

Town of Needham
Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group
Education Subcommittee
Minutes for February 3, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Bh5Fp2CBnw&list=PL3PRZZjHC3yE0eZ-rrW5RDdybU0e1R91L&index=5>

Members Present: Ramin Abrishamian, Vivian Hsu, Liz Lee, Jen Howard Schroeder

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

Ms. Hsu 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 Education Subcommittee of 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.

Educating Town Boards, Committees and Community Groups

Members said Kate Fitzpatrick will seek funds for a Racial Equity Tool Kit for Staff.

Members discussed what the Education subgroup's charter could look like:

- Ms. Hsu looked at last NUARI document for guiding principles
- Mr. Abrishamian quoted Needham's Racial Equity Statement:
"Needham will be a community free of racism, free of racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Our residents, schools, organizations, businesses, and government will work to identify barriers to racial equity and create solutions, opportunities, resources, and support for removing them." This was followed by 6 bullets, then the guiding principles.

Members discussed two ongoing initiatives: Education and Outreach

Education Subcommittee: Format, Substance, Resources

- Create a structure for communication, and, more importantly, dialogue.
- Boards and Committees need to be able to work through areas of disagreement rather than "here is the definition of racial equity".

- Create the space to have the conversation as opposed to educational training.
- Like-minded people assemble to have group conversations.
 - Invite diverse views and experience but who want to learn something.
 - Attract people who would not normally attend the event.
 - Don't put them on the defense.
 - They have to know and trust this is a safe environment with guardrails.
 - People who are skeptical are almost never at these events.
 - NUARI may appear intimidating to them.
- Training for the police force is inadequate.
 - At the National Race Amnesty Conference in Boston last year, Mr. Abrishamian was astounded by a presentation from the Elliot, Maine police workforce. After the murder of George Floyd, the Chief of Police realized his force was not ready for a similar situation. He went to an African American group in town and said, "I need your help".
 - The group organized workshops for the Elliot police force.
 - The workshops helped to develop guidelines and train facilitators.
 - Mr. Abrishamian suggested the subcommittee ask the Elliot, Maine Police Chief:
 - How did you train facilitators?
 - As a model, on what basis did they have conversations with police?
 - Invite them to NUARI to learn what guidelines, principles they applied.
 - Ms. Hsu suggested to gather and assess resources before inviting them.
- Ms. Hsu was a facilitator for a project called Citywide Dialogues in Boston.
 - They took conversational spaces into the neighborhoods, discussed racial and ethnic diversity, used experience facilitators, took responsibility for dialogue around race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status of neighborhoods.
 - The point of the dialogues was to bridge some of the gap in conversations without judgment so there was some understanding of where people sat.
 - She hoped NUARI would include not only like-minded individuals, but skeptical people who are naturally curious and want to speak their mind.
- Ms. Lee suggested that the idea of "calling out" versus "calling in" someone is not a great way to win hearts and minds to make sustainable change. She noted that Town Boards have a wider level of knowledge and perspective about equity work. They are faced with how to implement this mission into their own work.

What differentiates this subcommittee from other subcommittees on racial equity:

- NUARI is a group working on community conversations. This group's charge is the educational program. For example, to develop three subjects:
 - How to have different conversations around race (skill building)?
 - What is racism?

- How does one start dismantling racism?
- Winchester has community education programming and how to facilitate. Start with Town organizations already engaged where NUARI has sent material.
- The other subcommittee will measure success through measurement criteria.
- NUARI Community Conversations Group was initiated by NUARI.
- Will that group eventually replace NUARI?
- Information on the NUARI web site. The group consists of:
 - Select Board, NDI, Human Rights Commission, NUARI and other leaders. The outreach and conversation piece will examine areas identified by the NUARI working group.
- Education versus training - what resources can NUARI collectively pull together?
- NUARI's goal is to draw in people who might otherwise not be engaged.
 - Community conversations need to create a safe space for the discussion where we call people "in" and not "out". People call out are the things that go against NUARI guiding principles, systemic behaviors and patterns.
- Ms. Lee said the subcommittee appears to have two areas of agreement:
 - 1) Support or educate; provide information for Town Boards to do the work.
 - 2) Have these conversations in a functional way.
 NUARI will provide resources, education and support Town Boards or organizations with how to discuss this in their own work.
- Mr. Abrishamian said Town Boards can show initiative and set a good example
- Ms. Hsu said the other subcommittee is looking at how to implement initiatives with Town Boards and Committees.
- Ms. Lee thought the other subcommittee is finding markers to measure success.
- Ms. Hsu said they are coming up with the accountability piece.
- Ms. Howard suggests Diversity Training be mandatory like Open Meeting Law.
- Ms. Hsu said true diversity training as multi-tiered. NUARI is not giving diversity training, but sensitivity to diversity issues so training proceeds with a shared vocabulary (glossary) creating consistency and uniformity across Town.
- Ms. Hsu shared discussions she heard on two radio programs:
 - Fresh Air interviewed an education expert with a large advocacy. The discussion was about pending legislation in Texas, Florida, and another state about whether critical race theory can be taught in schools and the potential chilling effect on pedagogy. Though the legislation doesn't say this, one school district said, "If you're going to talk about the Holocaust, you have to talk about it from oppositional viewpoints".
 - Also, it was reported that someone at Xaverian Brothers High School who works in dining services and identifies as an African American wanted to celebrate Black History month by serving fried chicken. Is fried chicken and watermelon a racial trope? Comments on the story contained an incredible diversion of viewpoints. The comments bounced back and forth from ethnic, cultural history and socioeconomic issues and storytelling, family history, honoring customs. Ms. Hsu concluded there was not one unified lens for what this was all about. Each had their singular viewpoint.

