.g., students, non-academic staff, post-docs) who have traditionally lacked a pathway to provide input or participate in department-level decision making. IDEEAS is developing formal channels of communication between the group and department leadership in an effort to develop a sustainable ecosystem that will outlive its founders.

IDEEAS events combine community building and intentional learning opportunities to promote critical reflection and foster connections. Events included a well-attended kickoff party with facilitated conversation that drew 56 attendees (~40% of the department), and community conversations about implicit bias and structural racism. IDEEAS organizers have been critically responsive during ongoing COVID19 isolation, providing numerous opportunities for social connection and using the disruption as a catalyst to cultivate connection and build community resilience that will outlast the pandemic.

We invite discussion and collaboration with those engaged in similar justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work in the geosciences.