THE HISTORY OF THE EFA WELCOME PROGRAM
by Brittany Dowdle

The Welcome Program was one of the first outreaches of the EFA’s Diversity Initiative (DI), whose own roots go back to 2016. At that time the DI was no more than a great idea championed by Sangeeta Mehta and Christina Frey. But once the Diversity Initiative was established in 2017, and the members took a good look at what steps we could take to foster a culture of inclusion within the EFA, we decided that a Welcome Program was a promising place to start.

That early Welcome Program paired DI members who took on the role of "welcomer" with other DI members who took on the role of "newcomer." We knew how important a program like this could be, so we invested the time and energy in running a beta version of the program, with DI members as the test pilots. Anytime you create something from scratch, there will be a learning curve, and we wanted to absorb the growing pains as a group before bringing in EFA newcomers.

In that first beta, I was paired (as a welcomer) with Alissa McGowan (in the role of a newcomer). The test run showed the DI that the idea had promise, but it would take more work, so in the fall of 2018, Sangeeta, Alissa, Kellie Hultgren, and I met once a week to develop program parameters and overviews. Alissa volunteered to run the first live session, and it was a success. For the next year’s session, I stepped up and paired with Linda Ruggeri as co-directors. Together we reviewed participant feedback and used it to further refine the program, with help from Sangeeta and Kellie. Starting in 2020, Linda began leading the WP, continuing to improve it. In each iteration of the program, past newcomers have stepped into welcomer roles, which is one of the best recommendations for the Welcome Program that any of us could have imagined.

With each year, we’re focusing on continuous improvement, listening to participants, and providing an opportunity for members to take ownership and leave the program better than when they arrived.

Thank you for being part of that process!

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