

To: Mayor Jacob Frey, City Council President Andrea Jenkins and City Councilmembers  
CC: Department Directors  
Date: May 9, 2022

**Subject: Toxic, Racist, and Unsafe Workplace Conditions in the City Coordinator's Office**

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Dear Mayor Jacob Frey, City Council President Andrea Jenkins and City Councilmembers,

The attached letter was sent to Interim City Coordinator Heather Johnston on Thursday, April 28, 2022 by current and former City Coordinator's Office (CCO) staff. The letter requested that by May 6, 2022, Interim Coordinator Johnston send the authors a written acknowledgement of and commitment to: creating a written plan to address staff demands, scheduling a meeting with CCO staff by May 26, 2022 to review the written plan, and sharing the written plan with staff at least five days before the staff meeting.

On May 6, 2022, staff received an acknowledgment of the letter from Interim Coordinator Johnston with an expression of interest to work together. Also on May 6, 2022, current CCO staff signatories received an email from Robin Howard in Human Resources indicating that "the City has decided to enlist a neutral, outside party to investigate the concerns raised in the letter." While this may follow current City policies, we are concerned that this will be used as a way for Interim City Coordinator Johnston and other City leadership to avoid taking action on the stated demands, as has happened with previous formal complaints.

As of May 9, 2022, CCO staff have not received a commitment to creating a written plan to address staff demands nor an expression of intent to schedule a meeting with staff to address these demands, as staff had requested (see attached letter for reference).

Given this insufficient response, we felt the need to elevate these pressing concerns to elected leadership, to publicly name the harms that have and continue to occur in the City Coordinator's Office and seek meaningful redress. Further, as several of our demands implicate the hiring process for City leadership, this letter is relevant to both the Mayor and City Council who play crucial roles in hiring, confirming, and evaluating the performance of City leadership. Where we have made any changes to the letter to highlight demands that are within your control but were not within the control of its initial recipients, we have noted that. **One demand that we want to highlight here is that based on the experiences shared in this collection of documents and clear failure to lead effectively, we do not believe that Interim City Coordinator Heather Johnston should be retained in any leadership role with the City of Minneapolis, including permanent appointment as City Coordinator or any role that arises as a result of the new governance structure.**

Furthermore, while the initial letter was sent specifically to Coordinator's Office leadership and therefore signed by current and former CCO staff, this letter is being sent to Enterprise leadership. [As additional staff want to sign on, that list will be updated here.](#)

As staff who are working towards building a supportive, antiracist, and safer workplace for CCO staff and the entire City Enterprise, we are asking for your support in keeping Interim City Coordinator Heather Johnston - or any subsequent leadership position for CCO staff - accountable to work with CCO staff to accomplish the demands outlined in the attached letter that's transparent, equitable, and sustainable.

Always forward,  
*The undersigned current and former CCO staff*

Signatories: Amir Cannon, Angela Williams, Christina Manancero, Colleen Pulawski, Desralynn Cole, Diana Chao, Gina Obiri, Jonathan Williams-Kinsel, Kelly Muellman, LaLinda Xiong, Maria Lee, Nick Campbell, Nicky Leingang, Taylor Crouch-Dodson, Teeko Yang, Tor Chavarria, Track Trachtenberg

To: Heather Johnston, Interim City Coordinator of the City of Minneapolis  
CC: Leadership Staff of the City Coordinator's Office - Tyeastia Green, Kim Havey, Gülgün Kayim, Julianne Leerssen, Brian Smith; all City Coordinator's Office employees  
Date: April 28, 2022

**Subject: Toxic, Racist, and Unsafe Workplace Conditions in the City Coordinator's Office**

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Dear Interim City Coordinator Heather Johnston and CCO leadership staff,

This letter is the result of building frustrations about ongoing harm caused to current and past City Coordinator Office (CCO) staff, particularly Black and Brown staff. This harm stems from a toxic, anti-Black work culture that has been perpetuated by past and current City Coordinators, both Interim and appointed, for several years. City leaders [claim to uphold values of racial equity and justice](#) and [acknowledged racism as a public health crisis](#). However, these claims have failed to result in tangible actions that substantially support employees, especially Black employees. When the City fails its employees, it fails to serve our community.

Over the past several weeks, current CCO staff have worked together to create a list of demands that collectively aim to identify a set of structural changes and accountability measures needed to create a safe and healthy workplace environment, both now and into the future. We are committed to supporting an inclusive, anti-racist, healthy work culture within the CCO.

In addition to the list of demands, included in this letter is a timeline of events, a series of personal CCO staff stories, and a collection of department-wide communications. Together, these documents contextualize why we felt the need to organize and bring forward solutions to our grievances in such a structured and formal manner at this time.

These workplace issues are systemic and our demands are structured to address them as such. We recognize that submitting these requests in writing poses risks to our jobs and our professional reputations. We do not aim to be antagonistic to the work of the City and this department. Instead, we accept this risk with great care and dedication to current and former co-workers, to the goals and purpose of our divisions, and to bettering the lives of the residents of Minneapolis whom we serve.

