

Minutes of the
Fourth Meeting of the
MHAA Racial Equity Working Group
February 24, 2021

The fourth meeting of the Maryland Heritage Area Authority (MHAA) Racial Equity Working Group was held virtually on February 24, 2021.

Attendees Present

Robert McCord (Secretary of the Maryland Department of Planning and Chair of MHAA), , Walkiria Pool (Chair, Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs), Shauntee Daniels (Executive Director of the Baltimore National Heritage Area and representative of the Maryland Coalition of Heritage Areas), Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer, Director of Maryland Historical Trust, and MHAA member), Steven Lee (Commissioner for the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture), and Chanel Compton (Executive Director of the Banneker-Douglass Museum and staff to the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture)

MHAA Staff Present

Jennifer Ruffner, Ennis Barbery Smith, Andrew Arvizu

Welcome

Mr. Robert McCord started the meeting at about 1:05 p.m. by thanking everyone for attending virtually.

Ms. Jennifer Ruffner noted that the meeting is being live-streamed on YouTube for public viewing in accordance with Open Meetings Act requirements.

Discussion of MHAA Program Background Materials

Ms. Ruffner noted that additional materials had been added to the group's shared drive for review and invited any questions on those materials.

Mr. McCord inquired about whether anyone was having trouble accessing the files on the shared drive.

Mr. Steven Lee asked if perhaps the group should wait for the facilitator to help organize the meetings before really diving into the data. He noted that a lot of data has been shared but the group will benefit from the guidance of the facilitator in understanding the implications of the data.

Ms. Ruffner said that the working group members may determine what to discuss now and what to delay discussing.

Mr. McCord said that the preliminary discussions now can serve as a process of listing and noting items that should be covered by the facilitator-led discussion in more detail later.

Ms. Walkiria Pool asked about the recruitment process for the facilitator.

Update on Facilitator Request for Proposals (RFP)

Ms. Ruffner explained that one recruitment process failed since staff were not able to post the answers to bidder questions in a timely manner due to some staff absences and technical difficulties.

At the time of the meeting, a second recruitment process was ongoing.

Mr. McCord assured the group that the Maryland Department of Planning will be doing everything within their control to make sure that the process succeeds the next time around. He said that the department is making changes to their internal processes to help ensure this.

There was a question about whether any responses were received in response to the first RFP. Ms. Ruffner confirmed that the first RFP did receive some proposals.

Mr. Lee noted that he had asked at an earlier meeting about whether heritage areas needed to be geographically based and whether there could, in theory, be a culturally based heritage area. He asked if MHAA staff had looked into this question.

Ms. Ruffner said that according to the program's establishing statute, certified heritage areas must have boundaries that exist on a map and in this sense they must be place-based. However, heritage areas are and can be non-contiguous. In theory they could be a series of geographically defined points or small areas across the state. She noted that the limitations of this idea are related to the requirement for all jurisdictions involved to amend their comprehensive plans to include the heritage area's management plan when the boundaries are established or expanded.

Mr. Lee observed that MHAA would probably need to evolve its processes in order to allow for such a heritage area.

There was discussion of environmental-resource based heritage areas and project grants. MHAA staff clarified that this is already something the program supports, while some heritage areas have a stronger focus than others on environmental heritage and stewardship projects.

There was discussion of the multi-heritage area grant process, in which Mr. Lee said that one perception among applicants is that if one of the local heritage areas involved does not support the project, it seems that the project is unlikely to ultimately score highly enough to receive funding from MHAA.

Group members agreed that the group should discuss the multi-heritage area process as part of the facilitator-led meetings.

Ms. Chanel Compton added that the group is still very early in the discussion process and should remain open to all possibilities: institutionalizing racial equity in each local heritage areas' processes, creating a brand-new heritage area, other options, or all of the above.

Mr. Lee noted that it seems to be inequitable for project grant applicants to compete against project grant applications submitted by the heritage area management entities themselves and that this is one of the topics he would like to address in the facilitator-led meetings.

Mr. McCord thanked Mr. Lee and the group for the specific issues brought up and emphasized that, while the group is not ready to develop solutions at this point, he is committed to addressing these issues comprehensively, rather than in a piecemeal manner.

Mr. Lee asked if, given the discussion on equity-related issues at the local heritage area level, other local heritage area staff, in addition to Ms. Shauntee Daniels, might be interested in joining the working group?

Ms. Daniels explained the limited staffing capacity at many of the local heritage areas and emphasized that, while others had been interested in participating, they had not been able to allocate time. She offered to bring up this request at the next meeting of the Maryland Coalition of Heritage Areas.

Ms. Ruffner noted that, while staff had invited other heritage area directors to participate, another option might be having a meeting or series of meetings with the Coalition and the working group as things move forward.

Mr. McCord suggested that the facilitator should be given a list of contact information for all the local heritage areas and that they should be engaged in the process as needed as the working group moves forward.

Results of Demographic Survey – Expanded Data

Mr. Arvizu reported on the additional demographics survey responses received since the last meeting and the subsequently updated data. An additional 50 surveys were received, bringing the total to 147 over 65 days of data collection. Mr. Arvizu reported the following data and directed the group members to the shared drive for more details:

Of the responses received, 78% of the boards of directors were majority white, while 22% were majority African American. In terms of grant applicant organization staff, 88% of organizations reported majority white staff, while 12% reported majority African American staff.

In terms of mission statements, 14% of respondents specifically mentioned African American history, while 86% did not.

Other racial/ethnic categories were tracked, but the percentages were quite small. For example, 1.8% of organization board members were reported as Latino, and 1.4% as Asian.

Mr. Arvizu summarized that the vast majority of the comments received were positive, some offering insight into racial equity efforts being undertaken by the organizations. Some responses

offered justification for the racial make-up of boards and staff. Overall, about 5% of the comments received were less supportive of the survey effort, questioning why it was being undertaken.

Group members discussed that the act of circulating the survey may have generated some thinking about racial equity on the part of the organizations surveyed.

Next Steps

Mr. McCord underscored how much he appreciates the group members continued efforts, noting that he would like to continue to meet monthly, while the RFP process moves forward.

Ms. Elizabeth Hughes noted that multi-heritage area grant applications come with specific challenges and that it may be helpful for MHAA staff to put together some data about the review process and about successful and unsuccessful past applicants.

Ms. Ruffner agreed that this would be a helpful step.

Ms. Ennis Smith noted that the program is currently recruiting for grant review panel members and invited group members to nominate colleagues for the panel. She also noted that MHT staff members have asked the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights to lead a series of civil rights related training sessions for MHT staff members and partners. She invited the working group members to attend these educational virtual meeting sessions if they have interest and availability. The first one will be held on the afternoon of April 6. Interested working group members should email Ms. Smith to be added to the calendar invitation.

There was discussion about the nature and content of these sessions led by the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights.

Mr. McCord and the group members thanked each other for the time and contributions.

Mr. McCord concluded the meeting at approximately 2 pm.