

COLLECTIVE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



WASHINGTON NONPROFITS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

STATUS REPORT
FALL 2021

BACKGROUND

Washington Nonprofits is no stranger to community engagement. What is new is our capacity to devote more time and energy to this facet of our work. As the State association of all nonprofits, it is our duty to ensure that we reflect and support the diverse array of nonprofits and nonprofit people across Washington. With this in mind, we knew it was imperative that we approach the development of the Community Engagement Department with intentionality.

The need to be inclusive has always been there, but the world is asking us to do better right now. We are living in a new civil rights chapter and this chapter is asking more of us. Add to that the fact that individuals in our communities—many of whom are disabled, Brown, Black, Indigenous—have been further isolated by the impacts of COVID. We would be doing a disservice if we did not examine the systems in place and make space for community members who have been marginalized and nonprofits based in these communities.

If we were to build the Community Engagement Department in a traditional way, this would likely leave out many nonprofits and nonprofit people. Namely, those who would not have the same access would include Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), rural, disabled, and non-English speaking communities to name a few. And while we could do this the “easy” way and then slap Band-Aids on it later, why not build it right, from the beginning? Why not develop processes and programs that are anti-racist, decolonized, and inclusive? Why not use universal design to make space for all?

The beautiful thing is that when we center those who have been pushed to the margins, everyone wins. For instance, when we provide visual descriptions of presentation slides for those with low vision and those who are blind, the folks who are calling in to the meeting because their rural internet can't handle the video stream also get to “see” the presentation.

The following is a status report on the development of Washington Nonprofits' Community Engagement Program. The report includes background on the foundational concepts that guided us, a summary of the planning done thus far, and an implementation plan. This report and the work done on this project is a collaboration between Washington Nonprofits staff led by Director of Community Engagement, Alexandra Panagotacos, racial equity consultant Valeriana Chikoti Bandua-Estes, as well as the community of nonprofit people in Washington state.

METHODOLOGY

We utilized a Design Thinking approach to develop our program. The steps include:

1. Empathize: interviewing, shadowing, seeking to understand
2. Define: identifying needs, opportunities, pain points
3. Ideate: challenging assumptions, brainstorming solutions, and creating ideas
4. Prototype: building a representation of ideas
5. Test: trying out solutions and iterating based on feedback

EMPATHIZE

The Empathize phase comprised the largest portion thus far. We did this intentionally so that we could create the right space for honest and candid conversations. Building authentic relationships takes time and it is well worth the investment. The first six months of the Community Engagement program development involved a listening tour that consisted of small focus groups, individual interviews, and public listening sessions. Members of these feedback sessions represented a broad cross-section of nonprofits. Through this phase, we gathered valuable information to shape our program.

In this phase, Alexandra held one on one and small group meetings with approximately 40 people. A special focus was placed on hearing the voices of individuals from Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ2S+, Disability, Rural and other underserved communities. In collaboration with Valeriana Chikoti Bandua-Estes, we held two sessions at the Washington State Nonprofit Conference in May of 2021. Session one was an information sharing session with 158 registrants and day two was an open discussion with 77 registrants. In an effort to remove the financial barrier, we also provided an information sharing/listening session that was free, open to the public and featured both ASL and Spanish interpretation. This event garnered 106 registrants.

DEFINE

Analysis of this the previous phase revealed themes and opportunities. Major take-aways from this include the following:

Washington Nonprofits Themes

- Washington Nonprofits is an indispensable resource for nonprofits especially our learning offerings
- Many organizations were completely unaware of our work
 - This was especially true for organizations for and by BIPOC communities and rural organizations (to a lesser degree)
- Many individuals expressed concern about whether Washington Nonprofits would be welcoming of them
 - This was especially true for respondents who identified as BIPOC or disabled and rural organizations (to a lesser degree)
- Nearly all respondents were unaware of or knew little about our policy work or nonprofit policy in general

- Most respondents were unaware of our member benefits

General Nonprofits Sector Themes

- BIPOC organizations don't have access to funders and or the capacity to seek additional funds
- Rural internet is lacking and holding people back
- Funding opportunities are not accessible
- Timeline for funding is too short, or they never hear about it
- Funding keeps going to with white, able-bodied leadership
- LGBTQ orgs expressed concern about being left out of funding (unless they were community specific, BIPOC for example)

IDEATE

At this point, we felt we needed to create a more meaningful and lasting connection to communities who have been left out. We needed a way to stay connected to emerging topics, get feedback on the relevance of our programming, improve accessibility, and effectively (timely and in a relevant way) reach communities.

With this in mind, we conducted research into programs that could address these needs. We looked to platforms such as Promotores de Salud, Community Health Workers, Trusted Messengers, and school-based social change programs. A hybrid model inspired by aspects of each was developed. The idea of Equity Ambassadors was born out of this. Equity Ambassadors are individuals from the nonprofit community who disseminate information and provide feedback to Washington Nonprofits on its relevance and emerging needs in the community. We knew it would be essential that these Ambassadors be paid for their expertise and work.

We also identified that an accessible communication tool was needed to keep us better connected to communities and to provide a platform for nonprofit people to connect with each other. This need had already been identified and research had been done on suitable platform. The program recommended, Slack, is a communication platform that allows users to connect via channels and direct messages. After some additional analysis of the proposed platform based on new feedback, it was determined to be the best fit.

PROTOTYPE

Equity Ambassadors

We fleshed out a model of Equity Ambassadors as follows.

Equity Ambassadors are an essential part of Washington Nonprofits' Community Engagement program. They keep Washington Nonprofits connected to communities across the state. They identify unmet needs, enhance program relevance, and extend the reach of programming within underserved communities.

