

Town of Needham
Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group
Minutes for January 10, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVTB74oJ-xA&list=PL3PRZZjHC3yE0eZ-rrW5RDdybU0e1R91L&index=6>

Members Present: Marianne Cooley, Ramin Abrishamian, Natasha Espada, Toyin Fayemi, Liz Lee, Jen Howard Schroeder, Jay Spencer, Marcus Nelson
Members Absent: Vivian Hsu
Staff Present: Kate Fitzpatrick

6:00 p.m. **Call to Order:** This meeting of the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative working group was convened by Chair, Marianne Cooley.

Ms. 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. Ms. Cooley 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.

1. Approval of Minutes:

- a. April 26, 2021
- b. October 18, 2021

Motion: T. Fayemi moved to approve the minutes of April 26, 2021 and October 18, 2021.

Second: M. Nelson

Roll Call Vote: M. Cooley, yes; N. Espada, yes; O. Fayemi, yes; L. Lee, yes; M. Nelson, yes; J. Howard Schroeder, yes; J. Spencer, yes.
None opposed.

Motion Carries: 7-0

2. Community Conversations on Race/Forums

Chair Cooley noted the Summary document had not yet been sent to members.

The Community Conversations Group's first event will center around Policing, the history of policing, then making direct connections to our community.

They continue to work with the Police Chief and have him at the Select Board meetings for discussion at regular intervals

The group has hypothesized two other sessions for the community. They will meet and bring that outline to this group.

Listening to the concerns of Nichole Argo and Beth Pinals and knowing the concern among the group that is meeting, people may not react as expected. The group has discussed how to do it most productively and settled on a format that NUARI suggested which invites people into the conversation while still engaging them on a serious topic.

The group discussed approaching people in Town from various communities to be part of the Resilience Network. Specific communities may be under-represented in some of the work around racial equity. NUARI members offered names of people who may be willing to serve and join that effort.

Members discussed NUARI's role as an advisory board, how to train and disseminate responsibility of goals to town boards, committees, and community groups to adopt and successfully engage in racial equity initiatives.

- NUARI does not own this work but identified groups who could permanently own the work. The Resiliency Network is one group for the reason they are not held captive to Open Meeting Law and can convene and make decisions with and for the community without a formal process.
- NUARI is a short-term commitment; Resiliency Network is long-term.
- Affordable housing should be picked up by the Planning Board. They put together a committee to identify next steps for ownership.
- Red Foster has provided a Housing Authority update to the Select Board on plans and what they are doing to be ready for federal grants that will support renewal and renovation of Needham properties.

Communicating NUARI Goals:

- Have a clear message how NUARI lives on, how the batons are moving from one group to another.
- People are looking for guidance, a framework. Don't lose momentum.
- Select Board, Planning Board, School Committee and Town departments will have action items built into their goals to carry it forward

Educating Town Boards, Committees and Community Groups:

- Double-check the diversity mix of people assigned to committees
- As people adopt the goals, offer suggestions how to improve racial equity and social injustice parameters. They have to live by it themselves.

- NUARI can provide initial guidance and resources to help them dig deeper if they are not coming to the table with something substantial
- With the Select Board's help, the Resilience Network sponsored presentations for small group conversations on race. They have expertise and were getting results. We realized we did not have the right skillset for the right parameters. Have them come talk with us again.
- Checklists, framework, toolkit elements - Develop a document with 6 questions to ask when setting up a program. Train Boards and departments.
- Some town committees, organizations have already stated actions while others accepted the mission and vision without further action items.
- There has to be a bridge and opportunity for people within groups to talk to each other. If you have access to others and exchange ideas, you help deepen their understanding. Finance doesn't see how to employ racial equity.
- Groups need training. Once they adopt, they become accountable to those 6 questions. Then we can measure if they are putting forth the best effort.
- We have committees who already engage the community but may not have thought that racial equity could be part of their role, i.e., Historic Commission. Groups have different angles they can find a way to connect with the community in particular areas.
- Hold a training workshop similar to Resilience Network and have a keynote part be how to bring a race equity lens by asking each attendee to come up with one or two race equity focused objectives with a couple of activities under those objectives they may set for themselves.
- Have people talk across programs to come up with creative discussions and see different perspectives that don't come from NUARI. Use the power of the NUARI group to have people circle back to have the conversation.
- Bring them altogether in a workshop would be most efficient.
- Many people are willing to come on board but need to find a tangible way
- The Library Trustees may be a good pilot for the 6 questions and how it is able to be integrated among the committee and within their organization. Help them understand why they can adopt NUARI principles.

