

Minutes of the
Third Meeting of the
MHAA Racial Equity Working Group
January 19, 2021

The third meeting of the Maryland Heritage Area Authority (MHAA) Racial Equity Working Group was held virtually on January 19, 2021.

Attendees Present

Robert McCord (Secretary of the Maryland Department of Planning and Chair of MHAA), Reverend Tamara England Wilson (Chair, Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture), Frederick Nnoma-Addison (Commissioner for the Governor's Commission on African Affairs), Shauntee Daniels (Executive Director of the Baltimore National Heritage Area and representative of the Maryland Coalition of Heritage Areas), Wayne Clark (MHAA member), Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer, Director of Maryland Historical Trust, and MHAA member), Steve Lee (Commissioner for the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture)

MHAA Staff Present:

Jennifer Ruffner, Ennis Barbery Smith, Andrew Arvizu, Bernadette Pruitt

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. McCord opened the meeting with introductions at 3:05p.m. He wished everyone a happy new year and encouraged the working group to consider how they could continue their important work into this year. In looking at the working group's coming work, Mr. McCord identified two phases for moving forward: understanding how the Maryland Heritage Areas program works and understanding how to improve the program. He then asked Ms. Ruffner to report on the materials that had been compiled since the last meeting.

Compilation of Organizational Documents

Ms. Ruffner highlighted the shared Google Drive which contained the materials that MHAA staff had compiled at the request of the working group. She explained that staff had uploaded the statute, regulations and by-laws; board lists and by-laws from local heritage areas; grants materials, including a more in-depth review of the grants process, and information on management grants; and an updated organizational chart.

Ms. Ruffner offered to provide details on any of the documents in question.

Several members of the working group explained that they had not yet read the documents due to the busy nature of the past month. Ms. Ruffner stated that staff would be on hand to answer any questions as they arise.

Report on the Demographic Survey of Past Applicants

Mr. Arvizu provided an update on the demographic survey that had been conducted at the direction of the working group. He stated that the survey had received a higher than expected response rate, receiving over 100 responses out of roughly 300 requests. He explained that the survey had been active since Mid-December and had asked applicants of the past three years questions about their mission statement as well as the demographics of their board and staff.

Mr. Arvizu then explained the results of the survey. He stated that of 102 responses, 17% of organizations stated that they had an African American majority board and 10% stated that they had an African American majority staff. Additionally, 7% of organizations had a mission statement that specifically mentioned African American history. Finally, 8 organizations met the previously established criteria of an African American led-organization, by having both an African American majority board and a mission statement that mentioned African American history.

Then, Mr. Arvizu discussed a subset of the data, heritage area management entities. Of the thirteen management entities, only one had a majority African American board and staff. None of the thirteen had a mission statement that specifically mentioned African American history, although some mission statements included mentions of diversity or telling a more inclusive story. Combined, the boards of the management entities were 78 percent white and 17 percent black.

Finally, Mr. Arvizu discussed the comments that had been included in the survey. He outlined three broad categories of comments. The first, and by far the most common, were comments that expressed support for the collection and use of this data. The second were comments that sought to provide clarification of organizations' specific circumstances. The final were a minority of comments that expressed concern with the collection of this data, particularly in relation to MHAA's status as a state agency.

Mr. Lee asked staff to publish the data from the survey and was pleased by the volume of positive comments.

Mr. McCord encouraged MHAA staff to conduct a second call for responses, having seen the success of the survey's initial implementation. He stressed that the short period that the survey was open may have limited the total number of responses that were gathered. Moreover, the survey had come out at a time when many organizations are already very busy, further disincentivizing them from completing the survey. Mr. McCord concluded that a second call for responses would be highly beneficial even if it only drew a few responses since those responses may contain comments that could influence future working group meetings.

Ms. Daniels asked MHAA staff if the survey had categorized the responses by heritage area and requested a list of respondents from her heritage area, so she could identify who had not completed the survey.

Ms. Ruffner explained that the survey did not contain a field to collect that data, but that staff could compile that information. She stated that in the second round of the survey, she would reach out to heritage area directors in the hopes that they could share the survey with their networks.

Mr. McCord underscored the importance of a second round, and encouraged MHAA staff to begin its implementation shortly.

Ms. Daniels explained that as the representative of the coalition of heritage area directors, it was her responsibility to reach out to her fellow directors and ask them to engage with the survey.

Mr. Nnoma-Addison asked about the purpose of the survey if the results are not designed to be used as criteria in determining grant awards.

Ms. Ruffner explained that this data would serve as a baseline to judge the effectiveness of future actions. She stated that MHAA had never compiled demographic data in this manner, and this survey represented a starting point from which future surveys could be compared to. She stated that MHAA staff would promptly work to distribute a second call for responses, and would work with heritage area directors to promote the survey.

Mr. Clark commended the survey and explained that once a consultant has been brought on board the survey may serve as baseline data for future analysis.

Mr. Lee reiterated the need for a second call for responses. He then asked if the survey contained any questions about the funding of heritage area management entities.

Ms. Ruffner explained that there was a spreadsheet containing an in-depth breakdown of that information on the shared Google Drive. Ms. Ruffner asked for further comment on the survey, and stated that the survey results would be posted online after the meeting.

