DATE: May 28, 2021

TO: AAPA Lighthouse Awards Panel

FROM: Jay Doran, Engagement and Communications Program Manager, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

SUBJECT: Black Lives Matter Caucusing Series

SUMMARY

On Friday, June 5, 2020, more than 250 Port employees gathered for a community conversation focused on the impacts of the deeply racialized and tragic killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. At the time, their deaths were some of the most recent in a long history of unjust systemic racism and violence against African Americans in our country. The Port of Seattle, as a community of employees, came together to process feelings, build solidarity with one another, and begin a conversation about how the Port can create meaningful, lasting change. During the event, we spent most of our time in small groups engaged in a common anti-racist tool known as [caucusing](#).

In July and August, the Port's Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (OEDI) held six more caucusing events for employees to build a shared understanding of racial equity, strengthen our commitment to racial equity, and build our capacity to collectively undo bias, discrimination, and systemic racism within our organization. During this seven-part caucusing series, employees identified equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strengths and weakness of the organization, strategized on how to create lasting policy and cultural transformation, and engage in meaningful, difficult conversations with coworkers about racism and the ways in which it manifests internally, interpersonally, and institutionally.

Below, you will find more information about the planning, process, and results of the Port of Seattle's BLM Caucusing Series, including participant evaluations that highlight positive outcomes (e.g., employees reporting an increase in knowledge about racism and equity, an increase in identifying instances of discrimination and systemic racism, and increase in comfort in talking about issues of race).

BACKGROUND

For too long, many in our region, including the Port of Seattle, have benefitted from and operated in an unjust, racist society. Our institutional practices made it difficult for people of color and women to thrive and gain leadership positions, businesses owned by women and people of color to win contracts, and diverse communities in our surrounding area to contribute meaningfully to

our decision-making processes. By failing to acknowledge inequities, we play a role in perpetuating them. We can and must do better.

The Port of Seattle commits to leading regional and national efforts to achieve equity and social justice. Our vision is to develop a Port that mirrors — throughout its breadth of operations and services and within its leadership hierarchy — the diversity of our community, instills principles of equity in its culture, and ensures a fair and intentional distribution of opportunities with the goal of expanding economic development and quality of life for all.

In 2019, the Port of Seattle created the [Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#), becoming the first port authority in the United States to create such an office or department. Through developing an organizationally cross-cutting OEDI, the Port is building capacity to address institutional racism within the Port and to transform policies, practices, and processes.

1. What are/were the entry's specific communications challenges or opportunities?

The murder of George Floyd shook our nation, and the Port of Seattle was no exception to this. Within days of Mr. Floyd's murder, Port employees, supervisors, and leadership were reporting challenges of coping with Mr. Floyd's death while also being asked to perform their work and responsibilities as if everything were normal. As it often does, but is not often acknowledged, personal and professional life were intersecting. National events were impacting staff's mental health, wellbeing, and work. It was very clear that staff at all levels needed to be supported and that they needed the organization to acknowledge the seriousness of George Floyd's murder.

In addition to the need of this acute moment, the Port was (and currently is) in a long-term process to create a more inclusive organization, eliminate bias and discrimination from policies and practices, and create more meaningful, accountable, and transparent relationships with the communities we serve. In 2019, the leadership and Commission of the Port of Seattle recognized and acknowledge the need to center racial equity, and created OEDI, as described above.

Below are a few important data points that speak to the Port's critical need to advance racial equity, diversity, and inclusion:

- Of the 2,130 employees, 51% identify as white, 32% identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), and 17% have not reported their race. With such a large percentage of employees not reporting their race, it is difficult to fully understand how the representation of our workforce compares to the representation of the region we serve. It is also a signal that many employees potentially do not understand the value in identifying this information so that we can better understand how patterns of racial disparities manifest.
- 67% of the Port's workforce identifies as male, 33% identifies as female. We do not use non-binary options for gender, which illustrates the need for more education and understanding of how to improve inclusivity and create a culture of belonging.
- Representation of women and BIPOC in supervisory roles and leadership is disproportionately low in comparison to men and white people. For instance, since the Port's founding in 1911, only four Black women have served in director-level positions.