In order to proceed in a timely and respectful manner, we request the following:

1. Create a written plan for how and on what timeline CCO Leadership plans to address each item on the list of demands.
2. Schedule a CCO all-staff meeting to take place no later than May 26, 2022 with the agenda dedicated to reviewing the written plan. Ensure this meeting is in a format that accommodates remote participation.
3. Send the written plan via email to all CCO staff no later than 5 business days before the CCO staff meeting.
4. Share a written acknowledgement of and commitment to following through on the above three items by end of day on May 6, 2022.

We look forward to working together to build a safer workplace environment.

Always forward,  
*The undersigned current and former CCO staff*

Signatories: Amir Cannon, Angela Williams, Christina Manancero, Colleen Pulawski, Desralynn Cole, Diana Chao, Gina Obiri, Jonathan Williams-Kinsel, Kelly Muellman, LaLinda Xiong, Maria Lee, Nick Campbell, Nicky Leingang, Taylor Crouch-Dodson, Teeko Yang, Tor Chavarria, Track Trachtenberg

## TIMELINE

On numerous occasions and platforms, CCO staff have requested that CCO leadership be transparent and collaborative in their decision-making. In this spirit of transparency, we have chronicled below the chain of events that led our current group to organize around this particular list of demands. This timeline of events aims to highlight major moments over the past year that set the groundwork for this letter.

We recognize that we cannot capture every harmful individual and group experience had by CCO staff. Accordingly, we have attached three appendices. First, a series of personal stories submitted by CCO staff about their lived experiences (Appendix A). Second, an article from *Racket* detailing the rapid resignation of the City of Minneapolis Division of Race & Equity (Appendix B). Third, a collection of CCO-wide communications received from, and exchanged with, Interim City Coordinator Heather Johnston between October 2021 and April 2022 ([Appendix C](#)). These appendices should be read as complementary to this timeline.

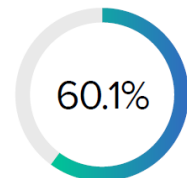
### HISTORY OF ISSUES WITH CCO LEADERSHIP



A lack of commitment to listening to staff, to being transparent with staff, or to addressing systemic anti-Black racism are not new issues within the City Coordinator's Office.

Concerns have been raised for years within CCO staff meetings. Promises were made by multiple people in the City Coordinator position to increase communication and transparency without any real behavior change or accountability structures established. Ongoing leadership turnover (4 new City Coordinators within 8 years) has meant that any commitments to change were never carried through.

In November 2020, results from the MyMinneapolis Survey revealed significantly below average ratings for the City Coordinator's Office in the areas of commitment and engagement, cultural agility, and racial equity. In the past two years, the clear insensitivity and unaccountability to establish and maintain a safe working environment for Black staff has only worsened. (See "[02-15-21 Email from Mark Ruff - Attachment re: My Minneapolis Survey 2020](#)" in Appendix C).

Overall Favorability



Category Result		
	My Group	Company
Commitment and Engagement	50.0%	73.7% (-23.7)
Cultural Agility	68.0%	72.9% (-4.9)
All Other Standard Items	61.0%	71.4% (-10.4)
COVID 19	67.8%	67.6% (+0.2)
Racial Equity	52.2%	62.4% (-10.2)
Overall Favorability	60.1%	69.6% (-9.5)

### DISTRUST OF ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

In considering how to seek support in addressing these concerns, we considered the pathways of our union representations and Human Resources. Both were deemed inappropriate and would most likely present barriers to achieving results.

#### ***Minneapolis Professional Employee Association (MPEA)***

Many CCO staff are represented by MPEA. In 2021, MPEA held multiple virtual membership meetings in which a large portion of membership raised a lack of trust in the Board given concerns of racism against members. The MPEA Board was not and continues to not be receptive to these concerns and has made no attempt to change its policies and practices to be a more inclusive association. Based on these past actions, CCO staff felt that our union would not be open to supporting our concerns.

#### ***Human Resources***

Many CCO staff have filed ethics complaints citing toxic, racist, and unhealthy workplace environments perpetuated by the City Coordinator. A review of those complaints will show that many were dismissed and closed without any investigation or conversation with the complainants, leading us to believe that the same

would happen with the complaints outlined in this document. Per the policies of the City of Minneapolis, all complaints filed against the City Coordinator are handled by the Chief Human Resources Officer, Patience Ferguson, in collaboration with an external consultant. Since the Chief HR Officer reports to the City Coordinator, CCO staff felt that any HR complaint process would inadequately support our concerns given this conflict of interest.

