



Community Involvement Committee



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## Community Involvement Committee

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TO: Chair Deborah Kafoury and Board of County Commissioners 6 pages

FROM: Community Involvement Committee

DATE: June 4th 2021

SUBJECT: CIC BIPOC Community Engagement Subcommittee Recommendations

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### **BACKGROUND & PROCESS**

The BIPOC Community Engagement Subcommittee of the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) began work in December of 2020 to better understand how different Multnomah County advisory groups conduct recruitment, selection and onboarding for members. Even though, prior to the pandemic, the CIC had existing infrastructure in place to smoothly transition to conducting all business remotely in May of 2020, it was clear the pandemic exacerbated existing inequities, especially in communities of color. Given that advisory groups are a crucial component of community engagement for the County, it seemed this moment was an excellent opportunity to explore how experiences of BIPOC community members are centered during the recruitment and retention process to various County boards and committees.

We felt it was crucial to first learn more about what advisory groups are currently doing. This would help us highlight and elevate County advisory group recruitment, selection and onboarding processes that seem to be good examples of intentionally centering the experiences of BIPOC community members. Gathering more information about County advisory groups could also help identify patterns and places where we'd like to recommend changes. To that end, we conducted five virtual meetings and met with the following County staff:

- Robyn Johnson who supports the Aging Services Advisory Council and the Disability Services Advisory Council in the Department of County Human Services
- Chris Lenn who focuses on equity and workforce development in Human Resources
- Brianna Bragg in the Health Department who supports the Future Generations Collaborative
- Nathan Wickstrom who leads the Multnomah County Public Health Advisory Board in the Health Department

During our initial discussions on shared values, we agreed that inclusive outreach, recruitment, selection and onboarding processes are critical in having successful and equitable

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advisory groups. Our subcommittee brainstormed a list of questions to ask County staff who support advisory bodies. The questions are as follows:

- How is outreach, recruitment and selection done for your advisory group?
- Are there any barriers you've identified in your recruitment, selection and onboarding processes?
- What are the current practices used for BIPOC specific outreach and recruitment?
- Are there requirements for the makeup of your advisory group?
- Do you track demographic data?
- How do you measure the success of the advisory group?
- How do you prioritize equity and lead with race during member onboarding and meeting practices?

OCI staff compiled these questions into a survey and sent it to all staff members supporting a Multnomah County advisory group. We received 17 responses and spent two meetings discussing the patterns and trends we noticed. Reviewing these survey responses was foundational to building out the recommendation section of this letter.

We updated the full committee on the work of our subcommittee during the CIC meeting on March 16, 2021. OCI staff led the CIC through a small group activity focused on gathering more input that could help shape our subcommittee recommendations. The committee talked through the following questions in breakout rooms:

- Describe a time you felt truly welcomed into a community space. What about it felt welcoming and inclusive?
- Describe a time you experienced or observed a community space not feeling as inclusive or welcoming as you hoped. What about it did not feel welcoming or inclusive to you or others?
- Imagine you are applying to a new committee of your dreams. For your dream committee, what does the application and onboarding process look and feel like? What do meetings look and feel like?

Highlights from our small groups discussions have been included in the section 'Best practices for creating a welcoming group environment'.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### What is working well:

In reviewing the responses from advisory group staff, we were impressed with many advisory groups

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in the Health Department, as they seem to follow organized plans and criteria they focus on when they need to fill vacancies. The advisory groups centered around specific communities of color (especially the Multnomah County Pacific Islander Coalition and Future Generations Collaborative) also stand out in the way they talk about their group's values, integrate an equity lens and have a community centered approach. We also liked how many groups conduct outreach in a number of languages and actively work with communities year round, rather than just engaging with communities when help is needed with recruitment.

## What could be improved:

### **Term limits**

We noted that there are some County advisory groups that would only have a vacancy if someone chooses to resign. We feel it is important to have a variety of new perspectives in advisory spaces and that one main way new perspectives are introduced is by bringing in new members.

Demographics in Multnomah County continue to evolve, and it's important to center equity and those with lived experience when filling vacancies. Term limits allow for staff to fill advisory group vacancies with voices not yet represented in their current membership and presents an opportunity to ensure an equity centered approach to recruitment, prioritizing communities not historically invited into these spaces, especially those who are Black, Indigenous and other community members of color. Maintaining the same members for long periods of time and having a homogeneous advisory group can risk having membership that is not reflective of Multnomah County at large, which can skew the group's work when they are in position to advise on a community they may not represent.

The topic of term limits is included in the Office of Community Involvement's drafted policy on minimum standards for advisory groups. While this document is currently in draft form, we have been able to review it and would like to indicate our support.

### **Stipends**

We feel that offering stipends for community members participating in an advisory group is a critical step towards equity. For many community members, time and money can be barriers for participation and this is especially true for BIPOC individuals. Providing members a stipend (while allowing members to opt out if they choose to) can help offset the cost of things such as childcare, food, transportation or technology needed to fully participate. This is especially important to consider when wanting to diversify community representation on boards and committees. Providing monetary stipends can help shift away from utilizing the expertise of those with lived experience without rightful compensation.

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## **Limited staff capacity to do outreach and robust recruitment**

In reviewing responses from advisory groups, we noticed that a lot of staff have limited capacity to develop and carry out a robust outreach and recruitment plan. For most County staff, supporting their advisory group isn't the primary function of their position. BIPOC engagement and recruitment requires dedicated time and capacity and if it's not a priority in that person's job description, it can fall to the wayside. We recommend that advisory groups have dedicated FTE, and that their staff include their advisory group responsibilities as a priority function of their positions.