RFP for Working Group Facilitator

Ms. Ruffner then discussed the RFP for the working groups facilitator, which had been published. Ms. Ruffner asked for feedback on the rubric for scoring RFPs. Finally, Ms. Ruffner asked if any members of the working group were interested in serving on the Technical Review Panel which would assess the RFPs once they arrive.

Ms. Hughes asked about the first two questions on the rubric: “If this offeror would perform the contract for free, would you select it?” and “If this was the only offeror, would you select it?”

Ms. Ruffner explained that these questions were a formal part of the state’s procurement process.

Ms. Daniels asked if any of the HA directors could serve on the Technical Review Panel, and Ms. Ruffner confirmed that they could.

Reverend Wilson nominated Mr. Lee to serve on the Technical Review Panel. Mr. Lee respectfully declined due to workload.

Rev. Wilson stated that she would nominate another individual to serve on the Technical Review Panel as a representative of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture.

Ms. Ruffner asked the group for feedback on the scoring criteria.

Ms. Hughes asked if candidates would be required to provide references before being selected.

Ms. Ruffner explained that the procurement process asked candidates to provide 3 references. Additionally, she stated that the procurement process has a 100% Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) goal.

Rev. Wilson said that Ms. Compton, the Executive Director of the Banneker-Douglass Museum and staff to the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture, had circulated the RFP within her network.

Ms. Ruffner explained that several candidates had already declined to submit a proposal, since they were too busy to accept an additional contract.

Mr. Lee asked if it would be a conflict of interest for a commissioner from the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture to apply for the position.

Ms. Ruffner explained that it would not be a contradiction as long as they had not been involved with the creation of the RFP.

Mr. McCord asked MHAA staff to check with the Maryland Office of the Attorney General for potential conflict of interests in relation to Mr. Lee's question.

Ms. Ruffner stated that anyone serving on the working group could not submit a proposal, as that would be a conflict of interest. She then explained that the RFP should be filled between the end of February and early March.

New Business and Next Steps

Ms. Ruffner asked the group for any new business.

Mr. Lee asked about the number of grant programs that MHAA administers.

Ms. Ruffner explained that there are capital and non-capital project grants, management grants, marketing grants, and block grants. The block grants are used by heritage area management entities to administer mini-grant programs within their heritage areas. Finally, there are grants available for the formation of new heritage areas.

Mr. Arvizu added that there are also emergency grants, although those grants do not constitute an additional grant program.

Ms. Ruffner explained that emergency grants are categorized as project grants.

Mr. McCord explained the role that the Executive Committee plays in determining eligibility for emergency grants. When the executive committee receives a request for an emergency grant, the committee tries to determine the urgent nature of the request. He stated that there are occasions when there is disagreement about the emergency nature of a request. Because of this, the emergency grant program is not an automatic process, but rather a carefully reviewed program that can quickly tackle the most pressing preservation issues.

Mr. McCord added that MHAA had provided emergency operational grants to mitigate the economic effects of Covid-related shutdowns in the previous two fiscal years.

Mr. Lee noted that MHAA administers five distinct grant programs.

Ms. Ruffner agreed and elaborated on mini-grants which are administered by the local heritage areas and are for non-capital grants. Ms. Ruffner then called on Ms. Daniels to discuss her perspective as the director of the Baltimore National Heritage Area

Ms. Daniels explained that she had grant money from the City of Baltimore for small capital projects under \$15,000 in addition to federal money for Heritage Investment Grants. Both of those programs are completely separate from the MHAA program.

Ms. Daniels also explained her block grant program, which is used for neighborhood investment projects. Neighborhoods in the boundary of the state heritage area can apply for those funds for smaller signage and special projects to support historic or or culturally significant neighborhoods. Overall, the goal is to leverage local resources to support heritage tourism. She explained that the project had been very successful since 2018 and has been a great use of \$25,000 in investment.

Mr. Lee stated that the neighborhood of Windsor Hills could put that program to great use.

Ms. Daniels agreed and said that she would be happy to work with them. Further she explained that she has already received three applications from neighborhoods within her new heritage area boundaries.

Ms. Ruffner explained that this was one of the most innovative uses of block grant funds across the heritage areas. She stated that the reason that these grants provide smaller awards is to avoid the high amount of paperwork that is associated with larger state grants. Mini-grants allow smaller organizations to have access to these funds without having to deal with statewide bureaucracy.

Ms. Daniels explained that this is part of the reason that management grants cost around \$100,000. She said that each local heritage area has to conduct their own grants management,

which means the heritage areas require staff to process local grants, just like MHAA needs staff for statewide grants.

Mr. Nnoma-Addison asked if these grants are shared at the ethnic commissions.

Ms. Ruffner stated that staff has shared these grants in past years, but had not done so this year. She explained that staff was working on opening the fiscal year 2022 grant round, and that staff was helping organizations submit their intent to apply forms which are due by the end of the month.

Ms. Smith encouraged organizations to submit ITAs since they allow organizations to complete the full applications for fiscal year 2022 project grants.

Rev. Wilson thanked the group for compiling information on the shared Google Drive, and said that the group was in a strong position to move forward. She explained that the group's work has been positive and has reflected Mr. McCord's intention to address the concerns she had laid out in her earlier letter.

Mr. McCord thanked the group as well and asked for final business.

Mr. McCord concluded the meeting at 3:54p.m.