

Minutes of the  
Ninth Meeting of the  
MHAA Racial Equity Working Group  
June 24, 2022

**Attendees Present**

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

**MHAA Staff Present**

Ariane Hofstedt, Andrew Arvizu

**Introduction:**

Secretary Robert McCord started the meeting at 2:05 and welcomed those in attendance.

Mr. Andrew Arvizu provided a progress update on the ongoing racial equity report being conducted by Symphonic Strategies. They shared that Ms. Bhabha had been coordinating closely with MHAA staff to gather information and prepare focus group and interview questions. Mr. Arvizu then turned the meeting over to Symphonic Strategies to provide a status update.

**Symphonic Update:**

Ms. Aadila Bhabha opened the update by describing the different focus groups, including past grantees, applicants who had not received grants, and outreach partners. In addition to these focus groups Symphonic planned to conduct a number of one-on-one interviews with heritage area directors and board members. She explained that the heritage area interviews will focus on understanding both the grants process and overall architecture of the program.

Mr. Steven Lee asked if the Eubie Blake Center was going to be interviewed and, if not, that they be added to the list.

Ms. Shauntee Daniels recommended against adding the Eubie Blake Center to the list, since they had not received an MHAA grant and are under new management. As a result, they may not be able to provide useful context.

Mr. Aaron Shapiro asked about the logistics of the meetings.

Ms. Bhabha explained that the interviewees have not been given notice yet. In the coming days, Symphonic will provide a standard introduction to the project and coordinate the meetings.

Mr. Shapiro asked how people who have different connections to the program, such as former HA directors or board members, will be identified.

Ms. Bhabha stated that Symphonic will make sure that everyone introduces themselves in the focus groups and that relation to the program is taken into account in the final report.

Ms. Daniels asked if Nita Settina and Marci Ross would be interviewed.

Ms. Hofstedt confirmed that both individuals were on the list, specifically for their knowledge of tourism in the state and not because of their preview experience on the Technical Advisory Committee.

Mr. Lee agreed with several of the names on the list. He asked if Mr. Fred Tutman would be interviewed.

Mr. Wayne Clark shared that Mr. Tutman has a long history with the Patuxent River Commission, and discussed connections with environmental grants and project support. He also shared that he was happy to see Ms. Ross is on the list as well, due to her experience with museums on the Eastern Shore. Finally he added that Ms. Charlotte Davis will provide useful insight on the Rural Maryland Program.

#### Review of questions:

Ms. Bhabha then focused on the questions to be asked of the focus groups. She explained that they tried to limit each group to five questions. Further, the questions were based on the feedback that Symphonic had gathered from the heritage area interviews.

Mr. Clark recommended that a question be added to discuss the history of the program, and if changes to policy have made the program more or less accessible.

Ms. Bhabha agreed to add this question.

Mr. Lee suggested asking grantees how long they had been aware of MHAA. Particularly, he was interested in organizations that knew about the program, but did not apply for grants.

Mr. Shapiro agreed that this would be useful to know, but raised the issue that many heritage areas were created at different times. He encouraged Symphonic to apply a geographic lens that would consider where applicants which heritage area applicants were responding from.

Ms. Bhabha agreed to these points and planned to incorporate them into the questions.

Secretary McCord asked about the use of the word “fair” when describing MHAA’s grant process. He pointed out that the term is subjective.

Ms. Bhabha explained that these questions will be coming out in a focus group so that the group could give their own open-ended perspective. She hoped to receive a variety of perspectives from everyone in the group and assumed that there will be different feedback from different heritage areas.

Ms. Daniels echoed the concerns over the term “fair” and proposed the term “equitable.”

Ms. Bhabha agreed to change this language.

Mr. Shapiro asked what kind of feedback Symphonic hoped to achieve from interviewing applicants who did not receive MHAA grants.

Ms. Bhabha explained that they will have a good understanding of the difficulties in applying for MHAA grants and they may even have some useful information on pervasive feelings about the program.

Ms. Elizabeth Hughes asked what type of equity is being addressed, since geographic equity has always been a consideration, but other types have not.

Mr. Lee suggested keeping “fair” in the questions, since it will give insight into how these organizations feel about the program. He explained that, in over 30 years of applying for grants, one of the key considerations he has is whether the process is fair.

Ms. Daniels agreed with Mr. Lee's point on the usage of "fair" and hoped that these interviews would be able to capture the different perceptions of this program. She then cautioned that the timing of the interviews will mean that the most recent grant round will be on the mind of a lot of grantees. She added that many Baltimore applicants were denied and this might strongly impact the discussions. On the other hand, she pointed out that doing the interviews before the grant round is announced may look like Symphonic is trying to avoid hard conversations.

Mr. Lee encouraged Symphonic to move forward with the interviews as planned, and deal with the reality of the situation rather than try to sway the result.

Ms. Bhabha said the exact timeline of the interviews will come down to availability.

Mr. Lee mentioned that the questions for MHAA partners will vary widely depending on the perspective of the organization in question.

Mr. Clark asked how Symphonic will be tracking MHAA's grant process.

Ms. Bhabha explained that she will be using interviews and the fiscal year 2023 ranking letters from each heritage area.

Mr. Lee asked how the report will address multi-heritage area grants, especially since the heritage area boundaries are often prohibitive to projects supporting African American heritage.

Ms. Bhabha agreed to add a question on this issue.

Mr. Clark asked how the report would address issues of representation of African Americans at the heritage area level. He stressed that the basis of the inequities in the program are tied to the challenges facing archeology and history as a whole. He suggested asking heritage areas what is keeping them from promoting more diversity in their staff and board.

Ms. Bhabha agreed and mentioned that this may be a structural issue, rather than an issue with individual heritage areas. She shared that this is an issue in many fields.

Mr. Lee agreed with this point and stressed the importance of minorities in decision making positions, not just on the staff.

### **Next Steps:**

Ms. Bhabha shared that she will compile the feedback from this meeting and create new focus group questions by early next week. In the meantime, she will schedule the focus groups.

Ms. Hosftedt added that Symphonic will be presenting to MHAA at the July 14th meeting. At the meeting, Symphonic will discuss the process, roles and responsibilities, and timeline of the project.

Mr. Lee concluded the meeting by sharing that after 239 years, the first book on an African American soldier of the Revolutionary War has been published. This book was made possible by Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and is titled “The Story of Mr. Thomas Arne: A Maryland Patriot of the Revolutionary War.”