

Minutes of the
Eighth Meeting of the
MHAA Racial Equity Working Group
May 25, 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), Nell Ziehl (Maryland Historical Trust, Office of Planning, Education, and Outreach), Aadila Bhabha (Symphonic Strategies), Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer, Maryland Historical Trust)

MHAA Staff Present

Ariane Hofstedt, Andrew Arvizu

Introduction:

Ms. Ariane Hofstedt opened the meeting at 11:03. She introduced herself as the new Administrator of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and shared information about her past work with the Smithsonian and Historic Annapolis.

Secretary Robert McCord welcomed Ms. Hofstedt to the team.

Update from Symphonic:

Ms. Aadila Bhabha updated the working group on Symphonic's progress with interviews. She explained that 44 interviewees had been identified, but there had been an excess of representation in certain heritage areas. Symphonic's next steps would be balancing the representation from each heritage area and looking for additional voices that have typically been outside of the program's reach.

She asked the working group if they agreed with Symphonic's approach to focus on the grant process.

Mx. Meg Baco agreed and reaffirmed the need to focus on an even spread of interviewees across the 13 heritage areas. Further, she called for a general geographic diversity of interviewees.

Ms. Bhabha stated that Symphonic will produce a finalized list of interviewees in the coming weeks, and will reach out to those selected with a standardized message. She hoped to complete the majority of the interviews by the end of June and start the analysis in July.

Ms. Bhabha then moved on to questions of data regarding quantity vs quality. She explained that there may be a bias in distribution, but also, in the actual funding numbers. She planned to look into funding data, specifically to understand if there is a discrepancy between white-led and minority-led projects.

Ms. Bhabha stated that she will also be looking at census data demographics to see if funding has reflected the general population of a given data. In terms of grant data, Symphonic will be using the grant data provided to them by MHAA staff which has funding data through 1998. Symphonic will specifically see how these statuses have changed over time.

Ms. Bhabha asked the team about different guidelines for grant management per heritage area. She asked that members of the coalition provide documentation on their grants process, alongside all of the coalition's management plans and 5-year plans.

Mr. Steven Lee suggested a special meeting with the Coalition to go over these processes.

Mr. Aaron Shapiro discussed the roles of the management and marketing plans and how their impact varies from area to area.

Ms. Shauntee Daniels added that the Baltimore National Heritage Area has not emphasized their management documents, since both plans are outdated and do not reflect the current state of the heritage area. Further, she explained that almost every heritage area's plans are outdated at this point, and that many will be re-working their plans in the coming years. She agreed that further discussion could be useful for the facilitation.

Mx. Baco stressed that each heritage area operates differently and encouraged Ms. Bhabha to reach out to all of the directors with specific questions. They explained that they would not want to speak on their Coalition members' behalf, due to the differences in process. Further, she stressed the importance that these questions come specifically from Symphonic, as the facilitators.

Ms. Bhabha agreed and wanted to look into whether heritage areas feel like they are reaching their communities. She also planned to look specifically at the logistical differences between heritage areas.

Mr. Shapiro asked Ms. Bhabha to look at the difference between state and local guidelines.

Ms. Bhabha suggested that the Coalition members attend a focus group to cover the technical side of outreach and the grant review process. She explained that in past projects, bringing experts together has uncovered pockets of excellence that can be shared with the entire group.

Ms. Bhabha then discussed the heritage area boundaries. Mr. Arvizu will provide Symphonic with the most up-to-date boundaries of each heritage area and past boundaries that are available. Symphonic will be looking at how these borders have changed over time and how new communities have been included. They will also be looking at how to deal with people if they are just outside of the boundary.

Mr. Lee explained that minority organizations are at a double disadvantage if they are outside of a heritage area proposing to work inside a heritage area. He stated that boundaries are geographically, rather than culturally based and this can lead to real challenges for historically disenfranchised communities. He asked if there could be less focus in the program on geographics and more on cultural trends. He suggested that this could help level the field for minority-led organizations.

Ms. Bhabha asked the working group for input on the boundary.

Mr. Arvizu explained the process for adding sites into a heritage area.

Mx. Baco explained that the boundary has been seen as a tool to differentiate between places in and outside of heritage areas, and that these issues specifically tie to the distribution of money in the state. Further, these distinctions have to tie into the themes of the heritage area. Initially, the role of the program was identifying regions of thematic history and tying them to geographic space. They asked if this system does not work, perhaps the program can be statewide. Further, they stressed that there are other statewide programs that are available to applicants and that one of the main roles of heritage area directors is to connect applicants with these resources.

Ms. Daniels explained Baltimore's history with Targeted Investment Zones and its focus on generating economic development via concentrations of cultural and historical resources. In her opinion, the origin of this program has been more economic than historical. Further, she

explained that expanding the borders indiscriminately would result in a lot of residential areas being added, which may not be beneficial.

Ms. Daniels highlighted a situation where a grant applicant was on the opposite side of the street from the boundary. Because of this, they were turned away just because they are on the wrong side of the boundary.

Ms. Elizabeth Hughes agreed with Shauntee and Meg, and asked people to consider how the program was originally started. To be able to sell the program to legislators, they needed to sell it as a vehicle for economic development. The focus of geography made the program look more narrow and useful when compared to broader statewide programs. Since then, several requirements, like Targeted Investment Zones, have been steadily phased out as they have become less useful. She suggested that perhaps boundaries may go the same way.

Mr. Lee added that he really appreciates the heritage area program and that it targets specific areas. That being said, there are some real limitations to the boundaries. He asked the working group to suppose it was a group of African Americans in the 1990s drawing the initial boundaries. At its core, there are biases built into the boundaries based on the people who initially created them. Mr. Lee stressed that he does not want to take the place out of the great heritage areas that already exist, but rather find ways to cover the gaps that exist in the current structures.

Ms. Bhabha added that Mr. Lee's plan might be the path of least resistance, because it would not require redesigning existing heritage areas but still serve to address the needs of minority communities.

Mx. Baco agreed with Mr. Lee's point about the biases that are implicit in the original boundaries. Further, they stressed the role that the requirements of the National Register have placed on the program. Mx. Baco encouraged the group to consider a new state-wide fund that could operate outside of MHAA to address these challenges.

Mr. McCord discussed the idea of an "at-large" heritage area that would cover any sites that are outside of traditional areas. He encouraged MHAA to look inward at how they would want to change their program, since this would be a major departure from the program's first steps.

Ms. Bhabha related this discussion of boundaries to her own experiences in South Africa, and how the idea of boundaries can cause divides in communities that take decades to overcome.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

Ms. Hofstedt asked Symphonic about what resources they would be circulating before the next meeting. She asked when Symphonic would have interview questions prepared for review by the working group.

Ms. Bhabha explained that the questions were still being developed and she should have them in the coming weeks.

Ms. Bhabha concluded the meeting at 12:05.