

September 7th, 2023

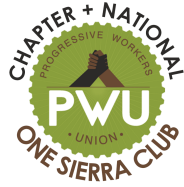
To President Chin and members of the Sierra Club Board,

I am writing in my role as President of the Progressive Workers Union and on behalf of our Sierra Club National and Chapter Units to share our analysis of the impacts of this spring's restructure and layoffs to our membership, and to express our significant concerns that this restructure had inequitable outcomes.

The restructure and associated layoff program was framed as a response to a budget crisis, yet the cumulative salaries of the top ten earners at the Sierra Club, \$3,236,620 as of April 30, 2023, nearly offset the projected total savings from PWU layoffs, \$3,599,641. Despite the union encouraging the Sierra Club Board and leadership since 2020 to prioritize reductions to inflated executive salaries and excessive overhead expenses, our BIPOC members were disproportionately impacted by layoffs in a program that will have lasting impacts on the internal equity and broader efficacy of the Sierra Club.

Based on a PWU analysis of members impacted by the restructuring, we saw disproportionate impacts to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) staff. These workers accounted for 48.5% of laid-off represented staff while Sierra Club's staff is 27.81% BIPOC, according to a [2022 report from Green 2.0](#). We do not present this information to accuse Sierra Club management of targeting these groups, but rather to illustrate the effects of layoffs that run counter to the Sierra Club's and the Union's shared goals and vision.

Our analysis of the full impact of the restructure is incomplete due to a lack of key data regarding the final number of layoffs, the racial and gender identities of *all* impacted staff, and other information that has not been provided to our union (see the "Remaining Questions" section of the analysis below). Throughout this process, Sierra Club leadership has declined to provide the union with key data regarding the restructuring, specifically about impacts to non-represented, largely managerial staff, a classification with significant influence on the culture and direction of the organization, and one that we know was largely impacted by the restructure and associated layoffs. Without this data, it will be impossible for us to get a full understanding of the impacts that the restructure had on the diversity of our organization and the disparate effects that it had on BIPOC staff members.



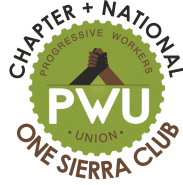
The restructure and the associated layoffs are still having profoundly negative effects on our members and their managers, and the organization as a whole. There has been a notable increase in contract violations, including ongoing denials of promotions and changes to job descriptions that significantly increase responsibility and workload. Declines in People Department (Human Resources) staffing have made resolving these issues extremely difficult and many members have lost hope about promised promotions or advancement. It is the Union's opinion that more collaboration with union leadership could have prevented an otherwise chaotic and ineffective restructure and layoff process and this gives us caution as we prepare for much-delayed contract bargaining later this year.

PWU Leadership acknowledges the challenges faced by Sierra Club due to projected budget deficits and the need to address those deficits. We strive to be a partner with Sierra Club in creating and maintaining a sustainable and healthy workplace for our members and hope that the data provided here will give the Board a better understanding of the significant impacts that restructuring has had on Sierra Club's years-long work to diversify and ensure racial and gender equity. Additionally, we hope that this glimpse of the consequences of decisions made since the budget crisis announcement instigates a deeper investigation into the equity impacts of the restructuring and associated actions, specifically by beginning with eliminating the equity department, which was largely BIPOC staff. We also offer this as an invitation to change course and re-engage with staff to seek a more representative understanding of your legal obligations to the organization and our members that is based in collaboration and respect.

We make these asks in the hopes that we can move forward as one Sierra Club, centering equity and compassion, and upholding the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

PWU President CJ Garcia-Linz on behalf of the Sierra Club Chapter and National Units



Progressive Workers Union Sierra Club 2023 Layoff Analysis

Sierra Club's 2023 Layoff Program

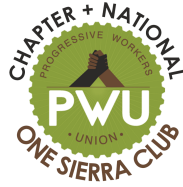
The restructure and the associated layoff program, including the initiation of a pre-curated Voluntary Severance Program (VSP) – also referred to as a Voluntary Separation Package – was announced at the end of April, with the VSP initially only offered to specific staff on May 10, 2023, with the implication and effect that staff who were offered but did not accept the VSP would be involuntarily laid off. The union learned through our members that some staff were later added or removed from the list after the fact. Non-represented staff were laid off in large numbers starting in late April as part of the program, but we will be focusing on our members as we lack sufficient data on non-union employees.

Note on PWU Voluntary Severance Program

PWU is aware Executive Director Ben Jealous has described the VSP program as one of the main culprits for institutional loss in knowledge. The VSP program is required by the Collective Bargaining Agreement as a way to reduce impacts on the organization and staff. Jealous' description, then, is one that inherently denigrates the union contract. The VSP program was a major source of contention during impact bargaining. It is our opinion this was because management developed a program that was built to fail in its intended mission.

In the beginning of our impact bargaining, management made it clear the VSP program was not intended to protect the organization from involuntary layoffs. Executive leadership stated during bargaining that there were financial concerns with backfilling roles on the VSP list, and that management had already made strategic staffing decisions. This is further evidence in the limited design of the VSP, which made offers to those who were already on the lay-off list, including managers from our understanding. Only a small number of members, eight in total, who were not already on the planned layoff list were made offers and of those eight, the union filed further grievances as some cases appear to bypass our collective bargaining agreement.