Ms. Fitzpatrick shared slides of boards and committees who have endorsed or not yet endorsed the NUARI mission. What major boards are not listed?

Not Yet Endorsed Town Groups:

Board of Assessors	Solid Waste & Recycling Advisory Committee
Conservation Commission	Technology Advisory Board
Golf Course Advisory Committee	Traffic Management Advisory Committee
Historical Commission (follow-up)	Transportation Committee
Housing Authority (follow-up)	Trustees of Memorial Park
Permanent Public Building Committee	Water & Sewer Rate Structure Committee
Rail Trail Advisory	

Not Yet Endorsing NUARI Mission:

Exchange Club	ICON
Knights of Columbus	Schools
Women's Club	

Measurement of the NUARI mission for Boards and Committees

Community Groups have a different work set.

- Minority participation in the workforce should be reported on. How many firms you've contracted with that are minority or women owned businesses? These tend to be outliers in the construction industry.
- Look consciously at how are you broadening workforce participation by broadening the businesses you contract with. What do you put out for bids and who is given the opportunity?
- Are we satisfied with the minimum goals or do we expect more which is question for the community?

6:35 p.m.

Vivian Hsu joined the meeting.

Ms. Cooley asked whether we want to invite community groups to a workshop to talk about the mission.

6:37 p.m.

Ramin Abrishamian joined the meeting.

Educating Town Boards, Committees and Community Groups:

- It would be valuable to invite community groups to a workshop. They will be inclined to roll up their sleeves and help us with some of the initiatives. It would benefit to see NUARI as more than words on a page.
- Community groups are a pillar of doing the equity goals work. Bring groups together based on what they do. The needs of a Town board or committee would differ from those of a community group. Have two training sessions.
- The groups questioning the vision statement are wondering is there going to be someone such as NUARI who will be monitoring, encouraging to push forward this agenda. This conversation would be helpful.
- As a networking opportunity have some universal training for both groups with the background goal of getting people onto Town committees as a great way to get people to connect with goals important to them.

NUARI's Transient Nature

- Ms. Cooley and Ms. Fitzpatrick met with the Town of Lincoln who have a committee similar to NUARI, but a standing committee as they wanted someone to take ownership.
- We will have to take advantage of our Human Rights Committee as an arm to help track in the future. They could set up the dashboard as a tool with 5 or 6 items so there is focus on the most important items. As a governance, the Select Board would have metrics to see if items need to be modified.
- Have both a community organization who holds the real mission, but also a committee like NUARI in town government who meet quarterly that does

an overall assessment whether things are moving forward, an extra layer of accountability.

- That group could divide up to be liaisons for 4 or 5 committees. Have another group that meets 2 or 3 times a year to go over progress made, where is there room for success.
- The NUARI group needs to find the right balance they're comfortable with
- Having these community organizations make everything happen is monumental. NUARI can be an advisory board to help these committees but not by ourselves. A dashboard is great but we have to be careful not to be so focused on numbers. There are a lot of soft spots. Where did we hit and where did we miss it? We have to be critical about those opportunities we missed. Those are the learning lessons for people to look at things in a different way as opposed to looking in a way they always look at it
- We need an action plan we can give people. Have a group who meets quarterly to make sure they're doing what they need to be doing.
- As a training follow-up, have the groups report to NUARI quarterly or the group that is convening what they've accomplished and their struggles to create peer pressure or inspiration for each other.

DEI Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Person

- There has to be someone people know to make sure there is continuity and groups are accountable. Is there someone dedicated to equity for the Town, even it is quarterly accountability?
- The Town is not at a point where there is a point person whose only role relates to equity who has responsibility spread out in several places.
- Ms. Fitzpatrick suggested the Town has heard from organizations who have done a lot of this work. Sometimes all of the work falls on the DEI Coordinator. Or the communities say, "NUARI is working on that; we don't need to". Presently the point persons are Kate and Katie.
- To advance these initiatives, we need a full Town resource. We need someone to go out and look at these items, take the ideas this committee creates, push things along, and meet with the committee periodically.
- Ms. Fitzpatrick said there is a \$100,000 budget item proposed as a Warrant Article for Annual Town Meeting to support these DEI initiatives. The Town will pull together the resources to get toolkits for this year. When NUARI pulls back, the Town will have resources, either a contracted or part-time person.
- Ms. Lee has experience in this work. To convince a person that equity is important in their personal life, their work, or on a committee is really hard work and takes a lot of time. On top of that, when you add in a group dynamic, then people in the group don't necessarily agree on some very fundamental core ideas that are essential to who they see themselves as.
- She said a checklist is good but we have to ask people how do they see themselves, what are their beliefs, how do those beliefs impact their work, whether that impacts the community in a positive or not so positive way. The process of getting through those layers is emotionally fraught.