Director-level positions are one step below the Executive Leadership Team, and there are currently about 45 director-level positions.

There are additional metrics related to the Port's contracting and use of women and minority-owned businesses, community engagement and funding, and hiring, retention, evaluation, and promotion. As to not inundate this submission with data, I will not include metrics for all these areas. Please let it suffice that across the Port's policies and practices there existed unintended systemic advantages for white staff and white communities and unintended systemic disadvantages for BIPOC staff and communities of color.

With this context in mind – the murder of George Floyd and the ongoing work to advance racial equity within our organization – OEDI designed and operated a seven-part caucusing series to address both acute and chronic challenges that we faced.

2. How does the communication used in this entry map back to the organization's overall mission?

The Port of Seattle's mission is to promote economic opportunities and quality of life in the region by advancing trade, travel, commerce and job creation in an equitable, accountable, and environmentally responsible manner.

As mentioned above, nearly two years ago, the leadership of the Port came to a difficult realization. They recognized that our institutional practices make it difficult for people of color and women to thrive and gain leadership positions, businesses owned by women and people of color to win contracts, and diverse communities in our surrounding area to contribute meaningfully to our decision-making processes. Admittedly, this was a hard pill to swallow, especially because these disparities were not created intentionally.

Nevertheless, the Port accepted that this is our reality and our responsibility to fix. The leadership of the Port made a commitment to change. The organization decided to invest resources in identifying and dismantling structural barriers to ensure that everyone inside and outside of our organization has access to the opportunities resources they need to thrive. And, the Port leadership agreed that this effort needed to be done with attention to removing barriers for historically oppressed communities, such as people of color and immigrants and refugees.

Not only did the Port create OEDI, which is staffed with experts in racial equity, but the organization also illustrated its commitment to racial equity by updating its mission (stated above), values, Century Agenda (see Goal 5), and creating an EDI Strategic Plan (2019-2020; 2021), to name a few. The Port come a long way over the last two years. We have achieved a great deal, and, our work is far from over.

The creation of the Black Lives Matter Caucusing Series is in line with our EDI strategic goal of imbedding equity, diversity, and inclusion in the culture and practices of the organization. It is also in line with our Century Agenda goal of becoming a model of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Additionally, on a philosophical level, The Port of Seattle views diversity as a source of innovation

and strength. We recognize that without greater emphasis on root causes of inequity, our organization will always face an uphill challenge to achieve our public service mission for all members of the public. We also recognize the negative impact this lack of equity has had on our ability to create a region with shared prosperity.

3. What were the communications planning and programming components used for this entry?

Everyone is affected by racism. We all must work together to end it, but people of color and white people are not affected in the same ways. Racial equity will only be achieved when people of color and white people can effectively and authentically work together for justice. But people or color and white people have different work to do, because of their different experiences with racism and white privilege. Working only in integrated groups puts an undue burden on people of color to be the teachers and obscures the responsibility of white people to learn about, understand, and strategize for racial equity.

This is where caucusing can be helpful. Race-based caucusing is a common anti-racist tool. It is a means to an end – not an end in and of itself. Race-based caucusing creates contained spaces for people of color and white people to process events, emotions, and develop and deepen our understanding of how to create lasting, meaningful change. It helps people develop strategies for how we work together to create lasting change, so that when we come back together as a community, we can be effective partners and allies in the pursuit of racial equity.

Our desired results/goals for the BLM Caucusing series were:
- To normalize conversations about race and racism;
- To build partnerships with one another as we work together to combat racism;
- To create a space for employees to share feelings and thoughts; and,
- To lay the foundation for future change by strategize about how we create an equitable, anti-racist organization.

Our objectives for this project were:
- To recruit and train at least 20 staff volunteers to lead and facilitate caucus groups
- To engage 10% of the Port's workforce (approximately 210 staff) in at least one of the seven events
- To build staff's understanding of racial equity and why it is important for our organization

The primary audience of this work was the Port's staff. The secondary audience was the Port's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and Port's Commission. While the ELT and Commission were encouraged to participate in the events, the primary audience for this seven-part series was staff

(front-line and supervisors) with the intent of sharing results and outcomes with Leadership and ELT to inform future EDI efforts.