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#### **TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN CCO LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIST OF DEMANDS**

- **Summer 2020 to Fall 2021** - All but one staff in the Division of Race and Equity has resigned. Minneapolis lost eight exceptional staff in two years, including four Black women. (See Appendix B)
- **Summer 2021** - Heather Johnston rejoins the City of Minneapolis as Interim City Coordinator. Previously, she held the position of Chief Finance Officer from 2004 to 2011.
- **Summer 2021** - Interim Coordinator Johnston receives the [2021 ReCAST report](#) outlining concerns raised by current and former staff from the Division of Race and Equity of being silenced, disrespected, and harmed while working for the City of Minneapolis.
- **October 2021** - Interim Coordinator Johnston holds first CCO Staff Meeting. Staff share issues about office culture and return-to-work plans. Interim Coordinator Johnston verbally agrees to hire an outside consultant to facilitate how best to address these concerns.
- **October 15, 2021** - As a follow up to the October CCO Staff Meeting, Trudy Kjenstad (Manager of Administrative Services in CCO) sends a 3-question survey on behalf of Interim Coordinator Johnston to all CCO staff. Survey includes the following (see “[10-15-21 Email from Trudy Kjenstad re: Coordinator's Office Staff Survey - Please respond by October 20th](#)” in Appendix C):
  - Q1. What is your preferred cadence for all-staff meetings? [Monthly / Bimonthly]
  - Q2. Would you be willing to lead a group in addressing the workplace culture issues that were discussed at the October 13 staff meeting? [Yes / No]
  - Q3. Would you be willing to participate in a group to develop recommendations for addressing the workplace cultural issues that were discussed at the October 13 staff meeting? [Yes / No]
- **October 20, 2021** - Interim Coordinator Johnston asks CCO staff for suggestions on an outside consultant as she wants to fully participate in the conversations. She asks for responses within one week, noting that the City’s procurement process takes a while. (See “[10-20-21 Email from Heather Johnston re: Follow up workplace culture discussions](#)” in Appendix C)
- **October 2021 - December 10, 2021** - Interim Coordinator Johnston continues to hold CCO Staff Meetings where the culture and communication is racist and toxic, including dismissing Black employees when raising concerns and claiming to not hold positional influence despite her top position in the City’s organizational hierarchy.
- **November 30, 2021** - Interim Coordinator Johnston’s deadline for submitting Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA). No guidelines or parameters were announced to CCO staff about AWA submission other than this deadline. (See “[10-20-21 Email from Heather Johnston re: Follow up: workplace culture discussion](#)” in Appendix C)
- **December 2021 to February 2022** - CCO staff experience a total lack of communication from Interim Coordinator Johnston on any plans to address workplace cultural issues, COVID-19 safety issues, and

return-to-work work expectations in alignment with the AWAs submitted by staff and approved by their supervisors.

- **February 13, 2022** - Interim Coordinator Johnston sends an email at 5:00 pm outlining protocols for a return to work on February 14, 2022. There was no mention of COVID-19 case numbers nor any acknowledgement of concerns raised by Black staff. (See [“02-13-22 Email from Heather Johnston re: Return to the Office - week of February 14”](#) in Appendix C)
- **February 24, 2022** - Interim Coordinator Johnston holds a CCO staff meeting and announces that future CCO staff meetings will be held quarterly and in-person.
- **March 1, 2022** - When asked by Taylor Crouch-Dodson (Program Manager in the Office of Performance & Innovation) if a hybrid option will be provided for remote employees to attend CCO staff meetings, the answer was “No.” (See [“03-01-22 Email from Yvonne MacFarlane re: Coordinator's Office Staff Meeting \[includes Public Service Center Tour from 2:30p-3:00p\]”](#) in Appendix C)
- **March 2, 2022** - Gina Obiri (Program Manager in the Office of Performance & Innovation) sends an email to CCO staff (and copies MBEN co-chairs) in response to the decision of only holding in-person CCO staff meetings. In particular, she says, “It is disingenuous and problematic to ask Black staff to subject themselves to the same environment that has been the source of trauma when nothing suggests that anything will be better. When will this start? And how will it happen in a way that doesn’t place burden on Black staff?” This email sparks a chain response from multiple CCO staff echoing a call to action by Interim Coordinator Johnston to address ongoing workplace issues of racism, toxicity, and safety. (See [“04-06-22 Email from Gina Obiri re: Staff Meeting Agenda 2242022”](#) and subsequent responses in Appendix C)
- **March 3, 2022**- Track Trachtenberg (Project Coordinator in the Division of Race & Equity) names that Interim Coordinator Johnston asked them for advice on how to proceed with addressing the issues raised in the email thread initiated by Gina Obiri. Rather than answering from the perspective of a single white staff person, Track volunteers to gather with CCO staff that participated in the email chain to collectively discuss what action they want to see from Interim Coordinator Johnston. (See [“04-06-22 Email from Gina Obiri re: Staff Meeting Agenda 2242022”](#) and subsequent responses in Appendix C)
- **March 15, 2022** - CCO staff receive an email response from Interim Coordinator Johnston. This delayed response was lacking for multiple reasons, as identified by staff in responses to her email.
- **March 2022 to April 2022** - CCO staff continue to send responses to the original email sent by Gina Obiri on March 2nd with several staff noting the timing gap and substantive lack in Interim Coordinator Johnston’s response. (See [“04-06-22 Email from Gina Obiri re: Staff Meeting Agenda 2242022”](#) and subsequent responses in Appendix C)
- **As of April 28, 2022:**
  - Continued expectation by Interim Coordinator Johnston for CCO staff to work in-person despite multiple instances of staff noting the option to work remotely promotes mental and physical well being.
  - No further responses to workplace culture issues have been made by Interim Coordinator Johnston.
  - No follow-up from Interim Coordinator Johnston on the survey from October 15, 2021 that was sent to CCO staff.
  - No follow-up from Interim Coordinator Johnston on bringing in an outside consultant to help her address the workplace culture issues surfaced by staff.
  - Multiple current CCO staff are interested in supporting the work outlined in our list of demands to improve workplace culture but are uncomfortable signing their names due to fear of

retaliation. This fear further exemplifies the immediate need for action on these serious and toxic workplace culture issues.

