

MINUTES FROM SPECIAL MEETING

Commission on Racial Justice and Equity

Thursday, November 4, 2021

7:00pm

Held Via Zoom

Meeting began at 7:00pm. In attendance were Alina Bricklin-Goldstein, Deb Carroll, Tracy-Ann Johnson, Amo-Mensah Amofa, Sue Oppenheimer, Dave Peniston, Lillian Tanski, Jen Wang,

Absent: Barret Katuna

No Public Comment

Introduction of NCCJ partners

Lillian and Deb had previously spoken with Sandra Vonniessen-Applebee and Lisa Tatko

- Nyaunu Stevens - Director of Programs
- SV: Director of Program Operations
- LT: Community Engagement Manager

LTatko: National Conference for Community and Justice - 1927 - deal with human relations education and issues. Work with all kinds people, sizes of organizations and agencies. Work with towns, nonprofits, for profits. The work we focus on and do covers 9 different areas of identity: race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, age, class, abilities, faith, body size (?). We do a lot of work with dialogue, talk about areas of oppression where people are disadvantaged or advantaged. Looking to bring common ground so that people who have advantage can help support those who don't.

NS: Middletown project. Was fun - 2019-early 2020. They were interested in feeling out where racial issues existed and what they could do about it. Multi-step project. Focus groups for BIPOC residents, community conversations, two-day anti-racism training for all the town leadership including mayor and chief of police. Super exciting b/c multi-level approach - captured a lot of different perspectives - put together nice report.

<https://www.middletownct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/18262/NCCJ-Middletown-Report-on-Anti-Racism-Initiative-in-the-City-of-Middletown-PDF?bidId=> The way we do our programs ... was an academic - teaching sociology and women's studies - greater Cleveland area, did a lot of equity-oriented theater. Absolutely love the way we do it: highly interactive. This is a no shame, no blame space. Equity works makes everyone better - when you enter into a space whether as dominant or marginalized group, your life will get better.

SV: understand where you're at: have done survey, want to have more conversations before putting together report. We have grant dollars to do the work, we want to help you pick your next steps.

LTatko: We're based in Windsor. Last year they declared racism as a public health crisis. Then working/struggling with what that looks like. Inviting people to learn, get involved, listen. In Windsor we have diversity, have people who have different experiences than others. It's common: you just don't see if you don't know what to look for, and you don't directly experience it. We work with a lot of all-white communities. We hear "we don't have any of those problems." Once we expand on all those identities, people will hear something and lean in a little more, and

can identify where they've heard/seen something. Then find common ground, can relate to, and want to learn about what they don't know about. Believe that everyone wants to help.

DC: we did not realize how long it would take to design the survey, didn't really have plan for disseminating the survey. Deb and Lillian working with Sandra and Lisa on getting dates scheduled.

LTatko - what we define as a focus group. Nyaunu does our FGs, she's an expert in this area. Nyaunu would run the BIPOC FG.

NS: like a group interview. 1 hour long. It's short and sweet, small and intimate (about 10 people). The facilitator and participants. All about creating a space for them to feel space enough to talk about the challenges they've experienced. Important: Who is in front of the room is so critical for the space that's set - for BIPOC FG, would be a BIPOC facilitator. For that really good, rich information that's going to get into the issues people are facing, it's more effective/economical to do FG instead of interview 10 people individually. Guarantee anonymity, but no one will have a particular statement attributed to them. Transcribe notes, look for themes that came up. Once transcribed, recording is transcribed. Has done for middle school, high school, nonprofits, corporate agencies.

SV: were going to offer 4 - different dates/times. Allows for different times for people to attend, eg stay at home moms, working people, retirees, etc.

DC:

- We are responsible for finding participants, right?
- Do you start with questions, or how do you structure it?

NS: there's a structure, you set guidelines, then we dive into the meat of it. Loosely structured, but there's a handful of very pointed questions, to get people to really reflect on what their experience has been, and share it. The challenge is not that we don't get enough information or not enough quality. When people do it, people feel like their town/organization cares about their viewpoint, they express gratitude.

