

May 29, 2020

To: Washington County Board of Commissioners
From: Washington County Racial Equity Collaborative

Re: REC Mid-Year Update

Dear Chair Harrington and Washington County Board of Commissioners (BOC):

The Washington County Racial Equity Collaborative (REC) is committed to provide you information on our plans and progress as part of the agreement and funding award we received in December 2019. This update is consistent with that commitment and also reflects our recommendations for the outcomes identified in our internal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Since this agreement, the world has dramatically changed, thus the questions we raise and the recommendations we offer reflect our present shared reality of COVID-19 and its impact on every facet of the County's and the REC's ongoing work portfolio. In some cases, we have altered our recommendations completely because of the pandemic, adjusting our work to match community needs. Admittedly, this update comes a month later than originally planned based on our partner agreement with Washington County (WashCo), though it follows an earlier set of recommendations that served as a proxy when the community was in the early grips of the Covid-19 crisis.

With that said, in this correspondence, we remind you of our initial charge, what we have achieved to date, what questions have surfaced from our recent conversations, and our recommendations that merge the goals and strategies enumerated in our MOU.

The Frame

In our proposal, and as reflected in our members' internal MOU, the REC:

- Outlined its vision for a flourishing WashCo with a commitment to equity and racial justice via its communities of color;
- Named the challenges facing its communities of color based on systemic and institutional racism and the lack of civic infrastructure to counteract such systems;
- Set a goal to increase the level and impact of engagement with these communities;
- Identified two specific strategies to do so:
 - Strengthen the capacity of culturally specific nonprofits and partners by establishing a foundation to support the civic, economic, and cultural infrastructure that serves them directly;
 - Increase the collaboration between communities of color and existing bodies of leadership across sectors including government, business and education;
- Set multiple objectives encompassed by the strategies above;
- Identified a desired outcome “that Washington County is more prosperous and resilient because people of color successfully contribute to policy decisions, plans and investments in their schools, local businesses, and civic life for the benefit of the entire community,” along with specific outcomes for this first phase of funding:

Current Status

This is an instructive, though not exhaustive, list of what we have done:

- Adhered to the vision of a flourishing WashCo by:
 - Maintaining frequent and iterative communication between WashCo staff and the REC on matters ranging from day to day operations, Civic Leaders program, Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer (CEIO) positions advice and contributions, housing structural analysis (with WashCo engaged consultants), and multiple sessions with different commissioners/agencies on WashCo civic engagement related issues;
- Addressed some of the challenges of systemic racism, through:
 - Monitoring, cultivating participation, and submitting testimony and feedback concerning the CEIO staff; submitted suggestions for position descriptions; uplifted COVID-19 issues regarding small business emergency funding, language/translation issues respective to sharing healthcare updates, workers not qualifying for federal/local government relief programs, etc.; participating on key advisory committees with frequent outreach from WashCo elected officials and staff (Kathryn Harrington, Pam Treece, Dick Schouten, Jerry Willey, Sia Lindstrom, Elizabeth Mazzara-Myers, and others);
- Increased impact with these communities through the actions above, as well as:
 - Specific outreach to communities of color prior for the publication and implementation of Small Business Emergency Grants responsive to COVID-19 impacts;
 - Participation in Chair Harrington's outreach to community-based organizations (CBOs);
 - Supporting the merger of WashCo's Community Engagement office/function with new CEIO office/function, creating greater cohesiveness of staff/duties, and hopefully, outcomes;
- Identified strategies to strengthen capacity and increase collaboration through the actions above, as well as:
 - Continued focus on the business sector with exponentially increased government interactions between WashCo and community;
 - Invited more members of REC to programs involving WashCo leadership (e.g. Building Bridges of Understanding, discussions on ICE, etc.)
- Met several objectives outlined in our original proposal, such as:
 - Built trust among partners and communities;
 - Identified and aligned mutual goals (Chair outreach, CBO Zoom meetings, etc.);
 - Identified communities of color priorities;
 - Improved traditional methods of funding partners to promote collaboration (vs competition) among culturally specific organizations (several REC members have co-written grants together based on our current collaboration and supported each other's application for funding);
- Realized desired outcomes as our collaboration grows and our interactions with WashCo multiplies with many points of entry (BOC/other leadership, Community Engagement, Government Relations, Housing, Law Enforcement, Public Health, etc.) which has increased REC's visibility and cooperation between partners.