As evidenced by the above series of events, Interim Coordinator Johnston's lack of adequate and timely responses to our needs as an office has prompted CCO staff to collectively organize our requests and surface them to CCO leadership.

## LIST OF DEMANDS

This list of demands was crafted collectively over the past several weeks by current CCO staff, who are committed to supporting an inclusive, anti-racist work culture within the City Coordinator's Office.

We recognize that, given the passage of the 2021 election Ballot Question 1, there is uncertainty around the future structure and positionality of our office. While we address these demands to current CCO leadership, they are equally applicable to a future CAO or any new role/existing department head that ultimately gains positional authority over the City Coordinator's Office or any of its existing divisions.

While these demands are addressed to all CCO leadership, the primary responsibility for fulfilling them lies with the City Coordinator; they should not be wholly passed on to be addressed by CCO division directors without their explicit consent.

Finally, we recognize that our office exists within the greater organizational ecosystem of the City; there are people and policies outside of our department that influence our office's ability to succeed in pushing forward the demands outlined below. Accordingly, several of our demands implicate external departments, divisions, roles, and/or policies in an attempt to proactively identify the most salient outside factors which influence the future of our own department's policies and practices. This list begins with internally-facing demands and builds toward more externally-facing demands.

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### ALTERNATIVE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND RETURN TO THE OFFICE

There has been a lack of attention paid to ensuring a safe and smooth transition back to the office by CCO leadership. Explicit policies and accompanying communications have been absent or confusing. Examples are included in both the introduction and the appendix.

In this section, we demand the development of a set of clear policies to govern alternative work arrangements and support effective remote and hybrid working models. We also identify actions CCO leadership can prioritize to ensure that the office is a healthy, safe, and productive space to work.

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**We demand that the City Coordinator create an explicit departmental alternative work arrangement (AWA) policy that:**

- allows for both hybrid and fully-remote AWAs;

- supports indefinite AWAs;

- has a standardized and transparent rubric for AWA determination and review;

- defers ultimate AWA approval and review power to direct supervisors, who are best positioned to assess their division's work needs; and

- acknowledges structural racism, in addition to COVID-19, as a barrier to safe and healthy workplaces.

**We demand that this AWA policy be developed transparently, collaboratively, and iteratively with – and ultimately agreed upon by – all interested CCO staff.**



**Further, to promote an effective and safe office space under the new AWA policy, we demand:**

A workspace audit to ensure the CCO's physical office setup is optimized for employee health, collaboration, and productivity.

Funding for the equipment necessary to support productive work no matter the location, including (at minimum) monitors and docking stations in the office and at home for all hybrid staff.

Department-wide training on Office 365 tools that promote productivity and open communication (e.g., Teams, SharePoint, Planner, etc.).

Explicit COVID-19 safety protocols for all staff and visitors who come to the office, including a communications plan to alert staff of potential COVID-19 exposure.

Explicit departmental policies that govern how colleagues working under different AWAs should interact to ensure that everyone, regardless of their AWA status, is able to meaningfully participate in work. This must include a requirement that all internal meetings provide options for off-site attendance.

**We demand that no staff be required to return to the office until a clear departmental AWA policy is in place and the above demands are addressed.**

### **CCO WORKPLACE CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP**

The workplace culture in the City Coordinator's Office is toxic and harmful for all staff, but particularly for Black and Brown staff. Examples of this are numerous and several are detailed in the appendix.

We recognize that it is impossible to shift these deep cultural issues overnight. In this section, we propose that CCO leadership actively set an anti-racist agenda to begin the essential work of creating a culture that values, supports, and is accountable to Black and Brown staff. We also address the contingencies related to a future role in a new governance structure with positional authority over the CCO.

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**We demand that CCO leadership actively set an anti-racist agenda to guide the department's operations. We demand this agenda be developed transparently and collaboratively with all interested CCO staff. This agenda must include plans for:**

Effective and consistent utilization of anti-racist practices to ensure Black and Brown staff are hired, prioritized, appropriately resourced, respected, and retained.

Proactive relationship-building with staff. This must include regularly opening the lines of communication for two-way dialogue between staff and leadership beyond what can take place during all-staff meetings (e.g., clear avenues and opportunities for staff to give feedback on department decision-making or serve on City-wide workgroups, such as the Next Normal implementation group).

Addressing long-standing conflict between offices to ensure anti-racism at all levels of the department and support inter-office collaboration.

Clear and transparent communications from leadership regarding departmental decision-making that are explicit about the sources of information used to inform each decision.