4. What actions were taken and what communication outputs were employed in this entry?
As this is being submitted in the special events category, and in many ways, is not a typical communications activity, we did not use traditional communication methods for strategizing and executing. The work of this project is more closely aligned with a community organizing strategy, although there is some overlap and similarities between organizing and communications.

Some of the desired results/goals listed in question 3 were essentially our strategies. Below I will expand on these strategies and the tactics to achieve them.

Strategy 1: Normalizing Racial Equity
The Port is a member of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). We use a framework developed by GARE known as Normalize, Organize, and Operationalize. The process of normalizing, organizing, and operationalizing is not necessarily linear, but rather complementary and intersecting. We are constantly in a process of normalizing racial equity, because as a government, it is critical that we name and recognize the long history that government has played in creating and maintaining racial inequities. We must learn to see and name race so that we can see and name patterns of racial disparities. Normalizing is one step in the process of learning to undo systemic racism. For this project, we used several tactics to normalize racial equity and the tool of caucusing.
- Internal messages to employees from the Port's Executive Director and Senior Director of OEDI responding to George Floyd's murder and encourage participation in the BLM Caucusing Series.
- External statements from the Port's Executive Director, Commission President, and OEDI about the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement (OEDI Newsletter; Statement from ED and Commission President; curated list of anti-racism resources).
- Race-based caucusing is also a tactic to normalize racial equity.

Strategy 2: Build Cross-Racial Partnerships and Relationships
Racial equity work is challenging, uncomfortable, and requires consistent practice and attention. While meaningful, lasting, and sustainable progress comes from creating change at systemic and policy levels, individual relationship and trust are at the core of racial equity. In other words, racial equity will never be achieved by a single person. We must work together.

To foster cross-racial partnership and relationships, we used the following tactics.
- Recruited, coached, and trained a cohort of 27 staff (15 white staff and 12 staff of color) to lead and facilitate caucusing sessions. I, a white man, and my colleague in HR Tracy Patterson, a Black woman, shared this responsibility. We lead this cohort of facilitators through a series of trainings to develop their skills and confidence to facilitate difficult conversations about race. We then provided the facilitators with structured agendas for each session, group debriefs between each session, and one-on-one coaching. This cohort

develop a strong bond and chemistry through this project, and they still meet regularly today. These facilitators also helped to foster relationships among other coworkers within the individual caucuses that they led.

- Worked with racial equity leaders and experts from around the region. At the beginning of each caucusing session, all participants spent thirty minutes together before people were broken up into their caucuses. During those thirty minutes, an external speaker joined us to talk about their work and/or provide a brief training on a racial equity concept or framework. The guest speakers included: Benita Horn (Equity Consultant, City of Renton), Michele Storms (ED, ACLU of Washington), Eric K. Ward (ED, Western States Center), Ericka Cox (King County Office of Equity & Social Justice), Scot Nakagawa (Senior Partner at Change Lab & Senior Advisor with Race Forward), and Anita Whitfield (Director, King County Office of Equity & Social Justice). Hearing from these external speakers illustrated how the importance of relationships across institutions, provided staff with more examples of organizations doing racial equity work, and reinforced the above stated goals.

Strategy 3: Engage Staff in Brainstorming Solutions

As previous statement, caucusing is a tool that helps groups and organizations learn how to work together more effectively to achieve racial equity. With that in mind, for the last two sessions in the seven-part series, broke participants into multi-racial caucuses, instead of race-based groups. These multi-racial caucuses were co-facilitated by a white facilitator and a facilitator of color, and the focus of these sessions was to discuss strategies and tactics for advancing racial equity at the Port. This allowed participants to practice thinking of solutions that are race-explicit and specific, that address a pattern of racial disparity, and that can be achieved collectively. This also created more buy-in from employees, because they felt invested in working together, having built relationships with one another over the last several weeks, and improving the organization.

This entire project spanned 10 weeks, beginning in early June and ending in early August. We planned the first event the week after the murder of George Floyd, so there was minimal time to prepare and design. After fantastic attendance at the first event, we took several weeks to regroup and plan the rest of the series. There were two leads on the project – Tracy Patterson (HR) and me (OEDI). We did not outsource work.