LTanski:

- We had discussed participants. I think we ought to have it match the participant pool for our survey: live, work, or spend time here. Re youth: we're under such a time crunch, and don't have survey data and don't know how to handle with parental permissions etc. Although we do want to know what our youth are doing.

NS: kids don't necessarily want to do survey, much easier to get them in a room.

DP:

- If we pick participants, do you guys pick the theme?

NS: understand the theme is racial equity as umbrella. If there's anything that's critical, we can work it in.

DP: let's say we start recruiting, say get 60 people, so we'd do 6 groups.

NS: recommend: go into it thinking how many groups you want to do, if get overwhelming response then you can select people randomly, put everyone else on a waiting list. Part of your outreach can be “space is limited.”

DP: Have you ever partnered with community that’s not very diverse? How did it go?

NS: yes and yes. A lot of experience, not as much representation of marginalized group. Helped advance the way they think and talk. For mostly white residents, co-facilitation - Nyaunu and Sandra. People hear info differently from different people - mixed identity of facilitators can be helpful for making these spaces feel space.

DC: Want to make sure you’re aware our big 4 areas: housing, education, recreation, policing. That gave us some shape to the structure of the survey instrument. Have you seen survey instrument and results?

NS: I would like access to do that , but don’t need to look at it in advance of the focus groups.

JW: Big 4 vs. open ended?

NS: it won’t impact the questions I write. Those topics will come up.

LT: just thank you.

TJ: As I reflect on these conversations, can’t help but reflect on importance of transparency. Curious about strategy to get leadership to be transparent - not politically correct, but honest. To create change, have to be honest.

NS: we structure it to get people comfortable. Guidelines, and space for authentic connection. Once you get that rolling, then the magic happens. We use real good qualitative research methods, evidence-based techniques.

AB: can we discuss timing/availability in the context of our deadline?

DC: Are you doing these in person or on Zoom?

NS: Can do both. We can create the same kind of space in virtual world as in physical world. If you want to offer an incentive - those can be easier to do in physical space. Middletown: offered incentive like dinner/refreshments will be served.

DC: Is there a discernible difference with info you get in person vs. online?

LTatko: Zoom can be exhausting. We do 2-day workshops - feedback is that they go by quickly and are v engaging. They’re listening at level they haven’t before.

SV: Maybe we offer a couple of both.

LTatko: youths - they’re having experiences.

TJ: had an interesting experience with my 8-year-old. Thought he was not ready for these conversations, but he was.

JW: I think we need to get pretty clear on groups, we've talked about youths, BIPOC, different constituencies. How many groups and ideal participant profile? Recruitment: help. Form: name, email address, racial identity/ Clarification: all groups will be for BIPOC individuals.

LTanski: Are we including mixed race individuals?

TJ: I would think that identity falls under POC.

LTatko: sth that would be helpful is going a little deeper - so people understand the purpose and exactly what identities we're hoping to raise the voices/space for.

DC: I'm one vote, but genuinely have concerns about including a focus group for non adults before we do the report. Important, kids are having those conversations, we wanted to do the survey at the high school. Worried that we have 3 FGs for adults and 1 for youth, that might get lost as weird appendage to our initial report. Part of report would be recommendation to do something much more robust with youth.

SV: maybe we hold on the youth idea, and offer 4 adult focus groups.

JW; Because we're a commission out of Town Council, we haven't done direct outreach to partner with school entities- eg Equity and Social Justice Cmte (which Dave serves on), new Director of EDI... maybe doing youth FGs is a bit premature?

LTatko: Plug a bit more for including youth. Adult spaces can have posturing, but kids are authentic. Sometimes talking to the youth can spring everything open. Like what Tracy-Ann said. This happened in Windsor.

JW: I will not take up more airspace but I think Glastonbury is a different community than Windsor and Middletown, and I *do* worry about the posturing and defensiveness of our parent/adult community. Myself included, as evidenced by my discomfort with this

TJ: Very much so. Conflict management will be essential in this town.