The VSP program, as defined by the Union's collective bargaining agreement, is designed to be a self-selection process offered to all staff in order to prevent involuntary layoffs. During the May restructure, the VSP was specifically designed to force certain staff to either accept



or be involuntarily laid off, a design out of line with the spirit and the letter of our contract. We see Sierra Club management's discomfort with the VSP program and that's the very reason why it's necessary. Layoffs should be costly to this organization; it disincentivizes Sierra Club from over-utilizing staff layoffs as a solution to its budgetary crisis.

Furthermore, the VSP, even if executed correctly, is not the source of people leaving the Sierra Club. An organization's culture, compensation, benefits and treatment of their staff is the ultimate determining factor.

Data Analysis

In total, 33 represented staff were laid off. **Sixteen Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) made almost 50%, approximately 48.5%, of those layoffs despite only making up about 28% of Sierra Club staff. Nine of the laid off represented staff voiced concerns that their layoff could have been retaliatory.**

Twelve staff were removed via the Voluntary Severance Program or had reassignment opportunities. However, many of those staff took the VSP because their position would be eliminated regardless, making the program feel involuntary.

Sierra Club has the needed information to complete an analysis of all layoffs, represented and non-represented.

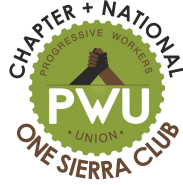
Cumulative Impact of Multiple Layoff Programs

In February and March 2021, Sierra Club staff were invited to apply for a voluntary layoff program (VLP) in which they would receive severance pay and an additional VLP incentive, based on their length of employment with Sierra Club. Between March and April of 2021, about 60 staff separated with the organization through the VLP, with 33 of those staff members from Sierra Club's unions: Progressive Workers Union (PWU; 26 members separated) and Sierra Employee Alliance (SEA; 7 members separated). A report from the 2021 VLP program that PWU sent to the board can be found [here](#).

Exit Interview Themes

The following analysis is a result of exit interviews PWU conducted with our members before they left the organization.

Why did they take the voluntary separation program?



Almost all respondents said they took the layoff program because they knew they were going to be laid off as a result of their role or campaign being eliminated. Most respondents described taking the option as a way to care for their mental health. Only one respondent said they were considering leaving before the restructure started.

Why did they not take the voluntary separation program?

Respondents, all of whom were offered VSP, said it made more financial sense for them not to take the involuntary layoff, and some voiced concern about qualifying for unemployment.

Would they have been worse off if they hadn't taken VSP?

For those that did take VSP, all respondents said they felt they would have been worse off if they had not taken the VSP.

What was their overall experience?

All respondents said it was a mixed to bad experience. Words and phrases used to describe the feeling are “traumatic”, “heartbreaking”, “disheartening”, “frustrating”, “hostile environment”, and “disappointing.” Respondents cited reports of BIPOC leadership being excluded from the process of the restructure and finding solutions to the budget crisis.

Could the Sierra Club have kept them?

Most respondents would have stayed if they had been offered another position only if there had been a more caring process with transparency. There was a feeling of being discarded and not valued.

Did they feel welcome at the Sierra Club?

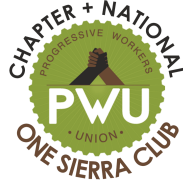
Mixed responses but overall sentiment was that they felt they were no longer welcome at the organization as a whole.

Did they have the training, and resources necessary to support their role?

Most respondents felt they lacked training, resources, support, and a clearly defined role.

Were there career advancement opportunities available?

Most respondents did not feel like there was a clear path for advancement within the organization.



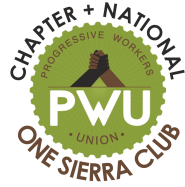
Did they see the contract being followed?

Many respondents reported seeing collective bargaining agreement violations related to equitable treatment of workers based on race and gender.

Remaining Questions to be Answered

As stated above, this is an incomplete analysis of the full impact of the 2023 VSP program on the Sierra Club staff community due to the lack of information about non-represented staff. PWU has requested further information and the final list of all staff voluntarily and involuntarily laid off. Here are some remaining questions that we feel should be answered in order to understand the full implications of the restructure:

- ***What percentage of Sierra Club's staff were BIPOC before the restructuring? How were those demographics impacted by the restructure?*** Based on PWU data on impacted represented staff, and [Green 2.0's diversity report on the Sierra Club](#), represented BIPOC employees were disproportionately impacted by the restructuring. This warrants further investigation.
- ***How many job openings did Sierra Club post between the announcement of restructuring to the completion of the VSP program and the involuntary layoff deadline August 27th? How did Sierra Club work to retain represented staff during this period?***
- ***What is the impact analysis of the restructuring and involuntary layoffs to non-represented staff?*** Without knowing the demographic data for non-represented staff at the Sierra Club, who were laid off in larger numbers than represented staff, it is impossible to fully gauge the impacts of the restructure on our organization. Only the People Department can answer this question and we hope an analysis of these changes is forthcoming, transparent, and shared widely with the Sierra Club volunteer and staff communities.
- ***What efforts, if any, were taken to reduce executive salaries in order to prevent staff layoffs?***
- ***The current state of the Sierra Club's operational capacity is low, and lacking key functional elements of the intended restructure. How does Sierra Club plan to address these gaps in a way that equitably engages the most impacted staff and volunteers?*** For example, there is no operational guidance for the "Regional



Hub" structure, and with the abolition of the Campaign Rep. role, there is limited to no capacity for project management and cross-department convening on key organizational priorities not already directed by Chapters.