

Invitation: Proposed next steps to address systemic racism

Friday, May 20, 2022 Email to BFM members and attenders

Invitation to the Meeting on Next Steps in the Proposed Journey to Redress Systemic Racism

Please join the Diversity Change and Threshing Prep Groups on Sunday May 22, 2-3:30 PM to meet the consultants from reparationWorks (Lucy Duncan & Rob Peagler) whose response to BFM's Request for Proposal was most aligned to our aspirations following the Meeting's fall threshing session on systemic racism. We are interested in having them support BFM's work to counter systemic racism in ourselves, our community, and the world. Lucy is a nationally known white Quaker (formerly of AFSC) who has been active in this area for some time; her life and work partner, Rob, is a black social entrepreneur who has spearheaded creative projects on diversity and inclusion in the Philadelphia area. They will describe their approach to working with BFM and you will have a chance to ask any questions you may have about the substance of the work.

Their proposal is available to BFM members and attenders. For background and context, please continue reading below.

Diversity Change and Threshing Prep participants: Alex B., Lauren B., Margaret B., Jackie D., Peirce H., Gale T., Michael W.

Background and Context for Follow-up Proposed from the Threshing Session of 2021

This document is written by members of the Diversity Change and Threshing Prep Groups to provide context for those who are: new to this process; as a reminder for those who may have participated in the Threshing Session that BFM held in October 2021 and could benefit from a refresher; and it contains particulars of the chosen response to BFM's Request for Proposal (RFP). Our intention here is to answer several basic questions:

1. *Where are we in the larger scope of Diversity Change work that BFM is undertaking currently?*
2. *Why are we proposing a collective journey to redress systemic racism, especially when many at BFM feel they have been on the journey for some time and BFM is undertaking many activities already related to such an effort?*
3. *What are we envisioning as the outcomes of such a journey that would be different from continuing on our current path?*
4. *Why do we feel the need to engage external experts in facilitating such journeys? Aren't we already doing enough, and wouldn't any expenditures be better spent elsewhere?*
5. *How and why have we selected Lucy Duncan and Rob Peagler from among various groups who responded to the RFP (Request for Proposal) issued by our group earlier in the year?*

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6. *What is the session on May 22nd meant to accomplish?*
7. *What happens after that?*
8. *Where/how will the Meeting make a final decision on whether to undertake such a collective journey, whether BFM agrees to engage Rob and Lucy, and how the Meeting proposes to fund such an endeavor?*

Q-1: Where are we in the larger scope of Diversity work that BFM is undertaking currently?

A-1: Quakers have been concerned with questions of equality from the outset based on their testimony - with respect to women early on, to African Americans from enslavement through Civil Rights and into the present, as well as on behalf of other non-dominant groups.

BFM's involvement in racial equality has also been long standing and taken many forms. This current Change Group was composed in mid-2019 after some diversity training. The Threshing Prep Group was subsequently spawned in 2020 after Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Call to Action on Systemic Racism. BFM generated many ideas on what the Meeting might do. Some fell within the scope of individual committees, and some would require Meeting-wide agreement. One of those recommendations was to seek external assistance for our efforts. The Change Group proposed that a Threshing Prep Group be formed to design a Spirit-led Threshing approach and secure external assistance to support the endeavor. Other recommendations from the Group at that time resulted in the decision-making queries that are used at BFM's Meeting for Business and the initiatives that are taking place in individual committees.

An initial Threshing session held in October 2021 posed several questions to the wider community. 60 people attended and 21 spoke. A brief summary of the session suggested:

- There is interest and willingness from a broad cross-section of the Meeting to address systemic racism.
- There is recognition by many that racism is pervasive and present everywhere, including within our Meeting – both in the socialization of those of us who attend and perhaps even in our patterns of behavior.
- There was roughly equally expressed desire to do the inner emotional and spiritual work that racism calls for and a desire for action involving Friends working side by side with others to advance the effort of combating racism in the world
- There were some, but not many, who commented specifically on the benefit of having external expertise. They shared experiences they had had on their own journeys and in the collective journeys of other organizations as they sought to grapple with blind spots and adopt new mindsets and behaviors.
- We did not hear much discussion on the topic of funding such expertise.

In response to the desire for externally oriented activities, the Change Group recommended Action in Montgomery (AIM). It was perceived as a vehicle for building skills and relationships with other religious organizations in the County to lay groundwork for subsequent initiatives that might emerge from the further Threshing Process. That engagement is currently resulting

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in a county wide agenda that includes collaborative efforts in climate change, affordable housing, accessible and affordable pre-K/childcare, as well as affordable and accessible care for adolescent mental health needs and immigrant/low-income individuals' dental needs.

In response to the lack of clarity on the nature and value that external experts could bring to BFM, Threshing Prep developed and issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to elicit more clarity on who might guide us, what the journey would look like, and how much it would cost BFM.

Q-2: Why are we proposing a collective journey to redress systemic racism, especially when many at BFM feel they have been on the journey for some time and BFM is undertaking many activities already related to such an effort?

A-2: At the outset, Threshing Prep was explicitly formed with the charge of helping the Meeting design a collective effort with external assistance to discern not only our collective commitments from among the list of ideas the Meeting generated. It was also and explicitly asked to address the collective identity from which we wished to take those actions. The question of identity is at the heart of this effort, and we believe requires collective learning, exploration, and skill-building along the way to fully discern that from a place of knowledge and spiritual guidance.

