



OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

Final Minutes - August 19, 2019

Evergreen State College, Tacoma, 1210 6th Ave, Tacoma, WA 98405

Office of Equity Task Force members present:

Rex Brown (for Lisa van der Lugt)
Benjamin Danielson (Co-Chair)
RaShelle Davis
Manka Dhingra
Michelle Gonzalez
Toshiko Hasegawa
Mystique Hurtado (for Craig Bill)

Karen A. Johnson
Mandeep Kaundal
Melanie Morgan
Jan Olmstead (Co-Chair)
Maria Siguenza
Allison Spector

Office of Equity Task Force members absent:

Jeremie Dufault
Sharon Ortiz
Ed Prince

Office of Equity Task Force staff present:

LinhPhung Huynh, Project Manager
Esmael Lopez, Community Engagement Specialist

Hannah Fernald, Administrative Coordinator

Guests and other participants:

George Bridges, President, TESC
Representative Mia Gregerson
Melanie Hisaw, State Board of Health
Christy Hoff, Health Disparities Council
Alexandra Montaño, State Board of Health
Paj Nandi, Department of Health
Anita Ahumada, Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Melissa Van Gorkom, Senate Committee Services
Taniesha Lyons, community member
Maria (Liz) Sarmiento, Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment
Juan Jose Bocanegro, All in for Washington

Martin N., All in for Washington
Jonathan Johnson, Tacoma NAACP
Andrea Daily Michaux, community member
William Golding, community member
Elizabeth Gordon, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
Glenn Jenkins, Washington Education Association
Kristi Cruz, Northwest Justice Project
Yoshi Kumara, House Democratic Caucus Staff
Sharon Kim, Department of Social and Health Services

Benjamin Danielson, Task Force Co-Chair, called the public meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. He and Jan Olmstead, Task Force Co-Chair, read from a prepared statement. Co-Chair Olmstead asked George Bridges, President of The Evergreen State College (TESC), to provide a welcome. Mr. Bridges shared information about the College and its reach into communities, particularly the Hilltop community in Tacoma. He outlined some of TESC's equity-related work and emphasized the significance of the Task Force's work.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: The Task Force approves the August 19, 2019 agenda.

Motion/Second: Manka Dhingra/RaShelle Davis. Approved unanimously.

2. INTRODUCTIONS AND ICE BREAKER

LinhPhung Huynh, Task Force Project Manager, gave an overview of the Task Force and its work (on file). The slide deck included content on:

- the creation of the Task Force;
- Task Force membership; and
- recommendation areas the Task Force must include in its final proposal to the Governor and Legislature.

Co-Chair Olmstead used this introduction period to ask for guidance from Senator Manka Dhingra, Task Force Member, and Representative Mia Gregerson. She requested that they speak about their sponsorship of House Bill 1783 and Senate Bill 5776 during the 2019 legislative session and their support for the Task Force's creation. Co-Chair Olmstead also asked RaShelle Davis, Task Force Member, to provide her perspective—since she was involved in this legislative work—and Representative Melanie Morgan, Task Force Member, to give opening comments.

Representative Gregerson thanked the Task Force and reminded members to work hard to find community throughout the project. She spoke about her background as a first-generation elected official and her experience seeing policies impact communities' opportunities. She emphasized the need for a state Office of Equity and gave words of encouragement.

Member Dhingra thanked Task Force staff and the Co-Chairs and she recognized Representative Gregerson's leadership. The Senator said this work is about finding solutions, holding people and agencies accountable, and creating dramatic change as a state. She encouraged the Task Force to set an example for the nation.

Member Davis thanked Member Dhingra and Representative Gregerson for their leadership. She described the Task Force's work as a priority to the Governor and the Governor's Office. She thanked Task Force members for bringing their true and authentic selves to the process.

Member Morgan reminded the public that an Office of Equity will be for them, not for the Task Force. She encouraged attendees to spread the word about this project, saying that buy-in is important to the Office's success and longevity. She emphasized the importance of being progressive and inclusive.

Co-Chair Olmstead engaged the Task Force and public attendees in an ice breaker activity (on file). Members and attendees shared their backgrounds and their personal reasons for doing this work. Some responses included, “I serve on this Task Force...”

- ...to make sure the government is for everyone and keeps agencies accountable.
- ...to make changes for all and to eliminate barriers that anyone faces.
- ...because now is the time for all residents to receive the benefits they need to work and prosper. Every life matters.
- ... because I want to see a government that works for and takes into account every resident.
- ...to support everyone with disabilities.

Some responses from public attendees included, “I’m here today...”

- ...to focus on programmatic solutions to problems. The perfect program will not work on a faulty operating system.
- ... to remove barriers and provide help where needed.
- ... to support colleagues to create the reality of an equitable society.
- ... to remind us all of the courage it will take.

