

North Adams Inclusion Diversity Equity and Access Working Group
Thursday September 3rd, 2020
MEETING MINUTES

Members in Attendance

Amber Besaw
Lisa Blackmer
Alicia Canary
Benjamin Lamb
Michael Obasohan
Ashley Shade
Jessica Sweeney

The North Adams Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Working Group met via zoom webinar on September 3rd, 2020 at 6pm EST.

Call to Order – 6pm

B. Lamb read a statement citing Governor Baker’s allowance to hold meetings using remote technology during COVID-19 and noted that this meeting is being recorded.

COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Canary provided a document of definitions compiled to the group
- B. Lamb provided a draft timeline to the group via email

PRIMARY BUSINESS

- **Report back on establishing definitions for development of the eventual training/tool kit in regard to Council Paper 11,852**
 - o A. Canary provided an overview of the definitions she has compiled. This is just a starting list and she noted that we will need more specific ones included as we move forward. The definitions are grouped when there are multiple versions available so that the group can consider which versions are most preferred by the group. She is hoping to get feedback on if this is a helpful direction. She asked about the departure of K. Ruiz Leon.
 - o B. Lamb shared that because of Karen’s starting in Grad School, she wasn’t able to continue on due to capacity limits. She is however helping to provide ideas on potential new working group members, and she will still be available in an advisory capacity to the group as needed. He noted that we also had a spot open due to Glenda’s departure from the coalition. The group still has an open spot that he is hoping he can lean on Karen to help identify someone with experience and knowledge about immigrant populations in the city. He also requested if anyone has anybody they would like to refer, to please do so.
 - o A. Canary continued on with the definitions overview. She mentioned that these are mostly general, but should shift based on how the training is being provided since most of this list is race-based.

- B. Lamb noted that this connects to the need to assess what people feel their awareness is on this list of items and felt these could be used to gather information on how to best hone the training to the needs of the trainees.
- A. Canary indicated that the group needs to agree on definitions before we can move forward with a training so that we are also aligning our selected trainer with the agreed upon language.
- M. Obasohan noted that there are a lot of duplicates, basically saying the same thing but some more in depth. He finds that the selection of definitions is extremely hard, and often you end up with just very long definitions and there is never a level of 100% accuracy. He feels if we can find a validated definition for each that we can generally be in support of, that should be a good benchmark and standard we can move forward with. There weren't really any on the list that raised major red flags because they all did have some level of validation associated. The definitions could also be part of a piece of the training that asks participants to match definitions with words in small groups to identify where people have gaps in awareness that they can unpack more. It allows for an in-depth dialogue on the language used which can lead to other conversations around their importance.
- B. Lamb noted that he appreciates that the definitions are coming from trusted sources already which helps him feel confident in their use. For the ones where there is one, it is likely going to be easier for us to agree on them, while for the ones with duplicates we need to work down to which works best for us.
- J. Sweeney noted that the duplicate definitions actually made the nuance of each of them more pronounced as much of it is ultimately contextual.
- A. Shade noted that we need to be cautious about using multiple definitions so that it doesn't provide a loop hole for people to gravitate towards the one definition that forgives inappropriate behavior. It might be better to combine them into singular definitions so it can't be misused.
- A. Canary asked if it made sense for her to winnow down to one definition for each then bring it back to the group before moving on to a longer list that we need to have established and available.
- B. Lamb appreciated that offer and thought it made sense so that the draft can be brought back and worked through once in hand.
- A. Canary will move forward with that and also start one about social identity groups and tools to create additional lists of useful information.
- A. Besaw noted that the definitions should evoke a level of realizing self awareness, but also it is important to understand that some individuals may have personal values that don't let them agree with definitions provided. She gave the example of faith communities that might not appreciate certain gender language. There needs to be a preparation for understanding that challenge, while still pushing the need for being kind and equitable in appreciating where different individuals and communities come from. How will we address that conversation of implicit bias with that nuance in place?
- A. Canary asked which ones in particular raised concerns.
- A. Besaw noted that there are likely quite a few around gender as it relates to the faith communities and their particular values. She is more concerned about being

aware of those points of rub, not so much taking that into hand when agreeing upon definitions.

