

COMBATING ANTI-BLACK RACISM AT THE CENTER

October 2020

The San Diego LGBT Community Center

The Center is examining its work and internal practices to eradicate anti-Black racism in all areas and functions of the organization. **This document represents work that The Center has done, is in the process of doing, or is exploring to work toward:**

- Meeting the needs and priorities voiced by the Black LGBTQ Community
- Restoring and strengthening existing partnerships and relationships with community members, and creating new relationships within the Black community
- Truly welcoming Black community members into The Center

We are learning and gaining a deeper understanding of past wrongdoings on the part of The Center, and anti-Black racism in the greater LGBTQ community, that have deeply hurt and alienated Black LGBTQ community members. As an agency, we fully acknowledge that much remains to be done to work toward healing our relationships within the Black LGBTQ community. We acknowledge that this work will never be wholly completed but must be an ongoing effort and woven into the very core of the agency. To that end, we have created this document to help guide future efforts, not as a checklist to showcase completed items, but to have a central, living record where we can ensure clarity on what remains to be done.

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SUMMARY

- The Center is examining its work and internal practices in order to eradicate anti-Black racism in all areas and functions of the organization:
 - Formation of The Center's Black LGBTQ Community Advisory Committee
 - Establishing dedicated programming for the Black LGBTQ community
 - Trainings and meetings dedicated to anti-Black racism for all Center staff, Board members, and volunteers
 - Working in coalition with social justice partner agencies to advocate for police reform and housing policy to prioritize housing insecure and unhoused Black LGBTQ people
 - Banning armed, uniformed law enforcement officers from Center facilities and events and continuing to reexamine The Center's relationship with law enforcement
 - Writing explicit priorities and goals for engaging the Black LGBTQ community into The Center's Strategic Plan
 - Reexamination and adjustment of Center operational and communications practices, including a revision of The Center's recruitment and interview practices to reduce barriers and bias.

- The Center is exploring ways to combat anti-Black racism through volunteer trainings, educational opportunities for the LGBTQ and greater San Diego community, and future programming opportunities for the Black community to voice feedback and concerns.

- The Center's anti-Black racism work in 2019-2020 has been guided by five priorities created by the Black LGBTQ Community Advisory Committee, following the community feedback voiced during the Town Hall for the Black LGBTQ Community (see Key Priorities on page 9).

WHAT WE HAVE DONE

Formation of the Black LGBTQ Community Advisory Committee (BLCAC) – an active Advisory Committee that provides advice to The Center on issues impacting the Black LGBTQ community to better serve and welcome Black LGBTQ community members.

- **Background:** Between April – August 2019, members of the Black LGBTQ community, and community leaders within the greater Black community in San Diego, met monthly with The Center’s CEO about the history of the Black community not being welcome or included in The Center. Out of these discussions, this group (which later became part of The Center’s BLCAC) asked The Center to hold a Town Hall for the Black LGBTQ Community, a listening event to allow community members a venue to voice past hurtful experiences and hopes for the future at The Center. It was important to this group to see and voice their feedback directly to the Center’s Board of Directors and senior leadership team, who along with Center staff, were present at the event.
- **August 22, 2019 – The Center held a Town Hall for the Black LGBTQ Community, organized in partnership with Gender Phluid Collective, the San Diego Black LGBTQ Coalition, and Unity Fellowship Church. This event had over 140 attendees, the largest number of Black community members at any event in Center history.**
- An invitation to debrief the Town Hall was sent to the list of Town Hall attendees (those who signed in), and The Center held a debrief meeting in September 2019, at which it was decided to form an advisory committee to prioritize concrete steps The Center will take to better welcome and serve the Black LGBTQ community, which became the BLCAC. The Center’s CEO and a Center Board representative have attended every meeting.
- **Over the fall of 2019, BLCAC focused on defining itself and its initial set of priorities. It formalized a group description, a vision statement, and a list of top priorities to begin working toward (see the Key Priorities on page 9).**
- The Center sent a direct follow-up message to all attendees of the Town Hall in January 2020, following up on progress toward the Committee priorities and to announce the launch of one of the top identified priorities, a Black-led peer discussion group for the Black community, Brave Space (see below). A Town Hall update was included in The Center’s e-news/social media in January 2020.
- To add more staffing capacity to this group and to better engage with the Black community, The Center’s former position of Community Outreach Manager was renamed Community Engagement Manager; this staff member was added to BLCAC.
- BLCAC continues to meet regularly and is open to those who identify as (or are guardians of) members of the Black LGBTQ community. For more information, see Helen Weldeghiorgis (hweldeghiorgis@thecentersd.org).
- **In partnership with The Gender Phluid Collective, Unity Fellowship Church, and the San Diego Black LGBTQ Coalition, The Center now offers a monthly peer-led support group, Brave Space, for LGBTQ+ folx of the Black and African diaspora community, to facilitate healing, provide encouragement, empowerment, and hope. It was formed in response to one of the priorities identified by BLCAC (see page 9) and launched in January 2020. It is run by two Black LGBTQ volunteers.**