Supporting expansion of Race Equity's internal capacity-building programs to ensure sufficient opportunities and buy-in for employee learning and culture shift.

Using SREAP to guide how the department supports the Mayor's administration of services.

Ensuring that existing anti-racist frameworks and tools (e.g., REIAs) are effectively utilized so that data and evidence are used to advance equity in program and service delivery.

Regular reviews of City policies that might hinder inclusive and equitable employee and community engagement, particularly those developed by Coordinator Departments (e.g., food spending policies, gift card stipend policies, etc.).

**We demand that CCO leadership implement clear and transparent frameworks and measurement tools to develop, monitor, review, improve, and evaluate its anti-racist agenda.** This formal evaluation plan must inform the CCO's annual review.

**We demand that anyone selected for leadership positions within - or with positional authority over - the CCO actively support the department's anti-racist agenda.** This must be done by:

Hiring an executive search firm to conduct national recruitment for the proposed CAO position with Race Equity having the option to be involved in or oversee contract management as interested<sup>1</sup>.

Ensuring anti-racist job descriptions and hiring rubrics are developed and implemented for the City Coordinator and proposed CAO positions. This must include language in the CCO/CAO job description(s) that holds the CCO/CAO responsible and accountable for the implementation of the anti-racist agenda.

Developing on-boarding plans that include racial equity training approved by Race Equity for all current and future CCO leadership and the proposed CAO.

**We reference the proposed CAO position above for concision and clarity, but these demands apply to any role created under the new governance structure with positional authority over the CCO.**

**Based on current staff experiences as detailed in the introduction and appendix, and the above demands for hiring CCO-related leadership, we do not believe that any past City Coordinators we have worked under, nor interim City Coordinator Heather Johnston, should be retained in any leadership role with the City of Minneapolis.<sup>2</sup>**

## HR PRACTICES

Future success of the above demands is inextricably intertwined with city hiring practices.

In this section, we demand changes to hiring practices, grievance policies, and accountability mechanisms for the Department of Human Resources to ensure that the CCO - and all departments - is structurally able to achieve a non-discriminatory and inclusive workplace.

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**We demand an overhaul of the City's hiring policies, particularly those related to department heads and director-level positions, with the goal of achieving a nondiscriminatory and more inclusive workplace for the City's BIPOC employees.** This must include:

Updating job descriptions using a racial equity lens.

Ensuring that both application review and interview panels include staff experienced in assessing candidates using a racial equity lens.

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<sup>1</sup> The original version of this document had a typo attributing the contract management solely to Race Equity without consulting them on their interest in holding that role; that typo has been corrected here.

<sup>2</sup>This demand was not included in the initial letter, as it is not within the control of those we addressed the letter to. As it is within the control of the Mayor and Council, we have added it here.

Standard interview questions related to racial equity and anti-racism.

Applying the above practices internally to ensure that HR staff have diverse racial, cultural, ability, gender and sexual-orientation identities, which impact HR development and the delivery of training, policies, and practices.

Mandated annual HR reporting on equity-related metrics developed through the Office of Performance and Innovation's metric selection process. This must include, but is not limited to: breaking out BIPOC staff by race; reporting on trans and gender-nonconforming staff; and reporting on outcomes by department.

Mandated annual meetings with elected officials, HR, and the Office of Race and Equity to review hiring and retention equity goals; identify challenges and opportunities; and develop action plans with measurable objectives to be met within a specified time frame.

**We demand that HR prioritize the professional development and advancement of Black women and BIPOC employees from within the enterprise.**

**We demand that a revision of the Anti-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (ADHR) procedures to:**

increase accountability in the internal investigation process;

require more communication with complainants; and

include contingencies for filing complaints against HR personnel and the City Coordinator (and/or other relevant positional authorities that may be created under the new governance structure).

**We demand that all of the above be added to HR's new DEI Strategic Plan and incorporated into the roll-out and implementation phases of that plan.**

**We demand that the City commission an external audit of the City's employment practices by a competitively selected vendor with a demonstrated record in racial equity (not simply DEI) work. The audit should:**

investigate HR's success in implementing its DEI strategic plan and where the plan or its implementation succeeds and/or falls short;

investigate and identify findings regarding the City's treatment and retention of BIPOC employees; and

make actionable and measurable recommendations for achieving a nondiscriminatory and more inclusive workplace for BIPOC employees.



## **APPENDIX A: STAFF STORIES**

## *My Time as a Black Employee in Minneapolis*

Black staff regularly face implicit barriers, resistance, and undermining by our white colleagues in the completion of our work. Furthermore, when Black staff speaks with leadership about the difficulties we face in the completion of our work, many times our pleas go unheard. As a result, Black staff are required to find alternative approaches to complete our work. Sometimes calling on white allies to engage gatekeepers for help.