- We don't want to endorse something that ends up in a superficial response to equity instead of the deep work of making changes that will touch at processes, how we make decisions, who gets heard, who doesn't get heard.
- She asked what kind of meaningful, sustainable change do we want to see?
- Ms. Hsu suggested pulling resources together, the shared glossary. If there will be a warrant article seeking funds for the Town's DEI initiatives, it will be very important to engage community members about NUARI's work so you have support for the warrant article.
- It is critically important for the success of implementing initiatives in the community that we have a professional staff member able to drive the bus. This advisory group does not have that capacity.
- Ms. Espada said in the private sector, the HR group is involved in training.
- Ms. Cooley said Ms. Fitzpatrick has been working to bring training to managers, but we can't even get a return call from the group we're interested in training our managers as they are so overwhelmed.
- Yes, HR folks are critical and have expertise to bring to this area.

Concrete next steps (what can we do):

- Next meeting - Select a toolkit and checklist from examples
- Convene groups that are and those that are not yet participating to engage in a conversation about what that work might mean to them.
- See if we can engage them to join the NUARI work, how the work can apply in their organization, or how they can contribute to the Town's work
- Ms. Fitzpatrick suggested Lisa Smith McSweeney could shepherd the group to another complete document
- Ms. Hsu suggested budget timelines are moving along quickly. Departments and community organizations are looking at their budgets that could help facilitate some of these efforts for their related activities. Do we want to accelerate a timeline to engage these groups to think about how to move this work toward? We don't want them saying a year from now, "what is NUARI doing and why have they been so quiet?"

Mr. Spencer suggested 3 streams we can work simultaneously:

- 1) Get the committees that haven't adopted to adopt and get folks to speak to those committees where there are issues. Have committees meet where there aren't issues.
- 2) the educational component
- 3) measurements: checklist, progress report, communication strategy.
- All three streams can be worked on at the same time. Some of these items will move faster and have a first quarter close.
- Be very clear with a multidimensional training plan. Lisa can help us in terms of best practices who to train different groups.

Ms. Cooley suggested:

- Stream 1 in two steps. Ms. Fitzpatrick and Katie King will remind them we asked for an endorsement and ask for feedback. This gives them a contact point if they'd like to engage with someone from NUARI.
- Stream 2: Do we want to come back to let there be some crosstalk between these groups to see how they can build something that is broader for the community by working together?
 - NUARI split into subgroups and come back for discussion
 - Stream 1: Kate Fitzpatrick, Katie King, Maryann Cooley
 - Stream 2: education/training convening: Liz Lee, Jen Howard, Vivian Hsu, Ramin Abrishamian
 - Stream 3: toolkit measurement: Natasha Espada, Jay Spencer, Marcus Nelson, Toyin Fayemi
 - Where committees are unendorsed, Mr. Spencer is willing to assist.
 - Ms. Fitzpatrick suggested telling unendorsed groups we are working on training opportunities and a toolkit for you to use.
 - Before the next meeting, Stream groups should send their proposals to Ms. Fitzpatrick who may coordinate a subgroup meeting date.

7:35 p.m. Natasha Espada left the meeting.

Next Meeting

February 7, 2022 (shorter meeting) February 28, 2022

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

7:25 p.m.

Adjourn

Motion: M. Nelson moved to adjourn.

Seconded: J. Spencer

Roll Call Vote: R. Abrishamian, yes; M. Cooley, yes; N. Espada, yes;
O. Fayemi, yes; V. Hsu, yes; L. Lee, yes; M. Nelson, yes;
J. Howard Schroeder, yes; J. Spencer, yes.

Motion Carries: 9-0

A list of all documents used at this Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group meeting is available at:

<https://www.needhamma.gov/4942/Needham-Unite-Against-Racism-Initiative>