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Trainings and Meetings for Center Staff, Board, and Volunteers

- Discussion sessions were held during meetings of the senior staff, Directors and Managers, at all-staff meetings and at Board of Director meetings:
 - August 2019: prior to the Town Hall to prepare for the event
 - August – September 2019: to debrief, review community feedback, and deepen understanding of the feedback from the event
 - December 2019: following up regarding the Town Hall; reviewing progress made toward BLCAC priorities
 - January 2020: preparing for the launch of Brave Space
- The Center’s Board of Directors held a special debrief meeting immediately following the Town Hall and continued discussion at the September 2019 Board meeting.
- Meetings in May and June 2020 of the senior staff, Directors and Managers, and all staff have been devoted to discussion on anti-Black racism, Black Lives Matter, and actions against police brutality, providing resources and avenues for staff to participate as they choose in protests and other actions.
- Training on anti-Black racism for Center volunteers who lead peer-led discussion groups (6/6/20) and for all Center volunteers (8/29/20).
- **Conducted a series of staff trainings on anti-Black racism with two members of BLCAC – three completed (4/29/20, 6/8/20, 6/29/20).**
- Conducted a similar training on anti-Black racism for the Center Board of Directors (7/28/20), also conducted by a member of BLCAC.
- CEO led training session for volunteer peer facilitators regarding the Center’s anti-Black racism policies and practices (6/6/20).
- Created a regular meeting, Breathing Room, for Center staff providing direct client services to discuss race and racism.

Policy and Advocacy

- Coalition for Police Accountability and Transparency (CPAT) – The Center was a founding member and continues to serve on CPAT, which was formed by the ACLU in 2016 and arose out of the need to advocate for changes within the San Diego Police Department to address evidence-based statistics that demonstrate that SDPD is overpolicing and use of force on Black, Latino/a/x, and LGBTQ people.
- Together with CPAT members, The Center advocated for greater community input and transparency in the City of San Diego’s search for the new Chief of Police in 2018.
- **The Center is currently calling for local governments to pass the Police Accountability Now policy reforms, which include five policy changes that will address racial and identity disparities present across San Diego County:**
 1. **Pass PROTECT, a policy that seeks to ban the use of consent searches and limit discretionary stops by police;**
 2. **Stop the enforcement of low-level offenses and invest in non-law enforcement interventions;**
 3. **Strengthen community oversight to ensure accountability;**
 4. **Adopt a de-escalation policy;**