This is a paid opportunity, and Ambassadors will be classified as independent contractors. Total payment for each 12-week period will be \$2,500. We estimate that the scope of work will take 72-96 hours to complete (6-8 hours per week). This is an ongoing program. Ambassadors may renew in future cohorts.

We are looking for applicants who have nonprofit experience and knowledge of Washington State. We are prioritizing recruitment of lived experience and connection to Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color, immigrant, rural, LGBTQ2S+ and disability communities. We are also seeking to recruit people from different geographic communities in Washington.

Activities are grouped into two categories: Program Support and Feedback. A participatory planning process will determine the specifics of the Ambassador's work.

Program Support Activities

- *Promote learning events, advocacy updates, and other key communications*
- *Recruit Washington Nonprofits members*
- *Communicate membership value and benefits to current and prospective members*
- *Support Washington Nonprofits' advocacy work*
- *Steward channel(s) in the Community Slack*
- *Support regional Nonprofit Network meetings and encourage participation*
- *Host breakout rooms at network events and trainings*
- *Grow Community Slack membership*
- *Other activities proposed by Ambassador to increase community engagement*

Feedback Activities

- *Bring ideas from events, meetings, etc. back to the organization*
- *Contribute to our ongoing effort to understand and support nonprofits in WA*
- *Provide feedback on relevance of programming*
- *Identify unmet needs and opportunities to support nonprofits*
- *Utilize an equity lens in assessing needs and readiness*
- *Refer prospective presenters, facilitators, content experts, and community leaders*
- *Identify emerging topics*
- *Other activities proposed by Ambassador*

Desired Qualifications

- *Passion for nonprofits*

- *Familiarity with Washington State communities*
- *We are prioritizing recruitment of Equity Ambassadors who have lived experience and connection to Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color, immigrant, rural, LGBTQ2S+ and disability communities. We are also seeking to recruit people from different geographic communities*
- *Commitment to Washington Nonprofits' mission*
- *Demonstrated commitment to racial equity*
- *Other related experience, especially in a nonprofit setting*

Slack

We developed the Community Slack Workspace as a place to bring together community, board, staff and volunteers at nonprofits in Washington state to connect, collaborate, and strengthen the sector. There are channels to engage in conversation with nonprofits in your region, share relevant information, and brainstorm solutions. Users can also ask questions and collaborate through direct messages and private groups.

The Washington Nonprofits Slack Community is intended to be a welcoming, inclusive, and harassment-free space for all members of the nonprofit community – inclusive of all gender identities, sexual orientations, physical abilities and appearances, and beliefs. As such, we created a Code of Conduct to uphold that commitment. Members must agree to the following:

- This space is regularly moderated. If you are found in violation of the following guidelines you will be warned and potentially removed.
- All members of the Washington Nonprofits Network agree to the following:
- To engage in professional and respectful dialogue. This means no discriminatory, insulting or vulgar behavior. Harassment includes, but is not

limited to; deliberate intimidation, disruption of conversations, personal attacks, insults, or the use of sexual or discriminatory imagery, comments, or jokes. We reserve the right to delete any posts that contain any of the above, as well as any posts containing profanity or racial slurs.

- To not share out any information shared on this platform without the consent of the individual. We want this space to be one in which everyone feels free to ask questions without fear of judgement. This means not taking photos of messages or sharing information shared in this space with the intent to embarrass or draw attention to a fellow member of the community. This is a space for support and collaboration.
- To not sell or solicit. This is a community space and not one to market your organization or product. If you have a learning event or training opportunity, please post to #events or #trainings.
- To take care of each other.

TEST

In the short time since launching the Slack Community, we have already iterated the design to a degree. We have also had the opportunity to test aspects of the Equity Ambassador prototype.

We tested the feedback loop with a Resource Tour & Review project. This involved providing individuals with a tour of our programming and member benefits and eliciting feedback. We also tested the program support aspect of the Equity Ambassador model via a group of nonprofit leaders called Community Engagers. This small group of nonprofit leaders met quarterly and received information on programs and opportunities to share with their networks. This group also acted in an advisory and feedback capacity on the development of the Equity Ambassador program. Both of these small tests helped us to refine the Request for Qualifications of the Equity Ambassador and compensation structure.

TIMELINE

For reference, below is a timeline of significant events:

- *January 2021: Initial fact finding & listening sessions*
- *February 2021: Engaged with racial equity strategist, Valeriana Chikoti Bandua Estes, listening sessions continue*
- *April 2021: Anti-racism training for Washington Nonprofits board and staff, Resource Tour & Review, first Community Engagers convening*
- *May 2021: State Conference presentation/listening sessions*
- *June 2021: Slack launches*
- *July 2021: Public presentation/listening session*
- *August-September 2021: Analysis of feedback*
- *October 2021: Equity Ambassador application opens*

Projection of future events:

- *December 2021/January 2022: Review Equity Ambassador applications*
- *February 2022: Participatory expectation planning with Equity Ambassadors*
- *Spring 2022: Equity Ambassador work*

NEXT STEPS

At the time of writing, our Slack community is growing steadily with over 250 members and the Equity Ambassador program is accepting applicants. We are eager and hopeful about ways the Equity Ambassador Program and Slack community will help Washington Nonprofits continue to improve its meaningfulness to nonprofits across our State. We will continue to assess the relevance, effectiveness and accessibility of these programs and make changes accordingly.

To join Slack, visit <https://washingtonnonprofits.org/slack/>

For more information on the Equity Ambassador program or to apply, visit <https://washingtonnonprofits.org/jobs/>

If you would like to discuss any of the topics discussed, please contact:

Alex Panagotacos

Director of Community Engagement

alex@washingtonnonprofits.org

509-990-6835