

**Town of Needham**  
**Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group**  
**Minutes for June 22, 2022**

**Location: Town Hall, Powers Hall**

**Members of the public may view or listen via Zoom.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82685728068>

**Members Present:** Ramin Abrishamian, Marianne Cooley, Natasha Espada, Toyin Fayemi, Vivian Hsu, Liz Lee, Marcus Nelson, Jen Howard Schroeder, Jay Spencer  
**Members Absent:** None.  
**Staff Present:** Kate Fitzpatrick, Katie King  
**Guests:** None.

**5:00 p.m. Light dinner**

**5:45 p.m. Call to Order:** This meeting of the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative working group was convened by Chair, Marianne Cooley.

Chair Cooley announced this open meeting is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020 due to the current state of emergency from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. She noted all public gatherings have been suspended as advised and directed by the Commonwealth. And, as such, suspending the requirement of the open meeting law to have all meetings in a public, accessible, physical location while encouraging and allowing members of all public bodies to participate remotely. She stated the meeting will not include public comment and the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative working group and all attendees are convening by Zoom, as posted on the Town's website identifying how the public may join. All supporting documents used at this meeting are available on the Town's website [www.needhamma.gov](http://www.needhamma.gov).

**1. Discussion about Glossary of Terms**

A glossary of common terms and definitions is being developed and will be available in the near future.

**2. Update on Staff DEI efforts**

**Resources**

With the help of the Town's state legislative delegation, Needham secured \$50,000 for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work.

**Staff Training**

- Active Bystander virtual training was conducted to equip staff to intervene as necessary.
- Town departments are encouraged to set up their own field training.
- William James College held the first of a 5-session training for the top two managers in each Town department which was well received. Next session to be held in the fall.

- Leadership training: Every department manager must have a DEI goal for 2023 that is a concrete, measurable checkpoint.
- Training is focused on how to make the goal actionable to translate into everyday work.
- Define a clear protocol process for evaluating participation in initiatives.
- Forum of department managers to hear how others plan to apply goals in their department.
- How will they identify vulnerable and disproportionate populations?

Members discussed whether to do a pre- and post-training survey to see whether attitudes, comfort level or knowledge has shifted over time.

#### **Recruitment of Town DEI staff**

- Where to advertise the positions
- Implemented a new tracking system to root out biases
- The Town subscribes to Diversity.com which opened up a world of job posting sites.

#### **Support Staff**

- Support Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) staff
- Employee Resource group called "Stronger Together"
- Contracted with former HR director to assist the group to identify goals

The Town will re-engage with Boards and Committees at a later point.

### **3. Review Committee Charge and Progress**

- Articulate a recommended vision for racial equity in Needham with guiding principles that will inform future actions.
- Establish protocols and practices for getting community feedback with a specific focus on engaging BIPOC residents, and others who have been marginalized due to their race or ethnicity. Strategies should be identified to keep Needham's racial equity work informed by BIPOC resident input but owned by Town leadership and the broader community.
  - Protocols and practices are not yet firm.
  - Use the protocols and practices of the rapid response team.
  - Formulate a complaint process on the web site.
  - Identify a location where people should go to comment.

Members discussed efforts to engage a more diverse segment of the community:

- Affordable Housing survey did not prove effective to this end
  - 89% respondents were white and over age 65.
- Town survey was mailed to residents and delivered via newsletter.
  - Asked: How is Needham doing in five key areas of racial equity?
  - Results will be shared in June.
- Members discussed sending out a survey with the Census or the water bill.
- Members further discussed means by which to make engagement fun and exciting
  - Post-it ideas

- Engagement at Dunkin, Carnival, or other popular areas
- Mobile app
- Active solicitation from various areas (e.g. schools, Linden-Chambers).

### **Action**

- Partner with the Human Rights Community or Resiliency Network.
- Go to various places to find people before training launches.
- Get feedback to learn what are the roadblocks to someone coming forward to the network.

### **Layer in Subgroups**

- Bring in NUARI principles.
  - Present different capacities (focus groups, who is in the room).
  - Educate people to look with different lenses.
  - Recommend what members need to do to get the minority group to speak.
    - True feedback will come when the minority feels secure.
    - Getting this feedback is important than getting the general feedback of the majority.
  - Ask students how they want to communicate and what makes them feel comfortable.
- Set up communication structures to ensure sustainability and accountability of initiatives.
- Ongoing - to what degree does it become more like breathing as people's process?
  - Outreach - focus group discussions. People need to feel safe to be talking about it. It will require intentional effort to design this.

### **Accountability and Sustainability of NUARI initiatives**

- Principles should be part of a process, common sense that effects everyone
  - Give everyone the Glossary, a shared language.
  - Annually report department goals and achievements.
  - Create realistic, sustainable long-term goals.
  - Summarize Town achievements as a whole.
  - Be mindful that a board/committee without Town staff will not have the initiative that one would have if there were Town staff who have a performance requirement for the goals.
- Discuss and prioritize other recommendations that have been submitted to the Select Board.
- Provide a DEI Checklist.
  - Community initiatives are complete and continue to be ongoing.
  - Schools have their own coalition - not sure of the progress.
  - Select Board has focused on Police issues. NUARI is grateful for those who have participated in helpful conversations.
    - Review the last 3 Select Board sessions with the Police to see what we've learned.
  - Housing initiatives are in progress.
  - The Select Board has written a letter to recap.
- Making recommendation to the Select Board about future action.
- One year ago, NUARI provided a concrete set of recommendations. Circle back today.

