

Minutes of the  
Seventh Meeting of the  
MHAA Racial Equity Working Group  
April 29, 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), Ngozi Azubike (Commissioner for the Maryland Commission on African Affairs), 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), Nell Ziehl (Maryland Historical Trust, Office of Planning, Education, and Outreach), Aadila Bhabha (Symphonic Strategies)

**MHAA Staff Present**

Andrew Arvizu

**Introduction:**

The meeting was started at 2:02 by Mr. Robert McCord, who welcomed everyone. Everyone briefly introduced themselves, including Ms. Aadila Bhabha, the Working Group's new point of contact with Symphonic Strategies.

**Data Collection for Symphonic Strategies:**

Mr. Andrew Arvizu began by discussing the collection of interviewees for Symphonic Strategies. At the last meeting, Symphonic had requested the names of individuals who should be part of individual interviews or focus groups. Between this meeting and last, members of the Working Group and the Maryland Coalition of Heritage Areas (MCHA) had provided around 40 names. Mr. Arvizu reported that several MCHA members were still waiting to submit their interviewees.

Ms. Bhabha offered to review the list of names and handle the selection process by following a theme-based series of criteria.

Mr. McCord requested that the Working Group have the opportunity to endorse specific candidates for consideration. Mr. Arvizu agreed to facilitate this process ahead of the next meeting.

Mx. Megan Baco mentioned some of the challenges that members of the MCHA had faced in collecting this list, including issues with two separate data requests being made. Mr. Aaron Shapiro concurred. Mx. Baco suggested putting together a shared list that combined both data requests.

Ms. Bhabha agreed to look at a shared list, containing endorsements from the Working Group, and to use that list for selecting interviewees.

### **Plans for Facilitation:**

Ms. Bhabha then introduced Symphonic's plans for facilitation. She started by breaking down the facilitation into three categories: assessment, reporting, and planning. The assessment phase will involve 20 hours of interviews and focus groups as well as a review of MHAA's institutional documents. The reporting phase will involve working with the Working Group to produce a series of recommendations in the form of an audit. Finally, the planning phase will include 20 hours of consultation on the implementation of the recommendations from the audit.

Mr. Steven Lee approved of the proposal and particularly appreciated the idea that Ms. Bhabha was going to reach out to constituents that have not applied for MHAA funding in the past. He explained that many groups do not feel encouraged to apply due to the history of the program and policy-based impediments.

Ms. Bhabha explained that Symphonic will be happy to look at these groups, but asked the Working Group how they might accurately identify them for interview.

Mr. Lee explained that he was specifically thinking of smaller museums and cultural organizations. Funding decisions in the past mean that these smaller organizations have fewer resources and less organizational capacity to commit to lengthy grant applications that have historically been unfruitful. In particular, Mr. Lee stressed the mental barrier created by a legacy of underfunding.

Ms. Ngozi Azubike agreed with Mr. Lee and hoped that Symphonic would be able to come up with ideas for reaching out to these organizations, breaking down barriers, and bringing new people into the program.

Ms. Bhabha agreed and explained that all of this will be under consideration during the facilitation process.

Mr. Shapiro asked Symphonic to consider the barriers that eligibility requirements put on potential partner organizations. As the heritage area director of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area, he provided examples of organizations that were in Baltimore County, but outside of the heritage area, meaning they were ineligible for grant funding. He encouraged Symphonic to specifically look at these organizations.

Ms. Chanel Compton asked that MHAA staff be added to the list of interviewees. She explained that the staff members would be able to speak to the history of the program and the challenges that limited capacity can bring.

Mr. McCord asked Mr. Arvizu to get a list of applicants to MHT's Census grants from Ms. Anne Raines, deputy director for MHT, to send to Symphonic.

### **Discussion of Roles During Facilitation:**

Ms. Bhabha then laid out the roles for each of the involved parties in the facilitation. First, she explained that MHAA will be responsible for providing documentation and information for Symphonic to review. Then she explained that MHAA staff will be responsible for facilitating the transfer of information and providing support to Symphonic. Finally, they explained that the MCHA will be responsible for providing feedback on the process and sharing information on their own local policies in regards to supporting minority-led organizations.

Mx. Baco encouraged Symphonic to look at how each heritage area handles scoring at the local level. They explained that each heritage area uses a different scoring system and review criteria. They also drew attention to the wide disparity of funding and staff between heritage area management entities. These disparities have a major impact on the capacity of heritage areas overall. Finally, Mx. Baco asked MHAA staff to compare the performance of this program to other similar programs such as MHT Capital and Non-Capital and the now-defunct Museum Assistance Fund.

Mr. McCord agreed and asked that MHT staff create a spreadsheet of grants from other MHT grant programs.

Mr. Lee stressed that the real question at hand is not the number of grants, but rather the amount of grant funding. He explained that just because a certain number of grants was being given to minority-led organizations, that does not guarantee equity in funding. Further, Mr. Lee circled back on the issue of heritage area boundaries as a way to cut organizations out from funding.

Ms. Ziehl drew a distinction between the Museum Assistance Fund and MHAA, citing that they had been created for different purposes. She also agreed with Mr. Lee that the boundaries of heritage areas has resulted in certain organizations being unable to be considered for fund funding. She stated that it was possible that MHAA could consider changing its location-based focus, but traditionally that has been part of the distinction between MHAA and the Museum Assistance Fund.

Ms. Shauntee Daniles added that the program is focused on promoting economic development through heritage tourism and that a location based design has been important to that model. She added that because of the defining of the Museum Assistance Fund, there has been a lack of support for operations. While she agreed that finding new sources of operational funding will be important, she explained that, right now, the focus should be on driving economic development through economic tourism.

Mr. McCord added that in the past, MHAA had relied on targeted investment zones to decide which areas were eligible for funding. Around the middle of the 2010's, MHAA removed targeted investment zones to make the program more dynamic and flexible. Since then, the program has shifted to an area-wide focus to determine eligibility. He added that, just like targeted investment zones, it is possible that areas could be removed in the future. He concluded by suggesting that MHT either look at ways to bring back the Museum Assistance Program or MHAA should look into ways to partner with institutions across Maryland.

Ms. Ziehl shared that a needs study on the Museum Assistance Program was created several years prior and should be available for review.

Ms. Bhabha concluded her presentation by asking the Working Group to guide Symphonic as to where to put their focus. She asked the Working Group to carefully consider what they wanted to get out of this facilitation and encouraged them to consider whether it is more important that MHAA provide a lot of grants to minority-led organizations or a few very meaningful grants to minority-led organizations.

Mr. McCord approved of the workplan and suggested that, if needed, the state data center may be able to provide in-depth census data.

### **Conclusion:**

Mr. Arvizu thanked Ms. Bhabha for her presentation and asked the working group to provide any final recommendations to be added for interview.

Mr. Lee asked to add the African Art Museum of Columbia.

Mr. Shapiro asked to consider adding organizations just on the boundaries of heritage areas.

Ms. Daniels gave several suggestions of organizations in Baltimore County that were ineligible, such as the Baltimore County Historical Society and the Hampton National Historic Site.

Mr. Arvizu added the suggested names and confirmed with the group that, ahead of the next meeting, members of the Working Group would add endorsements to the shared list of interviewees for consideration by Symphonic. Additionally, Mr. Arvizu would be responsible for providing a list of past grants from MHT.

Mr. McCord thanked Ms. Bhabha for her presentation and ended the meeting at 3:07.