5. **What were the communications outcomes from this entry and what evaluation methods were used to assess them?**

We measured the success of the project through both quantitative and qualitative data that was collected through a participant survey.

During the seven-part causing series, a total of 344 employees (16% of the Port's workforce) participated in at least one of the seven events, and on average participating employees engaged

in three events. Of the 344 participants, 64% identified as white and 36% as BIPOC. And, as previously stated 27 employee volunteers served as caucus facilitators.

Over 20% of participants (79) responded the to the post-series survey, of which 34 identified as BIPOC and 45 as white. For several survey questions, people were asked to rate a statement on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "I completely disagree with the statement" and 5 being "I completely agree with the statement). Below is a summary of the responses.

Statement: After caucusing, I have more tools and language for talking about race and racism.

As you see in the pie chart to the right, 75 out of 79 people answered with a 3, 4, or 5, and 58 out of those 75 answered with a 4 or 5. This suggests that we made progress toward our goal of normalizing conversations about race.
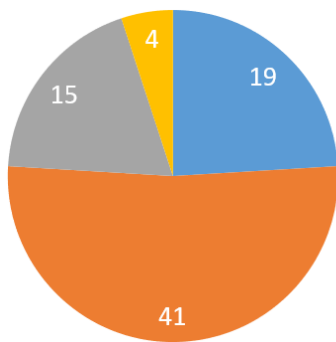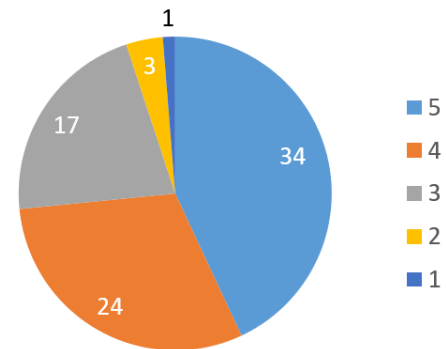
Statement: After caucusing, I have a better understanding of how I can personally help combat and dismantle systemic racism.

All but 4 of the participants answered with a 3 or above, and none of the participants answered with a 1. While our work is far from over, this suggests that caucusing helped employees strategize about how to dismantle systemic racism.

Statement: These caucuses allowed me the opportunity to strategize with my coworkers about how we can transform the Port into an anti-racist organization.

All but six participants posted a 3 or above, suggesting we made progress at both facilitating partnerships between colleagues
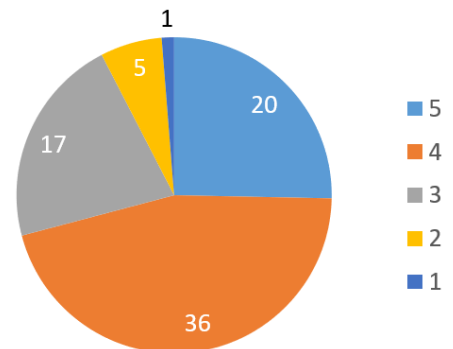
and providing a space for people to strategize about how we, as an organization, can become anti-racist.
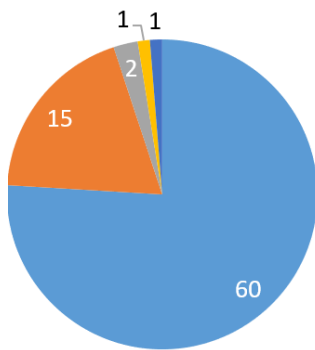
Statement: The weekly guest speakers deepened my understanding of systemic racism.

At the beginning of each event, participants heard from a local, experienced racial equity leader, including Benita Horn (Equity Consultant, City of Renton), Michele Storms (ED, ACLU of Washington), Eric K. Ward (ED, Western States Center), Ericka Cox (King County Office of Equity & Social Justice), Scot Nakagawa (Senior Partner at Change Lab & Senior Advisor with Race Forward), and Anita Whitfield (Director, King County Office of Equity & Social Justice). The speaker overwhelming resonated with participants.