Questions for Board of Commissioners, COVID-19 Inclusive

We respectfully raise the following questions for the BOC's consideration with the hope of receiving specific replies to any actions taken, underway, and/or planned.

1. What policy decisions will you make and what **actionable** steps will you take to prioritize communities of color in the COVID-19 recovery plan?
2. How will you support small business owners and essential workers in critical sectors (e.g. food service, agricultural, retail, health care, personal services, etc.) as they navigate new risks/requirements for health protection (PPE et al)?
3. How will you support families of color who lack digital resources gain access to educational communication, unemployment filing, small business-related needs, etc.?
4. How will you involve communities of color in ongoing BOC decisions surrounding COVID-19 issues?
5. How will you include people of color in the planning and decision making to ensure that rebuilding increases economic, social and environmental/climate justice?
6. How will you use **data** to inform your decision making on COVID-19 and other WashCo issues?

Current Recommendations

At this point in time, we offer the following recommendations for the BOC's consideration:

1. Communities of color writ large, and particularly the REC, should be involved and give advice regarding the best way to share information and receive input from residents of color, immigrants, language or technology-challenged residents, etc.
2. As WashCo has recently demonstrated in funding CBOs to advise planning and response efforts and conduct outreach and engagement, REC members and concomitant partners, should be participants on all critical advisory boards, economic development committees, fund allocation/disbursement committees, etc. with respect to COVID-19 related relief;
3. REC members be asked to inform how best to identify and reveal "hotspots" for COVID-19 infections, as communities of color, low income, those with pre-existing conditions, immigrants and other categories are most at risk due to health, intergenerational living conditions, and other factors;
4. Use data driven resources (REC-related researchers, universities, state/federal) to inform these decisions real time.
5. With support from the REC, ensure that the large cadre of contact tracers come from the recently unemployed, and are culturally and language specific individuals known to the community;

6. Use disaggregated, translated data in all reporting of information to communities, and use the most relevant conduits identified by REC members (e.g. texting, Spanish and other language radio or cable programming, the appropriate time to air to reach most folks, etc.)
7. Weave in the multiplicity of education and other electeds of color in Washington County to augment REC and WashCo engagement (e.g. school boards, fire and rescue, others).
8. Establish regular meetings with REC to ensure continuity of efforts and increased collaboration with communities of color;
9. Be clear and culturally specific in communications surrounding activities going forward.
10. Utilize Community-based Participatory models that have demonstrated the increased engagement of community in other municipalities by including the REC and other community members on hiring panels for WashCo's CEIO and other significant positions (director level and above);
11. For the next budget cycle, increase funding to expand the scope of work and number of participants in REC, even under COVID-19 constraints;
12. Use the \$104.66 million received from the federal government for COVID-19 relief, in part, by making *direct appropriations* to communities of color for a variety of purposes, such as:
 - a. Creation of resource hubs (as envisioned by Latinx partners);
 - b. Renters/homeowners protections;
 - c. Language/interpretation supports;
 - d. Small business supports;
 - e. PPE/increased testing in hotspots;
 - f. Enlistment of cultural leaders (churches, CBOs, low income housing experts) as conduit to get out more focused testing and information;
 - g. Bridging the school/digital divide;
 - h. Transportation;
 - i. Job search/retraining;
 - j. Oregon Workers Relief Fund (OWRF);
 - k. Food distribution/school lunch continuation/ summer program food/ food pantry;
 - l. Work with REC collectively, and organizations such as CCC directly, to develop of surveys, conduct research, and create disaggregated development tools to assist REC/WashCo in the identification of best targets for investment

In summary, the REC has made significant progress on the objectives and outcomes outlined in our original proposal to Washington County. In the second half of this year, the REC will continue to work with the County to address difficult questions, such as those we pose in this update, to act upon our recommendations, and to increase the engagement of communities of color, both in response to Covid-19, as well as in its day-to-day County operations. Finally, the REC will devote significant attention to create a 3-year Equity Action Plan, its final deliverable to the County as per our funding agreement.

We appreciate the increased collaboration demonstrated by the County's elected leadership and staff, and we look forward to your response to this mid-year update.

Sincerely,



Marcus C. Mundy, Executive Director



Glenn Montgomery, Executive Director



Bridget Cooke, Executive Director



Chi Nguyen, Executive Director



Nathan Teske, Executive Director



cc: Stephen Rhodes, Interim County Administrator
Sia Lindstrom, Acting Assistant County Administrator