## **Limited capacity of community members to participate in advisory groups**

Many community members, especially BIPOC folks, may have limited time and capacity to participate. Some might come up against barriers that could make it truly difficult to actively engage with an advisory group such as-- not having easily accessible transportation, needing childcare, not having reliable technology or having higher priority commitments during meeting times. In the survey responses we received, a couple of groups are structured to provide different levels of engagement, such as allowing people to be part time or full time members. Offering different levels of participation based on one's ability and capacity to engage, might be more welcoming for those interested and remove a barrier before the application process even begins.

## **Digital equity**

With advisory groups switching over to virtual engagement over the last year, issues of digital equity have felt increasingly urgent. Lack of access to reliable technology and resources could be a significant barrier for those wanting to serve on a County advisory group. We noted that some advisory groups have been able to assess the technology access needs of the group and provide Chromebooks and wifi hotspots to those in need. We recommend that staff of advisory groups assess the technology access needs for current and future members in order to help identify and mitigate this barrier where possible. Some members may be more familiar with technology systems, softwares and programs than others, so offering additional support and training resources is also critical.

## **Collecting demographic information when possible**

Many County advisory groups don't collect demographic data on their members. We feel this is important to do when possible, in order for staff to be aware if their advisory group is lacking representation from a certain group. We want to be mindful that some people aren't always comfortable disclosing demographic information to governmental jurisdictions, but feel that they should be provided with the option. Understanding gaps in representation can help staff

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**Members:** Richard Barker, Angel Brophy, Desiree' DuBoise, Amanda Squiemphen-Yazzie & Sachini Weerawardena **Staff:** Olivia Kilgore & Dani Bernstein

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intentionally prioritize equity when filling vacancies and actively strive for a membership that is reflective of Multnomah County's diversity. Collecting demographic information from members can take time and effort that could be a challenging requirement of staff with limited capacity.

In addition to collecting basic demographic information when possible (such as age, gender, race, pronouns, employer if applicable, etc) we recommend advisory groups also gather information such as: how applicants heard about the advisory group, technology access needs, language(s) spoken, accessibility needs, if someone is a first time participant or if they've served on other County advisory groups and which ones, and if there are any transportation considerations.

## **Centralized volunteer database**

There's not currently a Countywide database for tracking currently or formerly appointed members across all advisory groups. This could be helpful in determining which County groups, if any, someone has been a part of. A centralized database could be a great tool for staff to track members over time, and to get the word out regarding open positions and opportunities to former members and their networks.

## **Advisory group assessment on what's working and what can be improved**

It can be really beneficial for staff to survey current members to see what folks are finding helpful and what could be improved. We would also recommend that staff supporting advisory groups assess how things are working regularly, as a lot of input can get lost by just looking at the full year. We appreciated the response of the HIV Planning Council about how they evaluate meetings by asking participants if they understood what happened in the meeting and safety that people felt speaking up.

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR CREATING A WELCOMING GROUP ENVIRONMENT**

The Community Involvement Committee did some brainstorming in small groups about welcoming community spaces. We'd like to share our ideas for helping create welcoming and inclusive spaces for community members:

- Providing food and sharing a meal together
- Opportunity is created to get to know each other, network and deepen connections
- Creating space to connect with each other before diving into business
- When the group has shared goals that align with their values
- Clear and straightforward communication about what is expected and how the group operates
- Everyone's accessibility needs are met and proactively thought about where possible

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- Materials are accessible and available in different formats and languages
- Someone to acknowledge, welcome, notice, speak to, say hi to those in the space
- A point person to help introduce group members to each other
- A shared sense of belonging, where folks aren't tokenized but see themselves reflected in the group
- The group's equity needs are actively considered. Some questions and activities will be more taxing on some people than others.
- Multiple ways of engagement (i.e. offering virtual participation)
- Cultural differences are welcomed and celebrated

## **A NOTE ON THE BACKGROUND AND LIFE EXPERIENCES OF SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

*Richard Barker* (he/him) is a retired Strategic Customer Consultant for IBM. He's actively involved with the Linnton Neighborhood Association and Neighbors West Northwest, and during his time in California, volunteered for the LA AIDS Project, the Laguna Shanti Project, and the Orange County Gay & Lesbian Community Center.

*Angel Brophy* (she/her) is a Program Coordinator/Data System Specialist with Human Solutions. Angel also volunteers her time to be a Community Health Worker for her Filipino Community to provide wrap around services with the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns.

*Desiree' DuBoise* (she/they) is a Research Assistant working on various projects in the area of Psychology. Desiree' identifies as Black and non-binary, and is concerned with issues of homelessness, police brutality, and the LGBTQ+ community.

*Amanda Squiemphen-Yazzie* (she/her) identifies as a Warm Springs, Wasco, Navajo and Yakama Woman. She is a small business owner of Squiemphen-Yazzie Strategies and is passionate about dismantling harmful barriers with/for our most vulnerable populations.

*Sachi Weerawardena* (she/they) is an employee of the State of Oregon and has previously worked in Thailand and Sri Lanka with experience in project management, self-sufficiency programs, refugee resettlement, and returns & reintegration migration policy.

***This recommendation from the BIPOC Community Engagement Subcommittee has been approved by the Community Involvement Committee on June 4, 2021.***

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