

Minutes of the
Eleventh Meeting of the
MHAA Racial Equity Working Group
April 19, 2023

Attendees Present:

Rebecca Flora (Secretary of the Maryland Department of Planning and Chair of MHAA), Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer, Director of Maryland Historical Trust, and MHAA member), Shauntee Daniels (Executive Director of the Baltimore National Heritage Area and representative of the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition), Aaron Shapiro (Executive Director of Patapsco Heritage Greenway and representative of the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition), Steven Lee (Commissioner for the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture), Meagan Baco (Executive Director of Anacostia Trails Heritage Area and representative of the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition), Chanel Compton (Executive Director of the Banneker-Douglass Museum and staff to the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture)

MHAA Staff Present:

Ariane Hofstedt (Administrator, MHAA), Martha Waldron (Assistant Administrator, MHAA), Andrew Arvizu (Assistant Administrator, MHAA) Nell Ziehl (Maryland Historical Trust, Chief of the Office of Planning, Education, and Outreach)

Call to Order/Introduction/Roll Call:

Secretary Rebecca Flora convened the meeting at 2:32. In her opening remarks, she shared that this work is extremely important to her and that she is dedicated to addressing the issues of racial equity in the program. She wished that the entire working group could have joined for this important meeting but understood that scheduling had been an issue. She asked the group to introduce themselves.

The group introduced themselves.

Sec. Flora turned to Nell for a summary of past work.

Review of REWG Goals and Work Completed to Date:

Ms. Ziehl contextualized the Racial Equity Working Group Memo that was sent prior to the meeting by providing a history of the working group. First, she pointed out that MHT's statewide preservation plan PreserveMaryland II (2019-2023) recommended that MHAA "create a working group to identify barriers and evaluate equity in MHAA applications and grants." The second driver was a formal request that was sent in January 2020 to MHAA from Reverend Dr. Tamara Wilson of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture questioning funding discrepancies in the program and encouraging MHAA to take a critical look at its policies. In that same month, then Secretary Robert McCord called for the creation of MHAA's Racial Equity Working Group (REWG) with the goal of ensuring equal access to MHAA's programs, listening to stakeholders, examining MHAA's framework, and addressing barriers to the program. The REWG launched in October of 2020 with the intention of making a genuine and good faith effort to improve the policies, impacts, and funding for the program. At its first meeting, the group elected to focus specifically on the challenges facing the African American community. This could then serve as a model for other racial and ethnic groups. The group planned to conduct a two-phase approach, with the first phase focusing on identifying issues and creating a strategy and the second phase focusing on addressing the issues and executing that strategy.

Ms. Ziehl then outlined the following timeline of work completed to date: a demographic survey was conducted in December 2020, Symphonic Strategies consultant was hired in January 2022, and a draft MHAA equity report was produced by consultant the October 2023.

This work culminated in a presentation from Symphonic of the draft MHAA equity report to the Authority, the Racial Equity Working Group, and the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition in November 2022. Key concerns from stakeholders included a lack of demographic analysis, programmatic insight, or specificity in recommendations. MHAA staff hoped that Symphonic would be able to provide a revised report that addressed these issues and staff made several attempts over the last 3 months to work with them. During that time, they provided some additional information, but acknowledged that management challenges on their end prevented them from being able to complete the terms of their contract. Symphonic ultimately requested that we terminate their contract which was executed in February 2023. Of the \$50,000 contract, Symphonic had been paid \$10,000. The remaining \$40,000 reserved for the contract was unspent and remains in the MHAA account. While we did not get the final report we had hoped for, we do feel that Symphonic work did provide some important guidance. Ms. Ziehl concluded by explaining that the recommendations we will be going over today are based on information that was provided by Symphonic.

Ms. Shauntee Daniels joined the meeting.

Commissioner Steven Lee thanked Ms. Daniels for joining and noted that Ms. Daniels is the only African American director of a heritage area.

Dr. Shapiro asked why Symphonic was unable to complete their contract.

Ms. Ziehl explained that their evidence gathering phase was fundamentally flawed since the interviews and focus groups were not conducted appropriately. Symphonic also did not conduct a thorough document review at the outset of the process to be able to fully understand the program. Ultimately, they decided that they did not have the time and ability to correct the mistakes from early in the process.