3. GUIDANCE TO THE TASK FORCE

Co-Chair Olmstead merged this discussion with agenda item #2, Introductions and Ice Breaker.

4. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION DEFINITIONS

Karen A. Johnson, Task Force Member, led a discussion about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) language, so the Task Force could come to common understanding of the words that will guide their work. She gave a presentation called ‘Words Matter’ (on file). Members completed an activity to match terms with their definitions. Member Johnson explained that the definitions come from a committee of the State DEI Council. She then led a discussion about the difference between equity and equality and the meaning of the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion.’ Task Force members and public participants shared their thoughts on what the terms equity, diversity, and inclusion mean to them.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Co-Chair Danielson read from an opening statement.

Marietta Bobba, member of the Governor’s Interagency Council on Health Disparities, shared a story from her recent jury duty service. She said they watched a video about not bringing bias into their deliberations. She said during jury selection, the prosecution explored biases and when potential jurors shared that they believed there was bias in our system, they were excused because it was viewed as a bias against the prosecution.

Jonathan Johnson, Tacoma NAACP, shared a story about three different groups fighting one another in his command. He said divide and conquer works because people have fear and he emphasized that fear is powerful. He suggested to the Task Force members that they do not try to change everything at once, but rather find ways to incorporate small but decisive steps that build on one another and, over a short period of time, progress will be made. He then gave an example of how this incremental approach helped to reduce exclusion rates in school.

Sally Perkins, community member, introduced herself and said she lives in the Hilltop neighborhood. She thanked the Task Force for tackling equity in a real way. She said what the Task Force is really tackling is racism, and added that white people do not want to be uncomfortable, so they frame it as a discussion around equity. She urged the Task Force to use real words and invite people into their discomfort. Co-Chair Danielson agreed and asked Task Force members to make a commitment to being a little uncomfortable.

Taniesha Lyons, community member, said she is running for school board in the clover park school district. She said inequitable discipline leads to the school-to-prison pipeline and she is committed to working on that issue. Co-Chair Danielson asked her to share her thoughts on what could be done to address the inequity in school discipline. She said there is a need for cultural awareness in the school system so children of color, low-income children, and children who are LGBTQ feel safe and visible.

Marcia Tate Arunga, Academic Dean Tacoma TESC, said gentrification and urban renewal/urban removal and the impacts on communities is an alarming public health issue. She said it gives rise to stress-related disease and mental illness. She said Tuskegee led to generational fear and resistance to western medicine among those of African descent. She talked about how black cadavers were exhumed and used for medical experimentation and how that led to knowledge gains at the expense of her ancestors. She said it was important to remember this history and that we stand on the shoulders of those who have no voice because they are gone and that we need to remember them today.

Martin N., All in for Washington, said when we talk about equity, we need to talk about economic justice. He said Washington has a regressive tax code and our people are paying over 17-18% of their income and the top 1% are only paying 2% of their income. He emphasized that it is more than just getting the people who are making the most to pay their share. He said we also have to give communities the opportunity to figure out where the money should go.

Glenn Jenkins, Washington Education Association and teacher, said that white supremacy culture even comes up among people of color. He gave examples of fear of open conflict and power hoarding. He said courage does not mean that we are not afraid, it means that we do it regardless.

Kristi Cruz, Northwest Justice Project and Washington State Coalition for Language Access, thanked the Task Force for its work. She mentioned John Powell and his work around the 'circle of human concern and belongingness.' She said she works to promote language access. She said her clients have barriers to accessing systems because they speak languages other than English or use sign language and are often left out of the circle of human concern. She said she wants the Office of Equity to represent those individuals. Allison Spector, Task Force Member, said she has been working on the Department of Transportation's Limited English Proficiency plan and reiterated the importance of meaningful language access.

Co-Chair Olmstead said the comments have made her think about the work they do in Indian Country and she shared the Seven Generation Principle. Member Johnson shared

a timeline of key events in the civil rights movement. She thanked those for coming forward and reminding her about the pain in her heart and why she is here today.

6. APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Esmael Lopez, Community Engagement Specialist, acknowledged the Puyallup Tribe and ancestors of the lands. He introduced himself and shared his perspective as the Community Engagement Specialist for this Task Force. He asked for help in bringing the voice of the people to the forefront and to center the voices in the margins. He asked the Task Force to share thoughts on the ways community engagement will influence the process and outcome of this work. He also asked for thoughts on why communities should participate now and what they should expect from this Task Force.

Member Dhingra said the format and set up of the meeting has allowed for community participation. She added that in government, we speak with money and the fact that we have a budget proviso that is funding this Task Force shows that the government is serious about it. Co-Chair Danielson reiterated three commitments—creating a space that feels welcoming, building trust, and honoring our sense of accountability.