- M. Obasohan noted that this is an important piece. We hope that people come to the trainings with an open mind, but that might not always be the case. When the questions of “why” come up around those pieces of language and how those words are perceived need to include a level of pushing participants to not thinking about how those words impact them, but how they impact others. Other people have a need to be seen, and while you might not agree with what is being taught, it doesn’t mean people can coexist and maintain an open mind. Everyone has biases they need to consider when interacting with others. This is a reason why the definition activity is helpful to get people working through and talking through the words we use. Digging into these definitions now will help us significantly once we get to the point of training.
- A. Besaw noted that we are talking about city councilors and elected officials and creating a dialogue that may be uncomfortable, so it’s important to be considerate of the space we are creating, especially if an elected official is concerned about how their asking of questions and comments made could be perceived.
- A. Shade noted that she answers questions about gender all the time. Language evolves and we are constantly learning as meanings change, so its important to keep that in mind. When dealing with gender identity, there are certain words that have changed in meaning, but there are still words that exist to explain the thing that the other word once was used for. Its important to know nobody is going to be perfect at all of this and it takes time and patience. As long as people are willing to learn, they can do and be better through the process.
- L. Blackmer mentioned that there are a lot of acronyms used to identify where the definitions come from and would like to see the actual organizations cited in full.
- J. Sweeney mentioned that the local list of acronyms in itself is extremely difficult to navigate.
- A. Besaw noted that to be accessible it needs to be understandable, so these definitions are imperative.
- J. Sweeney noted that perhaps getting recordings of the definitions made would be helpful, though likely a long-term lift.
- B. Lamb noted that the new city website will be accessible which will allow for those without the ability to read to actually use accessibility utilities to hear the words in the document. This is another good reason why having all of this material on the city website will be incredibly important.
- A. Canary noted there are a lot of document reader apps that can do that, and others that can make recordings of meetings closed captioned for hearing impaired individuals.
- No Public Comment Offered

OTHER RETURNING BUSINESS

- **Review and discussion of draft timeline for initial training work**
 - B. Lamb presented a draft timeline to the group.

- A. Canary asked if surveying of participants would just be the council or would it include others all at the beginning.
- B. Lamb suggested we start with the council and potentially the mayor and department heads, but there is a difference between those creating legislation and those operating within the established legislation.
- M. Obasohan asked about how long the survey would be out for response
- B. Lamb noted it would be around 2.5 weeks based on the current draft. He also noted that after training is administered to the Council then we can evolve into the administering of it to other boards and throughout the city hierarchy.
- J. Sweeney suggested that the draft budget and mode of training be done after the survey is conducted.
- B. Lamb noted that establishing the draft budget should occur early so we aren't chasing dollars too late into the annual budget process. We can then back into it more specifically as the training takes shape. We don't want to get too far along and miss out on capturing funding that can support this program.
- A. Besaw asked if these trainings would be different for different branches of the city, as she thinks it would be good to know what people need to get out of a training, but it would likely be a split between those who are open to lifelong learning and those who aren't up for it voluntarily. If we aren't developing multiple trainings, we should have the variety of participants in the room, but if we are doing multiple versions then it makes sense to gather participant pre-feedback in waves.
- B. Lamb noted that we would be offering different rounds and styles of training from his perspective, starting with city councilors. There will be nuance that apply to any particular constituent group. While the Mayor does want training for the staff too, we know it will look different from the council training. We want the trainings to be and feel relevant to each group being trained.
- A. Besaw noted that perhaps there should be a core piece and then different nuance in how it is distributed.
- A. Canary noted feeling comfortable starting with council then department heads, and then work with the department heads to create more targeted trainings within their divisions. There are a lot of elements of diversity and inclusion built into trainings already being offered, so certain departments may already be getting elements in their ongoing education.
- M. Obasohan added that he likes the idea of core values within the training of what we want them to get out of it. So the question becomes, what are we trying to achieve? Are we trying to focus on general inclusivity and navigating challenging dialogues and conversations? If we can establish that and then wrap targeted training components around those core pieces, it should be worked into someone's everyday work. It needs to be relevant training for the attendee.
- J. Sweeney agreed that the core competency foundation layer is key, and maybe that is around the same language use and that common lens of understanding. We can't unpack our implicit bias if we don't know what implicit bias is.
- M. Obasohan noted that definitions and common language are a key to any forward movement in any trainings he runs.