Sec. Flora asked how Symphonic had been selected.

Ms. Ziehl explained that MHT had followed the state's procurement process.

Mx. Arvizu explained that the Racial Equity Working Group had selected 6 members, including 3 MHAA staff members and 3 members of the working group to serve on a selection committee for the consultant. Around 12 consultants applied for the position and the selection committee sat through interviews with 6 potential candidates. Symphonic was the highest ranked candidate.

Mx. Baco concurred that the process had been very thoughtful and thorough.

Commissioner Lee added that Symphonic gave the best presentation and provided examples of many similar projects which inspired confidence. He assured the panel that Symphonic was very carefully selected.

Ms. Hofstedt added that Symphonic had assigned MHAA's contract to a more junior consultant and that their upper-level staff had not paid as much attention as this project warranted because they had other larger high-profile clients they were managing at the same time.

Sec. Flora was happy to hear that the process had been thorough and hoped to reach a consensus on what items could be gleaned from the resources that Symphonic had left. She stated that the goal for the working group today was to discuss all 10 recommendations, and then determine which recommendations will be brought to MHAA.

Ms. Daniels noted that, after reviewing data and recommendations, Symphonic’s report should have focused more on the program at the state level than the local level. She suggested that too much of Symphonic’s consulting time had been spent analyzing individual heritage area processes, rather than the entirety of the state.

Sec. Flora thanked Ms. Daniels for her comments and noted that Symphonic’s report was flawed and wanted to focus on salvaging positive recommendations from the report.

Ms. Chanel Compton joined the meeting.

Recommendation 1 - Develop and include MHAA’s stated racial equity goals in the next MHT statewide preservation plan and Maryland Heritage Areas Program’s updated strategic plan

Sec. Flora introduced the first recommendation.

Mx. Baco asked about the timeline for the next MHAA strategic plan.

Ms. Hofstedt explained that MHAA will have a plan in place to draft a strategic plan by mid-FY24.

Dr. Shapiro noted the importance of ensuring that diverse voices are being brought to the table to decide what stories are being told.

Commissioner Lee stated that racial equity is also about what gets interpreted/preserved and how it gets interpreted and preserved, so not just about MHT programs but also the broader context. Goals should reflect internal and external work and be inclusive of all of Maryland’s rich assets.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #1 for MHAA:

Develop and include MHAA’s stated racial equity goals in the next MHT statewide preservation plan and Maryland Heritage Areas Program’s updated strategic plan. Goals should reflect internal and external work that is being done across all of Maryland’s assets and resources.

Recommendation 2: MHAA and its stakeholders should evaluate the definitions of equity and diversity as provided by Symphonic Strategies and approve or adapt

Sec. Flora introduced the second recommendation.

Ms. Hofstedt provided the definitions of Equity and Diversity as put forward by Symphonic who cited them from the Pride Centre of Edmonton’s 2019 Racial Equity Audit that stated Equity refers to “the rights of individuals and groups to a fair access to resources and outcomes.” Diversity refers to “the wide array of experiences among people and their perspectives on the world.”

Commissioner Lee emphasized how important it is for marginalized groups to tell their own stories and suggested adding “fair access to representation (boards and decision-making), resources, and outcomes” to the definition of equity. He explained that marginalized communities have historically lacked the representation to be able to control what kinds of stories have been told about them.

Sec. Flora agreed with Commissioner Lee’s recommendation to add representation to the definition of equity

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #2 for MHAA:

- Revise the proposed definition of Equity so the following adapted version is put forward to MHAA for consideration, "...refers to the rights of individuals and groups to a fair access to representation, resources and outcomes."

- No proposed revision to the definition of Diversity, so the definition as presented will be put forward to MHAA for consideration "...refers to the wide array of experiences among people and their perspectives on the world."

Recommendation 3 - Determine if the Racial Equity Working Group should continue and/or be reconstituted

Sec. Flora introduced the third recommendation.

Mx. Baco asked about the current makeup of the Racial Equity Working Group, particularly noting the lack of MHAA members.