- Create concrete goals for procurement such as those of DCAMM (Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance).
  - Gather data, set goals and a schedule for each board (equity, environment, zoning).
  - Create Town policy in each department for procurement and enrollment standards.
    - Goals to attract minorities and disadvantaged businesses
    - RFP's - Even out the percentage of targeted businesses
    - Ask the DEI questions of every contractor until the Town's DEI goals become mainstream to secure business with the Town.
- Board diversity - create initiatives to attract more diverse applicants
- Train Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs

**4. Consider and make recommendations on an oversight plan for the work – transitioning away from the NUARI working group and incorporating NUARI as a concept in the work of boards and committees.**

- NUARI is not the members, but an initiative.
- Working Group accomplished the goal to provide a framework for others to continue the work.
- NUARI members will be accessible as ambassadors or an Advisory Council.
- NUARI members will meet annually:
  - Before Town Meeting to discuss progress in a critical way (score card, checkpoints)
  - Resource to provide feedback to Select Board or Town Manager on action plans
  - Maintain the structure of NUARI group as very diverse with varying points of view.
- NUARI members go to boards and committees to help them set up their action plans.
  - Do you have equity goals for your group, for procurement, for hiring?
  - Get them started to create their own plan.
    - Gather data
    - What are your policies?
    - Are they doing anything to prevent meaningful access to people?
  - Meet with them once per year.
- Town staff will have equity performance goals.
  - Loyalty to do business with the same companies or individuals.
    - Introduce staff to more people with whom to do business
    - Widen the scope to be equitable or we will never progress.
    - State's Diversity office has the information to branch out (minority owned businesses, veteran owned businesses).
    - Develop goals:
      - As an output of your equity work, how do you see your audience diversifying?
      - Are you broadening the scope of people you are reaching?

The Town has funding for DEI to continue the concept work beyond NUARI.

- Select Board will be accountable to make sure groups are accountable.
  - NUARI goals are fundamental to the Select Board's goals.
    - Put together a scorecard
    - Which committees are picking up the ball and moving principles along?

- NUARI principles should be a role of board and committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs.
- Ask Chairs to set one equity goal by October 1 to transmit to NUARI group.
- Look at the goals in the spring.
  - Engage committee Chairs to talk about their goals with the community.
  - Give them structured 5 or 10 goals catered to their work if they don't develop goals.
    - Have 80% of staff trained in cultural sensitivity.
    - Ten % of employees or resumes be from POC.
    - Five % of your contractors as minority or women owned.
    - Give them names of people who can come to speak with staff.
- NUARI members should meet with them to consider the range of possibilities.
- Select Board should engage Chairs around NUARI principles. It's important to be a priority in their work.

## 5. Discussion about recommended training plan for boards and committees.

- Give them the Starter Kit - an easy assignment to complete by Labor Day.
- Determine by the end of 2022 if staff training could be used for boards and committees.
- Maintain momentum in-between training sessions.
  - Develop standard questions to challenge people to think about.
  - Give them an activity to complete:
    - What is the role of this committee? Goals of the committee?
    - Send the answers to NUARI group to invite assessment. Provide feedback.
  - For groups who feel they can't develop goals, offer a NUARI member connection.
    - Do an informal 30-minute session to guide them.
  - The best example is one committee leader leading on another committee leader.
  - This will confirm the kind of training they need.
  - Town Manager's Office sent a Toolkit to inform committees with core questions.
    - First - assess the need.
    - Schedule a 90-minute Event for all committee and board Chairs to hear why it is important to set DEI goals. Energize them to put something on paper.

### Priority timeline for Focus Groups:

- NUARI suggested to stagger training for Focus Groups while training Town Staff.
- NUARI, not Town Manager's Office, will elicit board and committee participation.
  - Do you feel welcome?
  - What is keeping you from accessing services?
  - Are there policies/procedures that prevent you from accessing services because of race?
- NUARI members discussed with Town staff how best to elicit feedback with BIPOC groups:
  - Six people in a room with a facilitator? Response could be 86% white persons.
  - Learn what the Resiliency Network has done to reach BIPOC communities.
  - One NUARI member has a list of 400 families.
    - Engage BIPOC community with real conversations over Zoom or Town Hall.
      - Make time to engage the community.
      - Facilitate a Focus Group.
      - Send a letter inviting people to talk with NUARI.

- Walk throughout the community to invite opinions on equity.
  - How have you felt since you've been here?
- UMass walked through the community with a phone survey, *Welcome and Inclusive*.
  - A visual campus map color-coded: red for students, blue for grad students, a dot for staff.
  - Create a survey for Needham on a phone.
- Is the Town able to come up with tactful questions to ask in a focus group?

**Next Meeting Date** - Spring 2023

**Matters not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance** - None.

7:06 p.m.

**Adjourn**

**Motion:**

**N. Espada moved to adjourn.**

**Seconded:**

**V. Hsu**

**Roll Call Vote:**

R. Abrishamian, yes; M. Cooley, yes; N. Espada, yes;  
T. Fayemi, yes; V. Hsu, yes; L. Lee, yes; M. Nelson, yes;  
J. Howard Schroeder, yes; J. Spencer, yes. None opposed.

**Motion Carries:**

**9-0**

TO BE ADOPTED