Member Spector and Maria Siguenza, Task Force Member, discussed barriers to participation, including the ability to take leave from work to attend a meeting during the day. Member Siguenza challenged the Task Force to think about accessibility and said her commitment is to offer her Commission to help get the word out. She added the onus should be on members to show up in community to seek input. Member Morgan said the Task Force needs to reengage communities in a way that is non-threatening and non-traumatizing. She reiterated that true engagement means going to the people. Co-Chair Danielson said the discussion is about the process the Task Force will use for engagement, and it is also about how the Office of Equity could encourage state agencies to do business.

Mr. Lopez said we often follow the colonial practice of extraction. We ask communities for information and when we get it, we move on. He said he will do his best to bring people to the table and bring voices back to the Task Force. He said it takes years to build relationships and trust, so he will lean on the relationships he has built in the past. Member Davis said we are very lucky to have a position dedicated to community outreach and added that it would be great to a community outreach plan at the next meeting.

Co-Chair Danielson asked what is different about this work that will make people want to participate. Member Johnson discussed how it is important to share stories that touch the heart. She suggested we work on inspiring people through stories and telling our dreams. Co-Chair Olmstead cautioned against having a pre-determined outcome. Mandeep Kaundal, Task Force Member, discussed the importance of qualitative information and suggested forming a dream that highlights the interconnectedness of our causes. Member Morgan said we need to accept people where they are at and as they are.

Mr. Johnson said that people who have been injured over and over are tired of being hurt and the Task Force will need to hear what hurts, not the angry words. He added that members need to connect and get to know each other before they can get to know the community.

WORKING LUNCH

The Task Force recessed for lunch at 12:40 p.m. and reconvened at 1:45 p.m.

The lunch was a working lunch where members wrote thoughts on chart paper about what they need to know to make informed decisions, who they need to hear from, and other ideas. Community members were encouraged to share their thoughts on what the Task Force should know and consider in their deliberations.

7. TASK FORCE BYLAWS

Jan Olmstead, Co-Chair, asked staff to provide an overview of the draft bylaws. Ms. Huynh walked members through the draft bylaws, which included sections on membership, terms of office, expense reimbursement, officers and committees, meetings (written to comply with the Open Public Meetings Act), minutes and agendas, procedures, and amending the bylaws.

Members discussed whether to include other groups in Task Force membership. Member Dhingra clarified that membership is outlined in the budget proviso. She added that outside of membership, we can ensure we engage with tribes, veterans, youth, and other groups. Member Morgan suggested including the website in the bylaws. Members decided that alternate members would be able to vote on actions. Members discussed the possibility of remote participation, and the Co-Chairs encouraged in-person participation.

Motion: The Task Force adopts the bylaws, as reviewed on August 19, 2019, with the addition of adding a link to the Task Force's website.

Motion/Second: Member Dhingra/Member Morgan. Approved unanimously

8. TASK FORCE OPERATING PRINCIPALS

Co-Chair Danielson, said the Co-Chairs were proposing operating principles for the Task Force to consider. He said these are the philosophies that will drive us and that we can use them to hold each other accountable if we drift astray.

Members and community participants discussed the principle about embracing equity. They discussed whether different groups, such as Black/African American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native, should be explicitly referenced. They discussed the systematic and intentional oppression of black and indigenous communities and that can not be overlooked and minimized. In the end, members decided to edit the language around equity to be broader, as there is another operating principle focused on race. Members also concluded that since the Task Force will be creating a definition of equity to guide the Office of Equity's work, they did not want to define equity in the operating principles.

Members discussed whether the Task Force wants to center racism in its work. Member Spector said as a white transgender woman, it haunts her to see how transgender women of color have been subjected to violence. She said focusing on racism should be a centerpiece of the work. Member Siguenza said she was able to identify language around intersectionality in the statement. Member Morgan said we need to start with racism because, otherwise, we will commit the same atrocities that we have in the past. Members discussed whether to define race and/or racism. Member Johnson said the conversation about race is really a conversation about whiteness. Co-Chair Danielson suggested that

defining race may be a distraction as the concept of race was created by society. Members asked public attendees for their thoughts before deciding to call out 'white supremacy' in the statement.

Members moved on to discuss the operating principle around centering community. Member Dhingra requested that the concept of inclusion be added, and members agreed. Members discussed the possibility of explicitly listing out impacted communities, such as veterans, in this operating principle. Member Morgan proposed incorporating groups as part of a glossary in the workgroup setting. Co-Chair Danielson expressed his concern over the term 'stakeholder' as it invokes Manifest Destiny and land theft. Co-Chair Olmstead, speaking from a tribal perspective, recommended not using the term 'stakeholder,' and the Task Force agreed to remove the term. The Task Force agreed with Member Johnson to replace 'strive to' with 'we will' to underline the Task Force's intentions.