LTanski: Yes Jen. I think that is an essential consideration in getting actions/recommendations achieved. Training on how to do outreach with community. Is that still a possibility?

SV: absolutely.

DC: No one on Council will reject report if it comes at end of Jan. So we have 9 weeks.

Rough draft for all of us: Jan 6. GB report will be part of our report, but our report will also have info from big 4 (should have by beginning of next year), focus groups. We need to do a summary and our recommendations. The report that Middletown did will be important for us as structure, Age-friendly community report is also a fantastic model: how to present data, interpretation, and recommendations. Very user-friendly report. They also did a vast data collection, spent 2 years putting together that plan.

Our job is not to take that info and rewrite it all, like a paragraph.

Big 4 interviews were not necessarily that illuminating, did not change our understanding.

DP: my only concern is, we've heard this report was coming but we have nothing.

JW: I agree with Dave. We have no idea what these big 4 interviews were about, what questions were asked, etc.

AB: yes, agreed with Jen and Dave. We have not heard anything from Mike at all since our first community conversation. was it re-recorded thereafter?

TJ: I also agree with Dave.

AB: I feel like we're a couple months behind, don't want the quality to suffer, want to do the rest of the work justice.

SO: In terms of transparency, I would like to see the questions Mike asked the big 4. Did they just talk, did they have specific questions he asked each person, I don't know how it was formulated. I would hope we'd be privy to the unedited versions - might be more truthful.

DC: Looking at Jen/Barret's areas, how do we divide this up?

AB: focusing on the actual write-up, but I think we have to talk in a group about what those components will be. In terms of timing, since you and Lillian have the contact with NCCJ, you guys should talk to them about timing.

DC: Working groups: is logical approach by the big 4 areas?

SO: How long does it take NCCJ to digest the information from FGs?

DC: will find out their turnaround from date of last focus group.

LT: in terms of structure, suggest we get moving now. In terms of recruitment for FGs: have already asked a few people in general terms. In terms of recommendations: what's hit our observations, hearts, experiences in town, and we should be compiling a set of things we've already thought of and keeping that along with GB results and get them marshalled before we get the FG results back. We need to get started on those brainstorms now [throw in Google doc] so we can discuss it. Thinks it makes sense to get into working groups for tasks. As a group should discuss recs for all 4 areas.

JW suggested WGs:

- Comms/dissemination
- Report framework
- NCCJ coordination (Deb and Lillian)
- Gather available data on race/ethnicity related to town services and analyze for disparities

AA: Since joining I've had very engaging conversation amongst my peers who live in Glastonbury on much of what we speak of in our meetings who I know would be very interested in being a part of a focus group. Will do. I reside in the Welles Village community and am quite

close with a lot of families around as I worked as a camp counselor for their children, so I can also share the idea of the upcoming focus groups to them as well.

DP: we have to knock it out of the park, so we don't drop the ball.

LT: On Dave's point, I think we should host a community conversation as well as focus groups.

DP: Agree we should do a community conversation on the full report.

AB: maybe we do that at very end when we have all our ducks in a row, recommendations there, etc. We probably don't have time to formulate recommendations after that last conversation.

DC: Our recs should come with pitch for our continued existence.

LT: totally agree with Deb's observation and that one of the recs (one of the top recs) should be the form we think RJEC should take going forward - I think we're all in agreement that the work should go forward. My read on the "conversations" - those are supposed to be public. FGs are private. Need to shoehorn one in before finalize recommendations, so that we've done conversations plural.

DC: Timing - should we ask for an extension? Budget workshops: mid-Feb to mid-March.

SO: With holidays and stuff, ask for end of March.

Next steps:

- Deb/Lillian will talk to NCCJ: to pull together focus group dates, and find out turnaround time from date of last focus group, and if they can help us write report and put together recommendations? Let's see them in action.
- Deb: over weekend will put together a google doc with our deadlines and FGs, and space to put our insights. Need chief editor for each section.
- Jen: to focus on comms/dissemination plan - could use 1-2 others
- Jen: to set up google form for signing up.
- Everyone: to start recruiting for FGs