Sec. Flora discussed the potential of reconstitution of the group to get more MHAA members on board and address issues of diversity.

Ms. Hofstedt explained that at the start there had been 19 members in the group, including individuals from other ethnic commissions. Attendance shifted when the group decided to focus on African American equity and has since steadily dwindled over its lifespan. She agreed with the plan to reconstitute the group given the new administration, turnover of positions, and the fact that the current REWG has achieved its phase 1 goal to identify the issues and create a strategy for phase II.

Commissioner Lee stated that he could not make a determination on whether or not the group should be reconstituted before we go through the process of fully examining the recommendations being put forward today.

There was consensus that the REWG would like more MHAA members to participate if it continues.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #3 for MHAA:

No proposed revisions, but REWG still needs to decide if they want to put this recommendation forward to the MHAA.

Recommendation 4 - Consider the best way to address an additional evaluation of the program's foundational documents and structure

Sec. Flora introduced the fourth recommendation.

Ms. Hofstedt pointed out that this was originally part of Symphonic's contract and that it did not get completed and still needs to be done. It was one of the items that was requested in Rev. Dr. Tamara Wilson's letter. If we were to proceed with this recommendation it could be a 2-year process and additional funds would be needed if a consultant was hired – someone that understands the complexity of state programs and cultural heritage.

Commissioner Lee agreed that an analysis of the program's structure is needed and added that evaluations should be conducted on an ongoing basis.

Sec. Flora agreed and added that the Governor is very focused on accountability and metrics, especially when it comes to issues of diversity and inclusion.

Ms. Hofstedt noted that it would be difficult to perform this analysis without outside help and that it may be useful to wait for guidance from the Moore administration.

Dr. Shapiro stated his support for recommendation 4. He reminded the group to consider the context of MHAA's foundational documents and noted that given the time period that many of these documents were

created they lack significant consideration of diversity and inclusion. He stated that the group should recognize that we live in an unjust and inequitable society, that was true in the 90s when this program was developed. How has the program addressed and acknowledged that? How can it be improved? He encouraged an analysis of the program structure to look at the development of the program over time throughout its development, rather than at a single snapshot in time.

Sec Flora agreed with this approach.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #4 for MHAA:

Consider the best way to address an additional evaluation of the program's foundational documents, structure, and its development over time.

Recommendation 5 - Collect demographic and racial composition data from applicants during the FY25 MHAA grant round and analyze metrics to determine usefulness

Sec. Flora introduced the fifth recommendation.

Ms. Ziehl explained that MHAA used the guidance Symphonic provided on Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI) and Black Serving Institutions (BSI) to develop the recommended questions outlined in the memo for data collection on demographic and racial composition.

Commissioner Lee pointed out that it should be standard procedure to collect this data, not just for FY25, but also beyond until we have achieved equity. Additionally, he suggested MHAA should also evaluate the diversity and equity of the committees making the selections, not just the applicants.

Dr. Shapiro agreed with Commissioner Lee. He raised the concern that the questions included in Symphonic's report may not tell the entire story, specifically when it comes to smaller organizations. Low staff could skew the numbers. How do we establish thresholds for useful data as some organizations have one paid staff, no paid staff, or no board structures? He suggested adding qualitative questions such as the Chesapeake Bay Trust application example, "what is the organization doing to improve equity, inclusion, etc.?"

Mx. Baco recommended incorporating other metrics beyond African American staff and board, such as other ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. They stressed the importance of self-selection when it comes to demographic data. They provided GuideStar's board member survey as an example <https://guidestar.candid.org/files/Demograhics%20PUP%20guide%2011102020.pdf>

Ms. Hofstedt pointed out that the memo stated that the three questions that were recommended for inclusion in the FY25 application could be adapted to address other groups, and that this would be a goal of the program. She agreed with the need for applicants to self-identity.

Commissioner Lee noted that historically it has been the African American civil rights struggle that has informed all other civil rights struggles not just here but in the world - so many groups take advantage of the rights that African Americans have gained for them. He added that this pattern repeated itself when representatives from other commissions left the REWG early on. He suggested adding "metrics to determine usefulness at a universal level" to the recommendation.