- J. Sweeney noted that often there are trainings offered but people don't take advantage of it in equal ways, so some don't understand how to talk about the issues with one another if there is an imbalance of knowledge and awareness. Shared language is very helpful.
 - B. Lamb asked if there were any additional thoughts on the draft timeline moving forward.
 - A. Canary asked if that meant that a draft survey would be needed for next meeting.
 - B. Lamb said yes and offered to help coordinate that piece. J. Sweeney and M. Obasohan joined as well to work on the draft for the next meeting.
 - L. Blackmer noted that both November and December meetings will fall on holidays so that should be considered.
 - B. Lamb noted that it would likely be the case that we cancel the second meetings in both November and December to appreciate the need for holidays and time away, and shift items to the first meeting in December and the first meeting in January instead. That would give more runway to get the work done between as well.
 - L. Blackmer agreed and noted that the one-week turnover is challenging and has no problem with a lighter schedule around the holidays.
 - M. Obasohan departed.
 - No Public Comment Offered
- **Discussion on methods of establishing accountability structures for City Council**
- B. Lamb indicated that he would be drafting a council rule to bring forward to the group to consider for recommending to the council to adopt since it is easier to adopt new council rules than to change ordinance.
 - J. Sweeney asked if it would be possible to list trainings on councilor profiles on the city website as an accountability piece to show the work that councilors have done.
 - A. Besaw noted that it might be all the trainings completed as councilors which could be important to know that they are doing a level of professional development in their roles.
 - B. Lamb noted that this is a real challenge because there is no standardized training protocols or dockets that every councilor is expected to go through, even though there should be.
 - L. Blackmer added that each councilor comes with their own particular expertise and knowledge and it could become too long to include all kinds of trainings on our profiles.
 - B. Lamb noted that perhaps a banner that indicates that all councilors will participate in said training to publicly note the level of importance.
 - A. Canary noted that in some forums there is public record keeping during meetings to identify who attends what so it becomes a part of the record for transparency sake.
 - B. Lamb mentioned it could be a new section on the agenda that does a roll-call of training completion.

- J. Sweeney noted that having more visibility on the website about expertise might help residents to know who to go to about what issue to try and find the most educated or experienced councilor on a given issue/topic.
- No Public Comment Offered
- **Discussion of available trainings and opportunities to share and recommend**
 - J. Sweeney shared that September 17th the Berkshire Cultural Resource Center will be holding an Anti-Racisms Discussion focused through a creative lens. Details can be found on the MCLA website.
- **Discussion of potential budget needs for an effective training / tool kit program**
 - B. Lamb didn't have anything to report out on this item.
- **Discussion of models of training that may work best for City Council, Staff**
 - B. Lamb noted that we will discuss this in the future based on the discussion tonight.
- **Discussion of draft working group expectation**
 - B. Lamb noted that this is something we will need to draft or try to find other models to mirror as a group for expectations purposes. This can return at a future meeting.
 - A. Canary noted that this connects to not excluding participants who can't commit to the full work group expectations, but instead trying to find ways to engage individuals who can contribute at varying levels, while not being at regular meetings.
 - B. Lamb noted that non-attendance in a regular fashion makes it difficult for groups to function efficiently so attendance really needs to be a direct commitment, but having an advisory group beyond the working group could be very helpful to have established for feedback and support, and the requirements for that group shouldn't be overwhelming.
 - Public Comments
 - Sandra Thomas, (82 Cherry Street) noted that she likes the new website but that this group is not adequately covered on the site. She'd like to see the group be listed, and to have the recordings posted promptly for access purposes.
 - J. Sweeney added that she would like to see a young person recruited to this group.
 - B. Lamb agreed but didn't think it should be a replacement of Karen, rather a new role on the group instead and welcomed outreach to potential interested parties.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: J. Sweeney

Second: A. Shade

Motion Carries

Meeting Adjourned: 7:14pm

