

December 19, 2024

Subject: Racial Equity Commission Community Engagement Committee September 17, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Reporting Period: September-December 2024
Prepared By: Joyce Chiao, Consultant, Abundance
Reviewed By: Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Recommended Action

Approval of the September 17, 2024, Racial Equity Commission Community Engagement Committee Meeting Minutes.

Racial Equity Commission Community Engagement Committee September 17, 2024 - Meeting Minutes

Agenda Item #1: Welcome

A. CALL TO ORDER: Per the bylaws of the Racial Equity Commission, Commissioner Candis Bowles called the meeting to order at 1:30 PM.

B. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

C. REVIEW OF THE AGENDA

E. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM: Quorum Met*; 4/4 Committee Members Present

Commissioners Present:

1. Commissioner Angelica Salas (Virtually)
2. Commissioner Candis Bowles (Virtually)
3. Commissioner Traco Matthews
4. Commissioner Virginia Hedrick

*Quorum is met using teleconference rules for advisory bodies outlined under California Government Code § 1123.5, which allows Commissioners to participate remotely and the Committee to vote on proposed actions to bring to the September 18, 2024, Commission Meeting.

F. PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

Public Comment

No public comment on this agenda item.

Agenda Item #2: Public Comment on matters not on the agenda

Pedro Trujillo of The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA).

Agenda Item #3: ACTION: Selection of Committee Lead and Committee Overview

Commissioner Candis Bowles, Acting Committee Lead

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Recommended Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Affirmation to recommend the appointment of Commissioner Salas as Committee Lead to the Commission

Affirmation passes (4-0-0*). *Marks abstention or absence from vote.

Commissioner Discussion

Salas: Invited Commissioners to offer thoughts on Committee bylaws.

Estes: Called attention to publicly-available documents, including a Community Engagement Summary, an Interpretation Summary, and Community Engagement Brief.

Salas: Provided overview of Community Engagement Brief. Invited Commissioners to offer thoughts on the contents of the brief.

Bowles: Expressed appreciation and agreement with recommendations. Emphasized that the Commission is not limiting community engagement to people who can attend Commission Meetings. Emphasized the need to bring in voices of those who typically cannot engage and to meet people where they are.

Matthews: Agreed with Commissioner Bowles' comment. Reiterated the need to meet communities where they are. Suggested expanded hours to hold meetings. Acknowledged that doing so requires cost. Encouraged Dr. Estes to consider how to allocate budget accordingly.

Hedrick: Agreed with other Commissioners. Acknowledged Dr. Estes for intentional geographic spread of meetings. Noted that this work will require targeted outreach and adequate briefings to communities, if needed, to encourage community participation.

Salas: Noted the importance of language access. Emphasized the aim to be present when people are available. Excited about the continued community Meet-n-Greets. Expressed appreciation for organizations, such as the California Racial Equity Coalition, who have contributed to the work of the Commission.

Estes: Noted next steps for staff to explore adjustments that expand geographical spread and shift meeting timing. Noted plans to follow up with Committee to create a community engagement plan that informs Commission development of the racial equity framework.

Bowles: Reiterated appreciation for the work of the California Racial Equity Coalition. Emphasized the need for targeted outreach to include people who are engaging with state agencies, such as the Department of Corrections, Transportation, Forest and Fire, Hospitals, and Highway Patrol.

Estes: Noted upcoming survey of state agencies and departments on their racial equity work to better understand where State entities are and, combined with understanding of what

communities are experiencing, to inform recommendations. Highlighted that this understanding of State entities may also support communities in building power to engage with the State.

Matthews: Suggested that the racial equity framework include the sharing of decision-making power and resources with community-based organizations.

Public Comment

Elena Santamaria of NextGen California.

Agenda Item #4: 15 Minute Recess

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Recommended Committee Lead

Recommended Lead Salas called for a recess at 2:42 PM.

Recommended Lead Salas called the meeting to order at 2:59 PM.

Agenda Item #5: DISCUSSION: Transforming Communities through Engagement – Panel and Committee Discussion

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Recommended Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Ben Wang, Director of Special Initiatives, Asian Health Services

Carolyn Johnson, Chief Executive Officer, Black Cultural Zone

Chanell Fletcher, Deputy Executive Officer of Environmental Justice, California Air Resources Board

Saúl Ramos, Co-Executive Director, SOMOS Mayfair

Panel Discussion

Estes: How does your organization ensure meaningful give back or return to communities in the process of community engagement?

Fletcher: Still figuring it out. Many state agencies have an engagement model. Consists of public workshops and meetings, coming up with a proposal, share proposal, take comments, incorporate feedback, share back a final updated plan for comments. Learning that this model is not helpful. Starting to grapple with what it means to give back and how to work with community that is not extractive. In the process of exploring. Have not figured it out.

Wang: Asian Health Services (AHS) is a community health center in Oakland Chinatown. Works with 50,000 patients, primarily low-income, Asian immigrants in Alameda County. Community engagement is not a transaction or one-time activity. Building a relationship. Aspire for deep engagement, such as through the Patient Leadership Councils. Meet monthly. Opportunities for patients to inform internal and public policies and to advocate for health equity and racial justice. Special initiatives programs focus on community-based solutions to safety and healing.