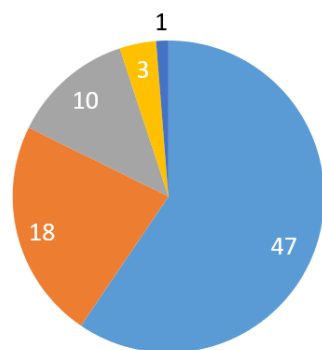*Statement: My facilitator(s) created a space where I was respected and heard.*

One of the goals for this series was to create a space for employees to share feelings and thoughts and to process the most instances of violence against Black Americans. This response indicates that caucus facilitators were very effective in meeting that goal.
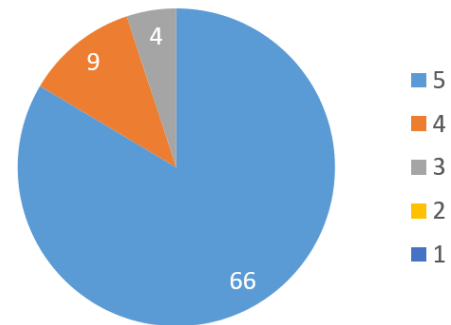
Statement: I think caucusing is helpful in both transforming the Port's culture and improving the Port's ability to dismantle racism.

This suggests that caucusing is an effective tool for the Port, helping us normalizing conversations of race and racism and to infuse equity principles and practices into all aspects of Port operations and culture.

Additionally, one of the main focuses of this series was to brainstorm and identify changes that the Port could make in order to become a more equitable, anti-racist organization. In the post-

series survey, participants were asked to expand on these ideas. Both areas for improvement and existing strengths were identified. Here are the predominate themes.

Internal Areas for Improvement
- Compensation Equity: There is a strong perception that we have significant disparities in how people with the same position are paid, namely Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and women are compensated at lower rates that white men.
- Performance Evaluations: Employees perceive the process of for performance evaluations as not being consistent across the organization, and it requires employees to write their own evaluations. This relies too heavily on the discretion of supervisors, which leads to bias.
- Hiring & Promotions: Employees are concerned about how and to what communities the Port advertises in and recruits for open positions. Additionally, many employees named a history of women and BIPOC serving in the same position for long periods of time without opportunities for development, advancement, and promotion.
- Workplace Responsibility: Employees experience the process of reporting discrimination, bias, or inappropriate behavior as not transparent, and to many, it feels like there is not follow through or consequences associated with problematic behavior.

External Areas for Improvement
- Stakeholder Engagement & Outreach: There is an opportunity to create more meaningful relationships with community partners, especially with those communities who are directly impacted by our work.
- Contracting: Employees expressed the need for greater utilization of women- and minority-owed businesses. Many expressed the need to help decision makers have access to WMBE vendor options/contracts, and hope managers and supervisors are held accountable to this in their performance reviews.

Strengths
- Time & Space for EDI Work: Employees view EDI work as valuable and central to improving the operations and culture of the organization.
- Support & Investment in OEDI: The Port's goals and vision for EDI are inspiring and ambitious. This is everyone's responsibility, and there needs to be continue and increased investment in OEDI to help lead this work forward.
- Commitment & Interest for EDI from Commission and Leadership: The support of EDI from the Commission and Leadership to-date has been critical to the momentum and energy for change. Employees expressed the need to sustain this, because without leadership actively communicating support, these efforts will lose traction.

Racial equity work is difficult, uncomfortable, and emotional, and the success of this caucusing series speaks volumes to employee's commitment and energy for transformational change. Based on the level of engagement, informal feedback, and survey responses, it is clear that Port employees benefitted from caucusing, and we benefited organizationally as we made clear

progress toward the first goal of the Port's Century Agenda Goals and EDI Strategic Plan – to infuse principles and practice of equity into all aspects of the Port's operations and culture.

In addition to this document, the following are included in this submission:
- PowerPoint that was presented to the Executive Leadership Team to summarize the project
- A facilitator's agenda for one of the caucusing events
- A flyer used to advertise this series to employees

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or follow-up, please contact me at Doran.J@PortSeattle.org.

Respectfully,

Jay Doran
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Port of Seattle