My first experience with harmful white staff at the City of Minneapolis came at the expense of a disgruntled Crime Prevention Specialist during my work to reform the City's Conduct on Licensed Premises ordinance. During the policy development stage of the project, I was asked to meet with the Crime Prevention Specialists to provide them with an overview of the proposed ordinance changes and the enforcement process. The Crime Prevention Specialists were understandably frustrated with the lack of communication from leadership. This was by design as MPD leadership intentionally did not want their inclusion in the project. During the meeting, the Crime Prevention Specialist interrupted me several times to object to the evidence-based justifications for the policy reforms and their role in supporting the implementation of this work. As I responded positively to their frustrations it became evident that I was only going to keep the conversation positive and look for ways staff could help leadership move the policy's implementation forward. After the meeting, a white woman Crime Prevention Specialist began to question me about my role within the city, education, and experience. She justified her questioning due to my email address, indicating my employment status was grant-funded to everyone in the room. Immediately the only sworn MPD staff member in the room concluded the meeting as he saw that I was visibly upset. When I asked for this interaction to be addressed, MPD said they were going to address the behavior of the white woman Crime Prevention Specialist but nothing about the behavior of all the Crime Prevention Specialists in the room. Nothing was done and the Crime Prevention Specialist Staff continued to resist efforts to implement the Conduct on Licensed Premises Ordinance for the two years I supported the project.

Crime Prevention Specialists' resistant behaviors continued after they were transferred to NCR. NCR leadership spoke to me about helping to plan around the Crime Prevention Specialist integration into the Department. During one of our conversations, the former Neighborhood Community Relations Director asked me to help his leadership team in their integration efforts but did not want me to interact with Crime Prevention Specialists because they blamed me for their transfer to NCR. When the former NCR director told me this, I was immediately hurt and upset. To think that my knowledge and experience were valuable, but my presence wasn't, baffled me. At no time was their treatment of me acknowledged by the Director and no efforts were going to be made to address the way CPSs were speaking of me to other colleagues.

Our organization's leadership speaks about the importance of racial equity and justice but does little to address inequities for BIPOC staff, especially when BIPOC employees are harmed by their colleagues. We go above and beyond to do our jobs but it feels like we have to prepare for battle just to achieve the results asked of us. At times being disrespected and undermined when our efforts disrupt the status quo. If we speak up, we are either ignored or dismissed and if we continue to speak up many of us fear career reprisal. If Minneapolis is going to achieve its goals, leadership needs to change the way it treats its BIPOC employees.

Jonathan Williams-Kinsel  
*Office of Performance & Innovation*

## *Working in the Division of Race and Equity*

For the most part, I will let the recently published article about the staff exodus from the Division of Race & Equity stand on its own; its text is copied below. I do not want to speak for my colleagues who have left the City, although I know this article only scratches the surface. I encourage you to also review the report of former staff interviews quoted in the Racket article, as it includes more voices from our former team and significantly more detail on the trauma staff experienced. I will add a few of my personal experiences to this appendix. In the time that the Division of Race & Equity didn't have a Director - from late summer 2021 until the end of March 2022 - I found it incredibly difficult to get our voice to the table on key issues. Although we didn't have a Director to speak in those spaces, the fact that staff in Race Equity would not be consulted at all, or invited to those spaces even just to create continuity until a new Director started, brought up serious concerns for me. There was still expertise in our office that could have been valuable, both in the rooms we were eventually able to push for access to and those we never even knew existed because we were systematically excluded. Examples include the following:

1. When Ebony and I were the Race Equity team (late summer/early fall 2021), we had regular check-ins with Danielle, and later Heather. During one of these, we were informed that City leadership and CAO staff were meeting to continue editing the ordinance that would turn Race Equity from a Division to a Department. We were not invited to these meetings until we explicitly requested an invite, pointing out that it would be important to have Race Equity staff at the table.
2. When Maria and I were the Race Equity team (fall 2021 through early January 2022), we had to push to have a say in who the panelists were for the Director interviews, to be on the panel ourselves (note - by this time Maria had left, so it was just Track who served on the second panel), and to have a role in editing the second panel interview questions to better reflect the conversation we'd had with Heather about interview question content. We were not invited to do any of these things, and had to propose it ourselves.
3. When Amir Locke was killed by MPD, no one spoke to me about it for weeks. Although I personally would not have been an expert in many elements of how the City should respond, and I acknowledge this, there were things I could have offered, including institutional memory of trauma response services provided by our office after past officer-involved shootings, and how to connect to those again. The fact that by not speaking to me, they did not speak to the Division of Race and Equity at all - even for past context - is deeply concerning to me.
4. In early February 2022, I asked Heather why Race Equity didn't have a larger role in supporting a racially equitable government structure implementation process, and whether racially disaggregated data was being used by those who were shaping the process. Based on our conversation, I decided to seek out some data and collaborated with coworkers to perform those parts of a Racial Equity Impact Analysis that we could as people not involved in the process. I sent that REIA, along with other feedback and offers for support, to key decision-makers in the process, and was informed within 12 hours that a REIA form was not required. When I reiterated that I knew the form was not required, but felt the process to be essential anyway, for the reasons I had previously stated to them, I received no response. The REIA I provided was not attached to the RCAs for presentations to Council on the topic the following week, and neither was any other REIA. Tyeastia has since been invited to the table for the governance structure implementation process, which is exactly what I would hope to see. However, this makes it clear that there were places that Race Equity could have been brought into the conversation sooner, especially since I was explicitly offering capacity to do so.