Organized with Chinatown seniors to provide exposure and learning. Partnerships with community organizations to provide seniors with an opportunity to learn about the history of redlining, segregation, Black Panther Party, West Oakland Health Council. Seniors met with incarcerated students in the San Quentin Roots Program to hear directly from incarcerated community members about their experiences with childhood trauma, domestic violence, exposure to violence at a very young age. Seniors are now advocating for better support for resources for young people in Oakland, language access, mental health care for all, re-entry resources. Community groups in coalition with each other. Much more holistic view of safety solutions in Oakland.

Johnson: Black Cultural Zone is a community development corporation and also part of a large collaborative. Define community as current residents and individuals, organizations who are aligned, generations and ancestors. Consider all those groups to be responsive to the need. Not transactional. Building trust. Making sure that the diversity of the community is heard. No monolith of the community. Listening and responding to the needs. Community engagement tries to activate those beyond the typical attendees of these events. Limit to attendee reach without transportation, food, hours flexibility. Feedback from limited audience is not valid or reliable as a technique. Reach people through messenger or ambassador programs. Give people what they need to be able to give feedback. Need to provide food, information, and resources. Make them feel welcome regardless of literacy and educational status. Give people the opportunity to speak. Community engagement is not a product. No one wants to fill out a survey to come roller skate. They just want to roller skate. Meet them where they are. Take them together to where they need to go for future generations and honoring our ancestors of what they expect of us today.

Ramos: Great definition of community. Would also include leaders of the organizations and the board members. Want to build direct path from community members to board members and who we have in those seats. Start with purpose of community engagement. Rooted in belief that the future of our communities rests on those most impacted by the issues that we have seen for generations. Listen deeply to create in deeper ways. Have a long ways to go. Three ideas. First, SOMOS Mayfair is a place-based organization in East San Jose. A very defined community. Charge is to create the systems and processes to respond to the needs. Give back programs, services, advocacy pieces that the community demands. As one example, we passed a housing policy that allows California to have tenant preference policies in different cities. SOMOS is peer-to-peer. Inherited model from work, knowledge, and learning in Latin America. Second, we think about leaders. Mayfair Popular University (Universidad Popular de Mayfair) is a training institute to develop community. Not only engaging folks in shared decision-making but also generating leadership within the community. Third, we must pay people. Also must name unjust barriers, such as immigrant policy, that does not allow us to pay people. Move and create tools to address those systemic barriers.

Estes: Ben, Asian Health Services received a Stop the Hate grant from the California Department of Social Services to provide support and services to victims and survivors of hate incidents. Can you speak to the creation of AHS's Community Healing Unit and Asian Black

Racial Healing Research Project for engagement and sustaining relationships with the community?

Wang: New program called Community Healing Unit. Direct response to staff, patients, and community members impacted by various types of violence and racism. Saw a rise of anti-API hate during the pandemic. Responded by providing holistic hair. Community Healing Unit provided victim support services in Asian languages and cultural competences. Tailored communication to monolingual and limited English proficient Asian victims. Comprehensive, holistic services include mental health services and lay mental health counseling. Lay counseling model expanded access to bilingual mental health services. Decreased wait times. Offered acupuncture, free food deliveries, massage therapies. Range of holistic types of healing. Program is at capacity. When you meet communities where they are at and provide actual access, people come to the program and utilize those services. West Oakland Health advocated to the federal government when Asian Health Services was forming. Helped AHS receive its first federal funding. Build a renewed partnership during the pandemic with the recognition that both Asian and Black communities were experiencing increased violence in Oakland. Started with engaging Asian and Black communities through interviews and focus groups on the issues of violence that they were experiencing and possible solutions. As a result, our organizations hosted joint food distribution events. Co-organized community and staff exchanges.

Estes: CJ, Black Cultural Zone Community Development Corporation developed the Black Cultural hub Model to elevate Black Arts/Culture, Building, Community Wealth, Quality of Life and Community Healing within community cultural facilities. How has this model informed how Black Cultural Zone has shared power and money with community and partner organizations?

Johnson: Black Cultural Zone formed by multi-cultural coalition in 2010. Started with collaborative approach. Brought in different organizations around identifying space along commercial corridor to share the space. Needed to form a community development corporation in 2019. Formed a steering committee of broad community members. Collective approach for community. True power lies in sharing and stewarding resources. Have networks. Direction comes collectively. That is our values system. When a grant is available, identify funding and determine who is best positioned for it. Identify how we best support each other and apply. Moving collectively shows results and the power we can have when we work together. Embed culture and spirituality in this work. Name who we are doing this for. Honor our ancestors. Not just here for me to talk and you to listen. There is something for us to do. We have an obligation to work not against each other but with together. Collectively own and steward properties so that future generations can hold onto it.

Estes: Chanell, how does the California Air Resources Board value lived experience in the Community Engagement Model? Specifically, can you speak to ideas like ground truthing and incorporating traditional ecological knowledge into the decision-making process at CARB?