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5. **Enact strong use of force policies, such as banning chokeholds and carotid restraints, requiring a duty to intervene and instituting other measures.**
 - Relationship with Law Enforcement
 - The Center will continue its long-existing policies that include prohibiting weapons on the premises of our properties and only calling law enforcement into our facilities as a last resort or a true emergency.
 - The Center has received a large amount of feedback from Black LGBTQ community members regarding the presence of armed uniformed law enforcement officers being a barrier to feeling welcomed at The Center.
 - **By a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, beginning June 16, 2020, The Center no longer allows armed uniformed law enforcement officers at Center facilities or Center events, unless as a last resort or true emergency.**
 - The Center continues to reexamine its own relationships with law enforcement and calls for a reexamination of roles and services provided by police departments that would be better provided by social service providers and other agencies.
 - In partnership with the Community Budget Alliance, The Center called on the San Diego City Council in June 2020 to reexamine and reallocate funding in the FY21 Budget from the Police Department to emergency rental assistance.
 - Housing Advocacy – Research tells us that LGBTQ youth and Black youth are over represented in the homeless system.
 - In August of 2019, The Center led a regional effort to add funding to San Diego to address this disparity through education, advocacy, and policy making. Unfortunately, the San Diego region was not selected, by the funder, as one of the 10 regions funded.
 - For nearly two years, San Diego has been working on creating a youth coordinated entry system for youth who are experiencing homelessness. Through the development of a coordinated community plan, subpopulations were identified. Two of the subpopulations, LGBTQ youth and youth of color, particularly Black youth, were not being prioritized in the scoring system due to the belief that it conflicted with fair housing practices. Through The Center’s leadership and advocacy, in June 2020 two questions were added to the scoring system, which allows for the prioritization of these two populations to receive housing.

Center Operations

- Since 2017, two members of the Black community have served on The Center’s Board; one of whom is the current Board Co-chair and the first Black Co-chair (Dr. Kafele Khalfani).
- Since 2018, The Center has worked on agency-wide measures to reduce barriers for Black community members (as well as other POC, transgender, and nonbinary community members) to join or engage with the organization.
 - Standardization of job descriptions, requirements, and salaries to reduce barriers and bias.
 - Removed 4-year college degree as a requirement from over 10 job descriptions for which the degree was not necessary for the position to reduce barriers to entering the organization.
 - Standardization of interview process to reduce bias.

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- Require interview panels for all job recruitments to include employees who are people of color.
 - Utilize a modified 360 annual review system which includes employee and peer feedback for greater accountability and equity in the process.
 - Exit interviews are performed consistently for greater amount of agency accountability.
 - In 2019, The Center enacted an agency-wide adjustment of compensation and ongoing annual review to ensure fairness.
 - In 2019, The Center held its first-ever management training for all Center Directors, Managers, and team leaders to work toward consistent practices throughout the agency. The curriculum trained staff on management skills and practices with a racial equity and inclusion lens.
- The Senior Manager of Community Engagement position supports BLCAC and does community engagement work within the Black community. This marks the first time that engagement with the Black community is explicitly written into the job description of a community outreach/engagement staff role at The Center.
 - Following the recommendation of BLCAC, a Black Services section has been added to The Center's website and will promote services and events for the Black LGBTQ community in The Center's lobby when the facility reopens.
 - Starting this year, Black staff members are given the day off on Juneteenth (June 19).
 - In addition to Brave Space, The Center has also provided support groups for MSM and transgender women living with HIV/AIDS. The group members in these groups are predominantly Black, though the groups are open to all people of color.

The Center's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan

- Feedback from the August 2019 Town Hall for the Black LGBTQ Community (in addition to community survey responses) was transcribed and included in the community feedback data analyzed to form the goals of the Strategic Plan.
- One of the five objectives of the Strategic Plan is to “expand and maintain community engagement and programming to underserved and/or disengaged communities of The Center,” including the Black LGBTQ community, with the goal of expanding our critical health and social-support services to those currently underserved or disengaged from The Center. This is the first time that the Black community has been explicitly named and included in a Center Strategic Plan.
- BLCAC is named in the Strategic Plan; continuing to support its recommendations for improving The Center's practices is named as a key component in working toward the Strategic Plan objectives and vision.