Track Trachtenberg  
*Division of Race & Equity*

### *An Anonymous Contribution*

Covid is still a concern for many employees and removing the virtual option for staff meetings felt abrupt, like there is a lack of awareness about the risks of in-person meetings to employees and our families. I would have preferred a virtual option within meeting invitations to reduce anxiety among employees so that there was no undue pressure to attend in person. Some of us, including me, have lost loved ones to Covid. Returning to the office is an area where the city should work hard to build trust with employees by prioritizing our well-being and recognizing that not all of us have the same tolerance for Covid risk.

Just as important, addressing racial equity in our workplace requires leadership to devote significant time to group learning and individual work... Many of us, including my entire team, have been purposely doing this work for the last two years and it has transformed the way we work together and how we view our role as public servants and as colleagues. Naively, many white people, myself included, find it confusing when we're asked to study racial equity and think, "I'm not racist, I don't need special training," until we take the time to learn- and then we understand it is lifelong work that changes the way we think. Authentic and productive training is different from the 30-minute training and quiz that HR requires. The City Coordinator role, as the head of our department, where we are struggling to create a healthy inviting workplace and retain good people, requires an ongoing commitment to racial equity learning in order for us to begin to heal. This training is necessary to improve understanding of and the response to the ongoing staff calls for change. I think we need expert third party support to get us started.

*Current CCO employee, anonymous*



## *Harmful Culture in the City of Minneapolis Goes Beyond the Police Department*

City of Minneapolis stated Vision: Minneapolis is an intentionally compassionate city where each of us can reach our full potential while caring for one another, eliminating racial disparities, improving our environment and promoting social well-being. We lead in innovative and creative ways, focused not only on our present needs, but also the success of future generations.

City of Minneapolis stated Mission: Our City government takes strategic action to address climate change, dismantle institutional injustice and close disparities in health, housing, public safety and economic opportunities. In partnership with residents, City leaders help to ensure all communities thrive in a safe and healthy city.

City of Minneapolis stated Values: Equity, Safety, Excellence, Welcoming, Stewardship, Transparency, Health

Above are the stated vision, mission, and values of the City of Minneapolis as written on the linked City webpage. I want to ground my comments in the fact that on paper, our organization appears to embody all the right things. In practice, that is not the experience of many staff and community members, especially Black and brown staff and community members. Writing values about racial equality and transparency doesn't inherently make an organization anti-racist or honest. Aligned actions must support those aspirations. More to that point, the City can't "dismantle institutional injustice" while ignoring and intentionally derailing staff/community attempts to call out and address injustices WITHIN the City institution. Each day I make a choice to step into a toxic culture that harms me because I love my job and making City services work better for marginalized community members, and thus all community members.

An organization's culture reflects its core values, and those values are expressed through, among other things, hiring and promotion, financial expenditures, and choices on where time and energy are focused. If we take a look at these areas within the City, there is little evidence that the City as a whole embodies the vision/mission/values listed above. The culture that is described in our stories and demands points to core values that uphold white supremacy, concentrated power, self-righteousness, and dishonesty. The actions of the City must match the promises and values it says are core to leadership and the enterprise. Employees and community must be able to count on you treating us as you said you would. However, the City is perpetually in a state of overpromising and underdelivering for Black and brown staff and community members. And to add insult to injury, we have members of leadership serving as keynote speakers and winning awards on topics they are failing at in the City such as hiring/retention of BIPOC staff, radical support of racial equity in City services, etc.

On the heels of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights presenting findings of probable cause that the City of Minneapolis and MPD engage in a pattern or practice of race discrimination in violation of the Minnesota Human Rights Act, **it's also important for me to name that race discrimination happens within EVERY department of the City, both internally with staff and externally in service delivery. This anti-Black racism is the fabric of the City enterprise so relegating behavior change to MPD is extremely narrow-sighted and will be ineffective.** It is not only MPD's policies, practices, and culture that need overhauling, it's the entire City. Therefore we are pushing for the demands outlined as these are some steps to start changing broader City culture. But the system isn't designed to support the needs of Black folks so we encounter barrier after barrier of procedural challenges, bureaucratic red tape, respectability politics, resource constraints, feigned ignorance, and legitimate fear of consequences that could threaten our livelihoods. Over the past weeks, we found that many current and former staff share these concerns/demands but are understandably fearful of signing on because of potential consequences or the emotional weight that comes with it. **It is unbelievably sad that we must fear for the jobs we love in order to stand up for what's right.** Some of us have built up a tolerance for this sort of risk because we recognize that we face risk either way. **Do we continue to be beaten in silence or do we reach out and grab the whip to protect our humanity at the expense of what could happen?** What's happening here is nothing new for me. I've faced it in previous organizations and stood up for it there by myself.

Now I have colleagues that are willing to stand up for it alongside me and I am so grateful for them and encouraged by our collective energy.