Fletcher: In the process of figuring this out, like most state agencies. CARB focuses on climate change and air quality. Views community engagement in terms of outcomes, such as reductions in particulate matter 2.5, ozone, greenhouse gas emissions. Doing workshops and engagement. Seeing reductions. Improvement for communities. However, reductions do not mean we are

addressing racial disparities or inequities. CARB began thinking about addressing lived experience after Black employees wrote a letter calling attention to marginalization in the workplace. Started with acknowledging harm. Resulted in resolution that called for Office of Racial Equity and more resources for community engagement. Realities of workforce and most state agencies is that not all employees understand racism and racial disparities. Currently creating tools to support workforce and enable meaningful community partnerships. Exploring how to share power through Community Engagement Model. One way to share power is through statutory authority, such as statutory authority to compensate communities. Another way is to earmark money given to state agencies for specific purposes, such as food for community engagement. Currently contracting with community experts who help to inform the model, which is used to train the CARB workforce. Important to be responsive to community concerns. Working with community groups to do public workshops. Exploring partnerships with other state agencies to expand reach of who informs the model. In addition to exploring how to meaningfully involve and share power with communities, CARB also focuses on how to identify and address racial disparities. CARB is developing a racial equity lens and welcomes partnership. Hopes that communities can use Commission to share concrete steps with other state agencies.

Estes: Saúl, How does SOMOS Mayfair's Community Engagement Philosophy, such as community developed agendas and community decision making, ensure diverse voices are heard in your community engagement strategy?

Ramos: This process is a journey with community to understand common language and shared values that anchor our work. Addressing issues, such as housing, education, environmental, etc., requires us to start where community is. Have a shared view of the decisions that we need to make. Must be willing to shift practices and policies. Place community members on Board because community members understand issues from a community perspective. Learn together. Have a common language. Discuss values. Embed community voice into every stage of the decision-making process. Be very clear about what decisions are needed and where we can have influence. Trust-building and long-lasting relationships are critical. Embed this approach into the culture of the organization. This journey requires time to be in community. Will not be one or two meetings.

Estes: What is the biggest takeaway in developing effective community engagement strategies?

Ramos: Community engagement is a process and journey. It is not a naturally recurring element of government. Partner with communities to do this work.

Johnson: Remember the individuals who populate your Commissions and agencies are people. Be willing to take risks to do what is right. Remember who you are.

Wang: Government resources can be difficult to access. Exploring more types of models that help communities better understand and access government resources and grants. Many communities on the ground are the most effective to address racial disparities.

Fletcher: Agree that government has resources. Need to grow awareness. Remove barriers. Make the procurement process easier to give money to the people that need it. Identify how to

be transparent about where we have influence and are limited and still be able to engage with communities.

Commission Discussion

Salas: Thanked the panelists. Invited Committee to provide initial reflections. Shared personal reflections. Community engagement has a beginning but does not have an end. An ongoing process. Begin by defining community engagement. Community engagement can connect us through generations. Community engagement is about trust-building and relationships. Recognize the need to address the accessibility of public meeting materials and language used. Resonating with the power of promoters and peer-to-peer. Partnerships with community-based organizations. Community engagement provides an opportunity for community leaders to be trained to generate that leadership. Compensate individuals. Celebration of victories, culture, and arts. Engagement and work in a way that is celebratory and connects people. Identify barriers that we can impact. Explore models that we can demonstrate are working and connecting communities to government in powerful ways.

Matthews: Four pillars. First, concept of relationship. A process, not a product. Measurement of success must consider the ongoing process. Second, trusting in the wisdom of the community. Valuing lived experiences. Remove barriers. Make it easier for communities and small community-based organizations to get actual funds. Build capacity. Help communities learn how to access resources. What are the first three critical steps to how the Commission might influence state departments to value lived experiences most effectively?

Johnson: If you have not lived it, you should not be talking about it. Find someone with lived experiences and someone they can be comfortable talking to. Listen to the people. Repeat it back. Follow through on your commitments to build trust. Acknowledge past harm. Reconcile different truths and repair the harm. Only then can we imagine the future.

Bowles: Expressed appreciation for the panelists.

Public Comment

Kei Yamamoto of California Pan-Ethnic Health Network and California Racial Equity Coalition, Niko Shahbazian of Catalyst California, Andrew Park of Trybe, Karen Fleshman of Racy Conversations.

Agenda Item #6: DISCUSSION: Next Steps for Staff Action

Commissioner Angelica Salas, Recommended Committee Lead

Dr. Larissa Estes, Executive Director, Racial Equity Commission

Commissioner Discussion

Salas: Recommend the election of Commissioner Salas to Committee Lead to the Commission for a formal vote. Identify barriers that state agencies experience in community engagement. Consider measures of success, timelines, and milestones.

Estes: Share graphic notetaking as part of meeting minutes and committee report at future meetings. Review effective community engagement models. Continue to learn and improve language services and language accessibility. Consider reading level and comprehension as part of language accessibility.

Agenda Item #7: Meeting Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:31 PM.

DRAFT