Ms. Hofstedt also recommended updated language to read "initiate" so that work would continue beyond FY25.

Sec. Flora agreed with both additions.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #5 for MHAA:

Initiate collecting demographic and racial composition data from applicants starting with the FY25 MHAA grant round and continue to analyze metrics to determine usefulness and equity at a universal level.

Recommendation 6 - Consider removing MHAA's grant program match requirement

Sec. Flora introduced the sixth recommendation and asked if this recommendation would even be possible.

Ms. Hofstedt explained the history of the match requirement. Initially, grantees needed 75% cash match. Now, they can use any combination of cash and in kind to fulfill their one-to-one match requirement. Other similar programs have eliminated their match requirement such as MHT's African American Heritage Preservation Program. She shared that smaller organizations have identified the match requirement as a challenge. Currently, the match requirement is in MHAA's statute.

Commissioner Lee agreed this was a good recommendation that should be made across all guidelines. He also suggested having each heritage area management entity develop committees of diverse members to determine the guidelines for and evaluations of the grants.

Sec. Flora recommended making Commissioner Lee's suggestion a new recommendation to be stated separately apart from recommendation #6.

Mx. Baco pointed out that it is currently MHAA staff who determine guidelines and application format, and the Grants Review Panel reviews the applications at the state level with the Authority ultimately approving or denying their recommendations for funding. They added that it would be interesting to have the Authority self-identify their racial and ethnic demographics as well.

Ms. Hughes talked about the importance of self-selection and not making assumptions when it comes to identity, especially in relation to the Authority - they should self-identify on a voluntary basis.

Dr. Shapiro worried that the removal of the match for management entities would be disastrous as it would disincentivize engagement at the local level. For local grantees, he worried that this change would harm the need "for skin in the game" and lessen the leveraging of state dollars.

Sec. Flora agreed that there would need to be caveats when it comes to eliminating or reducing the match.

Ms. Compton asked if it is up to the heritage area to determine what kind of match is required.

Ms. Hofstedt explained that the match requirement is determined at the state level, but each management entity can control the match requirements on their mini-grant program.

Ms. Compton prefers that the match be removed and added that as a frequent grantee, a match will always be a barrier. Removing the match would definitely increase access for projects and organizations.

Mx. Baco suggested that block grants should not have match, since they are used to support local community-based projects and could be given to first-time applicants as a form of capacity building. They also asked for a flowchart for the grant decision-making process.

Dr. Shapiro suggested that operating budget thresholds could be used as a waiver for any match requirement.

Sec. Flora agreed with these stipulations and noted that further discussion would be had with the Authority about the specifics of the match requirement.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #6 for MHAA:

No proposed revision, the recommendation stands as presented with the caveat that further discussions about the matching requirement would need to take place with the Authority and the language in the statute would potentially need to be changed.

It was suggested that a new recommendation be made to the Authority “At both the state and local levels, evaluate the diversity and equity of the review panels and committees responsible for determining grant guidelines and conducting evaluations.”

Recommendation 7 - Continue to make the grant process and application/grant agreement more accessible and user-friendly

Sec. Flora introduced the seventh recommendation.

Mx. Baco stated that the grant portal would benefit from having more automated reminders – more communication with grantees could be done through the grant software vs. one-on-one with staff. She agreed that there are a lot of improvements to be made and suggested looking for better grants management software. Such as Submittable [Grant Management Software | Submittable](#)

Dr. Shapiro noted that MHAA staff has made efforts to streamline the process. He encouraged the staff to continue these efforts so that there is 1 mandatory process rather than 13 individual sets of rules.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #7 for MHAA:

No revisions proposed, recommendation stands as presented.

Recommendation 8 - Consider creating mentoring and advisory opportunities for Black-led organizations, grant applicants, and heritage areas to assist with racial equity work

Sec. Flora introduced the eighth recommendation.

Ms. Compton noted that one of the missions of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture is to provide technical assistance to organizations across the state, but if each heritage area had advisory opportunities, that would be very supportive. She noted that there would need to be a clear framework for what this would look like, to prevent overlap.

Sec. Flora added that some of the Moore administration’s initiatives may support this.