Along our collective way, which for some of us has extended across weekly meetings for more than a year now, several things, including Spirit, have informed our perspective on the need/value for such a journey:

1. For those of us who identify as white, the George Floyd death, on top of so many others, made it impossible not to grasp the depth and pervasiveness of the racism that remains in our policing and more widely in our institutions. We felt Continuing Revelation was calling our Quaker values of Equality, Community, and Integrity forward in such a way that we could not turn away or ignore the call. We could not be content with superficial actions to assuage our conscience. We believe this requires deeper introspection to address the ways in which we enable and perpetuate such systems, albeit unintentionally. Furthermore, we are aware that if real change is to happen, whites need to be critical allies - there are simply not enough non-whites to effect this change alone. If whites are to be reliable allies, they need to be able to acknowledge the ways in which they are affected positively and negatively with the insidious nature of the racist structures and assumptions that are enshrined in US culture. For change to happen, it cannot be fully effective as individuals, but needs to be taken collectively. What better way to address it in ourselves than in a Quaker community held by Spirit and our Quaker values?
2. For those of us who identify as other than white, we have a range of perspectives. For some of us, the question is not whether white Quakers are well-intended and variously involved, but whether they are truly committed. Are they ready to give this concern of race sustained attention in ways that may be difficult, uncomfortable, or costly to them in some way? Are they willing to grow their awareness and skill capacity to create a firm foundation from which to engage in the outside world in reparative ways that truly

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break the cycle and seek to redress systemic racism at a more basic level? For others of us, our wish is that white Quakers be bold enough to speak up when they see racism and vulnerable enough to listen when they hear about the ways they are perpetuating it.

Q-3: Why do we feel the need to engage external experts in facilitating such journeys? Aren't we already doing enough, and wouldn't any expenditures be better spent elsewhere?

A-3: All of us on Change/Threshing Prep are aware that this work requires deftness and expertise that none of us in the Meeting has. We may have lived experience, or group process skills, or facilitation expertise, or experience in grappling with these things in our places of work, but none of us has the requisite expertise to support the Meeting well. However, we know that expertise exists, that we would benefit from it, and that - if done well - that support could help us all evolve our awareness and skills to a level that would simply not be feasible without it.

We recognize that BFM may be reluctant to commit the resources required to adequately recognize and compensate such experts for that expertise. Free is often not the best choice as it may not be effective or fair. We believe our expenditures do reflect our values so an expenditure here would recognize our commitment to live in integrity with the testimonials and represent an investment in our collective future. But that assumes there are enough who wish to go on such a journey and that the approach and individuals we are proposing are of interest to enough people in the Meeting.

Q-4: What are we envisioning as the outcomes that would be different from continuing on our current path?

A-4: In the first meeting of the Threshing Prep Group, after being charged by the Co-Clerks to identify external resources to help us, we asked ourselves how we would know whether the process had generated our desired results. Here is the list we developed then and included in our Request for Proposal (RFP) as our desired outcomes:

1. A Shared Vocabulary as it pertains to systemic racism
2. An understanding of what systemic/structural racism is & clarity on our role in redressing it
3. An understanding (or assessment) of who/where we are today as a community
4. A tangible vision for who we aspire to become as individuals and a collective
5. Clarity on what is needed to move us from here to there
6. Selection of those actions we are prepared to take as a community
7. A resourced action plan that reflects our commitments
8. An excited, energized, and engaged community ready to take the identified steps

While we believe we could nibble away at that set of desired outcomes, we do not believe that we can reach a coherent, informed, and connected place from which to clarify and pursue our shared BFM intentions without a concerted process to get there.

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We recognize that not everyone in the Meeting may be ready to commit the time and energy to undertake such a collective journey, but we believe it is important for a critical mass of the Meeting to develop the shared vocabulary, awareness, practices, skills, and commitment to make it transformative collective process that will shape who we are and who we seek to become on this critical question of values and Continuing Revelation.

Q- 5: How and why have we selected Lucy Duncan and Rob Peagler from among various groups who responded to the RFP (Request for Proposal) that our Group issued earlier in the year?

A-5: We issued the RFP to 9 recipients identified through outreach or by our community. We received 4 responses. We read, reviewed, and scored all of them against our desired attributes which included relevant expertise, experience, and orientation to the work. Rob and Lucy's proposed approach and profile were the best fit for those intentions. Their lived and deep experience, the combination of Lucy's Quaker understanding and Rob's work and outlook, as well as the fact that as a couple they live this work in love and challenge, drew us. The opportunities we had to explore our questions and concerns with them convinced us that they brought the blend of flexibility, clarity, and courage to engage interactively with the kind of Meeting we are. The core of their response is in the companion document.

Q-6: What is the session on May 22nd meant to accomplish?

A-6: We wanted those in the Meeting who are interested in this endeavor to have a chance to meet Rob and Lucy, hear from them about their proposal and why they responded as they did, and have an opportunity to ask them any questions. At the end of the session and after Lucy/Rob have dropped off the zoom call, we will ask you to fill out a brief 6 question survey. We're seeking feedback on whether what they've described as the possible journey for BFM is something you think would be good for the Meeting and whether you'd personally like to participate in it - subject to BFM working through the financing and the schedule being something that can work for you. We'd also like to get an initial sense of whether a participant fee would discourage anyone from getting engaged.

Q-7: What happens after that?

A-7: It is our intention to bring a full proposal, including costing and funding approach, to Meeting for Business on June 5, 2022.

Q-8: Where/how will the Meeting make a final decision on whether to undertake such a collective journey, whether BFM agrees to engage Rob and Lucy, and how the Meeting proposes to fund such an endeavor?

A-8: We believe a dedicated Called Meeting for Business to discern the sense of the Meeting is warranted and we are requesting that it be convened before the end of June.