Members discussed the operating principle of 'Commit to Bold Action' next. Member Morgan did not like the term 'champions for equity' and members ultimately chose the term 'leaders for equity.' Based on Member Dhingra's suggestion, members deleted the first sentence and began the section with the bold statement about 'revolutionary change.' They also added 'institutional racism'.

Michelle Gonzalez, Task Force Member, expressed a greater concern that the operating principles did not resonate with her because she did not know where they came from. She said she was hesitant to give full support without knowing what is being asked of her, explaining that she was under the impression the Task Force would be deciding if an Office of Equity is even the right thing to pursue. Member Johnson said that the discussion is not around 'if' the office will exist, but 'how' it should exist. She also cautioned against group think, and asked that Member Gonzalez speak her truth and bring her perspective to these discussions without feeling pressured by the group. Co-Chair Danielson acknowledged that the Task Force will not agree on everything, but hopes everyone is committed to creating an Office of Equity. Co-Chair Olmstead said these were valid concerns and appreciated the perspective. Member Gonzalez agreed to raise concerns throughout the Task Force's work.

Members then discussed the principle related to unintended consequences. Co-Chair Olmstead explained the Seven Generation Principle and its purpose of helping us keep the experiences of previous generations in the current context of this work. Based on Member Spector's suggestion, members swapped the order of the first two sentences to make the statement more active. Member Davis noted that systems are working exactly as they were designed to, so 'unintended consequences' is not an accurate term. Paj Nandi, member of the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities, suggested adding the term 'impact' to the statement. With these suggestions, members rephrased the statement title to 'Be Vigilant for Adverse Consequences and Impacts.'

Andrea Daily Michaux, community member, shared her lived experience and mentioned some priorities she could not find in the operating principles. She said she was hoping to hear about 'providing opportunities' and statements about what the Task Force intends not to do. She wanted to know: Who is the gatekeeper? Who is ensuring what is on paper is actually happening?

Co-Chair Danielson reflected that everyone can speak to the powerlessness that racism imposes. He encouraged members to be a little scared of what they are asking of the state and the changes that they are expecting. He said this work is bold and almost impossible, but if the Task Force dreams and works together, it will become a reality. Member Johnson encouraged members to become more comfortable in their discomfort and hoped everyone could share a little bit about their stories. She suggested making space to get rid of bitterness and to heal as a group before engaging others. Member Morgan said that creating a space where all could be authentic was extraordinary work. She said this dynamic is what the Task Force is about, and with guiding principles set, anyone could come into the room and join the fold of what was created today.

Members agreed to add language around ‘being comfortable with discomfort as a bold action.’

Motion: The Task Force adopts the Operating Principles reviewed on August 19, 2019 as amended.

Motion/Second: Member Dhingra/Member Davis. Approved unanimously

9. MAPPING EXERCISE – CURRENT STATEWIDE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION RESPONSIBILITIES (PREVIEW)

Ms. Huynh described the mapping exercise as creating an inventory of statewide, enterprise-wide DEI efforts and responsibilities. She explained that this information could help inform the Task Force’s deliberations on the Office of Equity’s functions and scope. Member Davis recommended that members submit information for the mapping exercise in the time between meetings, and asked staff to send out a template to achieve this work.

10. COMMENTS, UPDATES, AND REFLECTIONS

Co-Chair Danielson asked members and public attendees to share their expectation coming into the meeting and their experience of the journey so far.

Each member shared reflections. They expressed their appreciation for community members’ input and the group’s willingness to engage in candid, bold conversations. Mystique Hurtado, Task Force Member, said this work is important in building trust in all communities. Member Hasegawa said she began the meeting unsure what the Office of Equity would look like and how it would function. She said she is looking for equity responsibility, so it is important to know how we will hold our agencies accountable. Member Siquenza said she is leaving the meeting feeling centered, because she is confident in the way the Task Force is intentionally making weighty recommendations and is comfortable with disrupting the status quo.

Ms. Ahumada said she was happy to meet members and that she learned a lot about the potential of an Office of Equity. Ms. Daily Michaux said she was impressed with the diligence and delicate way the group approached conversations. She said the group took into consideration the emotions that we do not see, but are in the room.

Member Johnson shared her hope for co-creating a better future for generations to come. Co-Chair Olmstead thanked the group for being authentic and bringing their truths to the work. She said this work has been a long time coming and it is a dream come true for her.

ADJOURNMENT

Benjamin Danielson, Co-Chair, adjourned the meeting.

OFFICE OF EQUITY TASK FORCE

Jan Olmstead, Co-Chair

Benjamin Danielson, Co-Chair

To request this document in an alternate format or a different language, please contact Kelie Kahler, Washington State Board of Health Communication Manager, at 360-236-4102 or by email at kelie.kahler@sboh.wa.gov TTY users can dial 711.

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington • 98504-7990
360-236-4110 • healthequity@sboh.wa.gov • healthequity.wa.gov