

Racial Equity Advisory Panel (REAP)
Via Microsoft Teams
Minutes
February 16, 2022

PRESENT: Panel members: Andrea Brett, Chair, Karen Richards (minutes), Nancy Waples, Clarence Davis, Stephanie Seguino. Guest: Catherine Russell, Panel Assistant, Xusana Davis, Executive Director of Racial Equity (EDRE), Shalini Suryanarayana, Racial Equity Education and Outreach Associate.

BUSINESS MEETING:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Brett at 6:06 p.m.

- A. Panel Introductions: Shalini Suryanarayana, who recently joined the Racial Equity staff as the Education and Outreach Associate introduced herself to the panel.
- B. Agenda approval: No changes or additions were suggested for the agenda.
- C. Approval of the Minutes: The minutes of the 11/18/21 Panel meeting were approved unanimously as written.
- D. Election of the Panel Chair: The Panel unanimously approved the re-election of Andrea Brett as chair.
- E. On-Going Business
 1. *Discussion of Panel's current and future role.* EDRE Davis reminded the Panel that one of the roles discussed previously was to be a clearinghouse for recommendations made by other entities, committees, workgroups, etc. on racial equity issues. The Panel can also be helpful in weighing in on legislation and other policy decisions, such as the letter the Panel sent to the Secretary of Education last year about funding for the workgroup that is making suggestions for curricula changes that better reflect equity and diversity. The Panel could also be helpful in identifying and prioritizing proactive equity work to help move from the current more reactive mode. The upshot of the discussion was that this should be the sole topic of a meeting or an in-person retreat.
 2. *Staffing Update*: The Racial Equity Office (REO) was given two new positions by the Legislature last session: an Education and Outreach Associate, which has been filled as reported above, and a Data and Policy Analyst. At the time of the meeting, a conditional offer had been extended to a candidate.
 3. *Lawsuit filed by a State employee from DAIL's division of Vocational Rehabilitation*: The employee claimed that his First Amendment rights were violated by his required attendance at a racial equity and diversity training and that he was retaliated against. The lawsuit was eventually dismissed by the employee. Concerns were raised that such legal challenges, including at the local school board level, are having a chilling effect on training designed to raise awareness and combat unconscious bias. This is a national issue.
 4. *General Project Updates*:
 - a. Statewide Equity Plan is being infused within the Strategic Plan. The EDRE is working with other agencies to make sure that equity benchmarks are included in agency-level plans.
 - b. Health Equity Commission has issued its report.
 - c. Unconscious Bias Training. An RFP has been issued to hire a contractor to create a new employee orientation session. The contractor will create the curriculum and provide training of trainers (TOT). The timeline calls for a May selection, TOT during the summer and a fall rollout through Dept. of Human

- Resources Center for Achievement in Public Services division (CAPS). An introduction and higher-level course will be added to supervisor training.
- d. Racial Equity Office website: The EDRE and the staff assistant have upgraded the REAP website to make it more user-friendly.
 - e. Cultural Competency: The REO also received money for an assessment of cultural competency that will be administered to the Panel and another 100 people, including the Cabinet and other state leaders.
- F. New Business
- 1. *Legislative*
 - a. H-546: This bill would create a Division of Racial Justice that would include current REO staff, a deputy, and four data analysts, whose primary focus would be criminal justice disparities. A companion advisory panel of twenty (20) would be rolled into the REAP. \$960,000 would be appropriated for this purpose. The Panel was lukewarm to this proposal but willing to learn more.
 - b. Another bill is pending that would support equity projects at the municipal level. The State would have a convening role and support participants with workshops and technical assistance. The bill has the support of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and the Vermont Community Foundation, which will provide \$10,000 to support these efforts.
 - c. RFP for a Vendor to gather input from minority and women-owned businesses about ways the State can be more supportive was stalled at the contract stage but is now ready for signing. The legislature had to extend deadlines but also added additional funding for translations.
 - d. S-147: would require a unified language access plan (LAP) for all executive branch agencies. The EDRE feels that it should include all branches of government, the Judiciary and the Legislature. Richards and Waples pointed out that the Judiciary adopted an updated LAP in 2021.
 - 2. *Alzheimer's Association* - Chair Brett and the EDRE attended a meeting of this group which is working on equity and inclusion goals. The national organization is also engaged in this process.
 - 3. *Other Business*: The ERDE reported that the Panel's budget is currently projected to have a \$5000 surplus but this is expected to be used up on various initiatives.
- G. Public Comment: No members of the public were present.

II. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:37.

Next Meetings: March 16, 2022. Meeting will be scheduled on the third Wednesday of the month.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen L. Richards

Karen L. Richards, Panel Member