Communications

- A special email distribution was sent to the Town Hall attendees and greater Center email list to debrief the Town Hall, as well as a January 2020 follow-up on priorities identified at the Town Hall, and dedicated e-news statements on 5/29/20, 6/1/20, 6/5/20, and 6/8/20 in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

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- The Center has and continues to engage leaders in the Black LGBTQ community on communications about issues facing the Black LGBTQ community, and have implemented their recommendations, such as:
 - Standardized use of capitalized “Black” in all Center communications
 - Not promoting actions that are not led by and for the Black community
 - Black History Month – following the recommendation of BLCAC, The Center amplified and publicized events already planned by the Black community (rather than creating an additional, novel event).

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WHAT WE'RE EXPLORING FOR THE FUTURE

- Continuation or future trainings for Center staff, volunteers, and Board of Directors on anti-Black racism, building on the trainings described in the previous section.
- Community trainings and other educational opportunities for the greater LGBTQ community on anti-Black racism and on how to be better allies to the Black LGBTQ community and how to be actively anti-racist.
- Future large community meetings especially for the Black community, or other avenues to provide opportunities for Black community members to get an update on efforts to better serve the Black LGBTQ community, and to voice feedback and concerns.
 - Satisfaction surveys for staff and clients to evaluate success of these and other measures in working toward the goals identified above.
- In partnership with BLCAC and The Black LGBTQ Coalition, create a resource list for the Black LGBTQ community.
- Researching agencies that have successfully made this transition and put the work in and mirroring their efforts.

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KEY PRIORITIES

The following five items are key priorities that were identified by the Black LGBTQ Community Advisory Committee in the fall of 2019; updates on these priorities are listed below. These priorities are also intentionally reflected in “What We Have Done” and “What We’re Exploring for the Future” to note current status of work these priorities.

1.	<p>Community feedback: There is a real need for an independent nonprofit in San Diego for the Black LGBTQ community.</p>
	<p><i>Priority:</i> The Center will support the San Diego Black LGBTQ Coalition in obtaining its own 501(c)(3) status. The Center and the Coalition signed a fiscal sponsorship agreement in November 2019; The Center now serves as the fiscal agent for the coalition, free of charge, in the interim period, with the goal of this organization obtaining its 501(c)(3) status in 2021.</p>
2.	<p>Community feedback: Mental health is a crisis in the Black community; there is a real need for accessible therapy for the Black LGBTQ community with a Black therapist.</p>
	<p><i>Priority:</i> The Center is publicizing its Behavioral Health Services program to share that its staff includes two Black therapists, one who is fully bilingual and one who is a member of the Black transgender community. A poster is prominently featured on The Center’s website and in The Center’s lobby with other community resources that displays a picture of each of the BHS staff, including their names and pronouns.</p>
3.	<p>Community feedback: The Black LGBTQ community in San Diego is experiencing pain and trauma from the unique marginalization of being both a member of the Black and LGBTQ community; there is a real need for a supportive space for Black LGBTQ people to share pain, discuss anti-Black racism, transphobia and homophobia and create support for the Black LGBTQ community.</p>
	<p><i>Priority:</i> In partnership with The Gender Phluid Collective, Unity Fellowship Church, and the San Diego Black LGBTQ Coalition, The Center now offers a peer-led support group (Brave Space) to facilitate healing for the Black LGBTQ community, provide encouragement, empowerment, and hope. It is run by two Black LGBTQ volunteers.</p>
4.	<p>Community feedback: There is a real need for the Black LGBTQ community to be informed of the menu of resources that already exist in San Diego.</p>
	<p><i>Priority:</i> The Center will create a resource list for the Black LGBTQ community. The Black LGBTQ Community Advisory Committee is currently developing this list.</p>
5.	<p>Community feedback: There is a real need for more education in the greater LGBTQ community about anti-Black racism and issues impacting the Black LGBTQ community.</p>
	<p><i>Priority:</i> The Center will create educational opportunities for the greater LGBTQ community on anti-Black racism and on how to be better allies to the Black LGBTQ community. The Black LGBTQ Community Advisory Committee advised that this work begin internally among The Center’s staff and board; The Center has held and is continuing a series of all-staff trainings on anti-Black racism and held a training for the Board of Directors in July 2020.</p>