I'll close with a few thoughts on my time at the City. I've been managing work on unarmed public safety responses for my entire time at the City. It is work that I am incredibly proud of and dedicated to. It is also equally draining because of the racism that the team and I must endure and fight against, both systemic and personally mediated. Myself and other Black staff expressed this to and asked for support from leadership many times over the last 2.5 years, particularly when the former 911 Director, Kathy Hughes, refused to work cooperatively with us. Through that experience, I was made out to be a liar, incompetent at my job, had my ability to pass a background check questioned, embarrassed in front of community members and other staff during public meetings, forced to filter all communications with her through white staff, etc. All of that severely impacted my mental and emotional health and was ignored and covered up by City leadership. I went through the proper procedural channels and still, no one ever took it seriously because they felt it didn't meet the organizational or legal "standard" for discrimination or harassment, even with evidence that white colleagues did not face similar treatment. This all was in addition to feelings of invisibility that came with the murder of Black men by MPD and no acknowledgment from the City about how it affects BLACK people. No concern from leadership about what it's been like to lead a project that requires me to work with colleagues in MPD so that Black community members have alternatives that stand to reduce their contact with MPD. It's so heavy. All the while, watching this work be politicized when it is literally a matter of life and death for Black folks.

I love my job, my team, the CCO colleagues who stand in solidarity with these demands, and those who support them in spirit but are afraid to do so publicly. I urge City leadership and elected officials to use this call to action to prevent further harm to Black and brown staff by supporting the demands with action and accountability measures. There are so many talented and committed staff in the enterprise who want to remain in our jobs in a way that uplifts our humanity. Black staff deserve to come to work in an environment that helps us thrive, not breaks us down until we ultimately leave or become silent.

Gina Obiri

*Office of Performance & Innovation*

## **APPENDIX B: RACKET ARTICLE**

### [Why Did Almost Everyone Quit Minneapolis's Division of Race and Equity?](#)

published March 29, 2022 in *Racket* by Jay Boller

A curious update appeared in a city of Minneapolis newsletter earlier this year. Authored by the Division of Race & Equity's lone remaining employee, it read, "You also haven't heard from us much in general because most of the staff in the Division of Race & Equity have left, and we don't have new staff hired yet."

On March 2, the city announced the hiring of the department's new executive director, Tyeastia Green. News reports highlighted Green's immediate need to "replenish staff" due to "recent turnover." Pre-pandemic, nine staffers worked at the Division of Race & Equity, the city's five-year-old department that's tasked with dismantling "systemic disparities and institutionalized racism" in a deeply unequal city.

What happened? An ex-worker, who we'll call Jordan, agreed to tell *Racket* on the condition of anonymity. "I don't know if it was coordinated... We could not withstand it anymore," Jordan says. "The city will always say, 'Well, the police officers are your coworkers.' Well, the police officers are killing my community, they're literally killing our babies. Coworker or not, there's nobody being held responsible. We encountered resistance in really trying to make a difference."

Members of the old Division of Race & Equity staff, most of whom were people of color, overwhelmingly cited the city's failure to adequately address police killings as their main reason for departure, Jordan says; the bulk of the exodus occurred in mid-2021, though it started shortly after the 2020 police murder of George Floyd. The department didn't keep its frustrations secret. Interviews with concerned Division of Race & Equity workers, past and present, were included in a grant-related August report, which was shared outside the department—all the way up to Heather Johnston, the Interim city coordinator. In it, one worker was asked whether it's possible for the city to help heal fallout from "racist violence."

"No," they responded. "If the city continues to block, barrier, and bruise the staff—city employees themselves—attempting to right the city's wrongs." Under the section header "Insidious City Culture," another worker said, "That's a culture inside of the city that is so awful. It's oppressive, it's traumatizing, it's awful and the players are upholding the culture." The report called for additional training, increased support, and "a clear vision for what success looks like."

Under Green, a Minneapolis native and Black woman, the Division of Race & Equity will rebuild to 4.5 staffers. Currently, it's just the new director and the worker who wrote the newsletter update. Green held a similar leadership position in Burlington, Vermont, and beat out around 60 candidates vying for the Minneapolis job. *Racket* asked a city spokesman for comment on Jordan's assessment of the department. They provided the following statement from Green, who started Monday.

"This is my first week as director of the Race & Equity division. As such I cannot comment on the history of the division over the past couple years," Green says. "What I can say is my goal is to create a division focused on ensuring race is not a determining factor in any measurable outcome and making sure equity is built into the fabric of city operations."

Without dramatic and concrete policy changes to the Minneapolis Police Department, Jordan says, meaningful change from within the city will be difficult. A toxic culture, they say, is too ingrained, noting the hypocrisy of the city paying lip service to racial equality while ignoring calls for change from the Division of Race & Equity. "The city runs good people off. It has nothing to do with the people who are trying to make a change," Jordan says. "This is bigger than us; we were a microcosm of what was happening across the enterprise, because we saw people leave the Civil Rights Department, we saw people leave other departments en masse—and mostly Black women."

## APPENDIX C: CCO EMAILS

*To read the CCO emails referenced in the introduction, please access [this Google Drive link](#).*