None of this is talking about the sensitive nature that this will be a racial trope to some. The danger is each one can put their singular comments on social media and they will just hang there. There may be a single rebuke but there is no conversation about it. These conversations need to be a safe space where you can have a wholesome discussion of all the different perspectives and contexts to reach agreement and understanding.

Members discussed formulating an outline, syllabus or framework:

- Create steps to move this idea forward.
- Preliminary outline should create the conversation space, then elements.
- Singular event or series of events? Limit an event to 10 people?
- Create a draft, a guidebook, a checklist (with substance) of things to do.
- Weigh in with the groups on how these conversations might go.
- Mr. Abrishamian suggested trying one event and getting feedback.
- Ms. Hsu asked members if NUARI envisions an evening of conversational circles with two facilitators for a group of 15 people, 4 or 5 sessions at once.
 - Compare notes later.
 - Boards and Committees first, then the larger community.
 - Ask Chairs of Boards and Committees to do their own debriefing of what they collectively thought and learned and how it can impact the work their Board is doing.
 - Have the initial so that it has a cross representation with other Boards so they are not so insular for them to be enlightened.

Mr. Abrishamian said the Needham Resilience Network initiative is reaching out to disparate groups to create community conversations.

- Ms. Howard suggested their model brought together a lot of different people.
 - Launch off the model of Needham Resilience Network
 - Hold an event with a keynote.
 - Does one bring a race equity lens into your personal self so you can spot it?
 - Group breakouts should be a cross section of different committees.
 - Second breakout session for Board members of the same Board so they can process how it applies to their Board.
- Ms. Hsu said this might dovetail to "how is our Board going to commit to put NUARI vision statement into action?" which could dovetail into the accountability measurement piece.
- Ms. Lee suggested it would be logical to either:
 - On the same day and time, have all the participants in various sessions.
 - Kick-off an event. Have groups sign-up for sessions on different days.
 - Hold an "ending event" where everyone comes together.

Ms. Howard mentioned Nicole's Over Zero Workshop. Ms. Hsu said NUARI came up with the vision guiding principles.

- The group knows what it wants to achieve.
- It can create the framework outline for these conversations.

- See what NUARI members think.
- The group may get the substance from the outlines of the Citywide Dialogues project.
- The other committee is creating the measurement metrics.

Ms. Lee suggests including high school students as part of the conversation and process.

Ms. Hsu said these dialogues will need prompts or scenarios. Students may bring their parents to the meeting. Then Boards and Committees will understand the impact of their work through the eyes of the students. Engage the different constituencies of our community to get that broad input. It would be helpful to know what schools are doing.

Ms. Howard asked what is the invitation line to interest Boards and Committees.

- Update the list of those which have Endorsed NUARI principles.
- Think about how to engage those that are resistant.
- Ms. Howard asked to bring in a compelling speaker to talk to everyone whether or not they have endorsed NUARI Principles.
- The group working on measurement criteria says this is important to the Town.
- The invitation line could be "we want to support members of our community".

Ms. Howard asked what would be an equity goal for the Solid Waste & Recycling Committee.

- Making sure things remain affordable.

Members discussed unintended consequences of not endorsing racial equity.

- People look externally, not internally. One has to do both.
- All people have baseline assumptions.
- Ms. Hsu said there are unintended consequences. She related a story:
 - Arnold Schwarzenegger wanted to get 1,000,000 homes to have solar panels to combat the greenhouse effect. Government had enough tax credits in California to exceed 1,500,000 homes. The unintended consequence was that electricity rates increased for low-income households.
 - All Boards and Committees need to think not only "internally" how is this going to impact me outside my work with the Committee or Board, but what will be the potential unintended consequence if I do not, or my Community or Board does not endorse racial equity?
- Ms. Lee cited an example from the world of education:
 - People often prioritize math as a symbol of success. You will go to a better college, get a better job, have a better life. If a district prioritizes math in that way, one unintended consequence she has been looking at recently is "shadow education". You find a proliferation for very expensive math programs, soccer, science or whatever your community prioritizes. Parents can literally purchase their child's success within academia that hands an

advantage to a child above other families who cannot afford that. Even the focus of your education policies can have the opposite effect because you will spur families to take different action than you expected.

- Ms. Hsu said that is when enrichment becomes advantage.
- Ms. Hsu related that years ago a decision was made not to publish the Honor Roll in the Needham Times newspaper. Think about balance.
- There are unintended consequences to not engaging in this work, that racial equity does not matter, is not relevant.

Our subcommittee goal is "how does the group want people to think about it". There is both format and substance, then resources. NUARI will not be here in a year or two. The idea is to set this up and the community partners will be able to pick this up and carry forward with it together with Boards and Committees. NUARI is expanding on developing the framework for the visioning and guiding principles.

Mr. Abrishamian said a way to present this is not "we're going to educate you". It is a process of uplifting people. One will feel better about one's self. It is transformative, a change of mind, heart, and attitude. Recognize that racism is in the fabric of everything. People don't wake up and say, "I'm going to do a racist act today."

Ms. Hsu asked Education subcommittee members to email her their ideas for the framework. She will float this whole concept to NUARI at the 2/7/22 meeting.

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

7:20 p.m.

Adjourn

Motion: L. Lee moved to adjourn.

Seconded: R. Abrishamian

Roll Call Vote: R. Abrishamian, yes; V. Hsu, yes; L. Lee, yes;
J. Howard Schroeder, yes

Motion Carries: 4-0