Mx. Baco suggested that MHAA could co-host outreach meetings with the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture.

Ms. Martha Waldron added that some of the inspiration behind this recommendation is to connect successful grant applicants with first-time applicants to share insights into what worked for them.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #8 for MHAA:

No revisions proposed, recommendation stands as presented.

Recommendation 9 - Enhance and promote the mini-grant programs as tools to support racial equity

Sec. Flora introduced the ninth recommendation.

Mx. Baco explained that mini-grants only go up to \$5,000 and are often even smaller than that. They added that they do not want to see additional MHAA regulation in the mini-grant applications, to ensure applications can remain responsive to local priorities, but removing the match requirement would be good.

Ms. Compton noted that it is equally important to enhance and promote the major Capital and Non-Capital grants or an uneven access for minority groups will continue and they will not be able to get over the hump.

Commissioner Lee added that it's equally important that major grants are also enhanced and promoted to minority-led organizations as major grant tools. Stating that "Too many times, I have seen mini-grant programs used as a weapon" to disguise inequity. He suggested adding language to the recommendation that project grants would also be used to promote racial equity.

Ms. Compton shared that mini-grants across many different programs can be used to build racial equity through board training and capacity building to institutionalize racial equity work. She added that there are opportunities that are unique to mini-grants.

Sec. Flora agreed and concurred with Commissioner Lee's suggestion to have additional language added to the recommendation.

Ms. Ziehl noted that the intention of this recommendation was not to take away emphasis on the major grants, it was directly cited by Symphonic as a tool that was working and had more potential.

Dr. Shapiro noted that the current recommendation looks outwardly but not inwardly at the capacity of certified management entities to efficiently administer mini-grants and enhance racial equity work within their organization. He said that management entities will need help to make their efforts more consistent and equitable.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #9 for MHAA:

Enhance and promote all MHAA grant programs (capital, non-capital, block, management, marketing) equally across all heritage areas as tools to support racial equity.

Recommendation 10 - Evaluate heritage area themes and boundaries

Sec. Flora introduced the tenth recommendation.

Ms. Hofstedt added that this was recommended directly by Symphonic. She noted that assessing themes and boundaries would be a great undertaking, with many variables at play. She shared that former Sec. McCord had provided MHAA with some demographic data to start, but much more data and analysis would be necessary.

Commissioner Lee strongly agreed with this recommendation as he had been a longtime advocate for an evaluation of themes and boundaries. He reminded the group that many boundaries were established in the 1990s along with themes. Since they were created in a different time, they should be updated to make them more relevant to the communities they serve. Additionally, he questioned why heritage areas need geographic boundaries and suggested the creation of boundaries based on cultural heritage that are more relevant and representative of today.

Mx. Baco suggested separating the evaluation of themes and boundaries into two processes. Boundaries are immediate qualifiers/disqualifiers for grant eligibility and based on targeted tourism zones and themes are narrative and interpretative frameworks for explaining the authentic experience of an area. They suggested

making these two separate recommendation statements - both having cultural connectivity but to be assessed individually.

Commissioner Lee wanted to critically analyze the entire process between both themes and boundaries. He stressed the importance of having a diverse panel of folks making these determinations and the need for equity in decision-making. European Americans may have a different view on what constitutes a “tourist hotspot.”

Sec. Flora agreed with the distinction and with Commissioner Lee’s recommendation.

Proposed Revisions to Recommendation #10 for MHAA:

The following new language is being proposed for consideration:

- Evaluate the process of how and why themes are developed and used by heritage areas in promoting cultural narratives and heritage tourism products.
- Evaluate the process of how and why boundaries are defined and used by heritage areas for determining eligibility and target tourism zones.

Conclusion:

Sec. Flora thanked the group for a productive conversation. She explained that the next steps would be for MHAA staff to provide a revised list of recommendations based on today’s conversation and for members of the REWG to provide written feedback on the recommendations to MHAA staff by April 28th, 2023. Once the recommendations have been finalized via email, they will be sent to MHAA for consideration at the July meeting.

The group agreed with the plan.

Sec. Flora ended the meeting at 4:05 pm.