

WES ARAOMC AUDIT

To what degree is WES an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural institution?

Executive Summary:

As highlighted in the Washington Ethical Society's 2018-2019 Focus Goals, the organization aims to become an increasingly anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural (ARAOMC) and inclusive congregation.

To help reach this goal, a team of WES members and allies was created to work on an assessment of the current climate at WES based on a survey of membership. A subset of the team took up an audit of WES as an organization, using an ARAOMC lens.

Over the course of a year that spanned 2017-2108, the Audit team interviewed staff and stakeholders, reviewed WES' history, examined processes and looked at how the regular business of the organization is conducted. It also looked at the evolving demographics of the membership and its programs using an ARAOMC focus. The Audit reports on six focus areas: **governance documents; employment; communications and media; building and equipment; WES events and commitments; and platforms and the Sunday Ethical Education for Kids (SEEK).**

The report acknowledges the substantive efforts made in the past, particularly focused on anti-racism, and acknowledges WES' commitment to social justice. This audit includes observations and recommendations on taking WES further on its journey to becoming more inclusive.

Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Racist activities at WES to date

- Hosted two Jubilee workshops (Three day workshops aimed at examining how race and ethnicity have historically shaped our nation and continue play out in our institutions and our daily lives, in order to nurture a multicultural community and oppose racism in all of its forms).
- Hosted workshop on Transforming Whiteness.

- Valuing Differences small group led by Barbara Walker - started Oct. 1, 2012 and ended Dec. 2015.
- “Working for Racial Equity” group - has been in existence for three years.
- Teach and Talks sponsored by the Working for Racial Equity group.
- Platforms
 - ❑ Many platforms incorporate the concepts of systemic racism, white privilege, etc.
 - ❑ Race Card Project, collected Oct. 2015, platform in Nov. 2015.
 - ❑ My Little Children - WES members reflecting on race (around 2009).
 - ❑ Eugene Puryear on mass incarceration.
 - ❑ Amanda’s commitment to herself to have one POC speaking at platform each month (started ~ fall 2015).
- Black Lives Matter banner
 - ❑ WES endorsed Dream Defenders demands at Membership Meeting, November 2014
 - ❑ Platform about BLM September 2015
 - ❑ BLM buttons handed out on Sunday morning along with guide to wearing them, September 2015
 - ❑ Email to entire congregation with info about BLM and announcing new banner
 - ❑ Banner hung September 2015, several speakers “What BLM means to me...” and everyone given the chance to write in their thoughts and reactions.
- Relationship with Family and Friends of Incarcerated People
 - ❑ Fundraising to support FFOIP
 - ❑ WES members attend FFOIP events (cookout, etc.)
 - ❑ Participate at FFOIP’s invitation in MLK march
 - ❑ Teach-ins led by FFOIP (structured around ACLU report on racial disparities in arrests; Eugene Puryear’s book; and racism in general)
- Sidewalk Solidarity/Roadside Remembrance, once a week, over a period of a year and a half
- White Supremacy Teach-In, May 2017
- Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) activities

- ❑ Year-long reading group
 - ❑ Hosted trainings on talking to family about racism, winter 2016
- Multiracial families group, several meetings, 2015-16
- People of Color group formed, fall 2016
- 12-18 month Focus Goal created: Assess our readiness for, and develop a plan to move forward with, becoming an increasingly multicultural, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, inclusive congregation. As part of this plan, include ample opportunities for those who carry relatively privileged identities (white, cis, straight, etc.) to examine that privilege.

Focus Area #1 -- Governance Documents

The following governance documents were reviewed as part of this audit: the WES Focus Goals, the WES Certificate of Incorporation, the WES Constitution, the Overview of WES Governance, and the WES Bylaws.

- The Constitution contains an explicit goal of striving “to foster a climate of purposeful inclusion...We value the diversity of racial and cultural identity and background, nationality, sexual and affectional orientation, gender identity and its expression, religious background and belief, marital status, family structure, age, mental and physical health and ability, political perspective, and educational and class status.”
- While governance documents explicitly identify inclusion, defined broadly, as a goal of WES's fellowship, they do not explicitly identify the existence and impact of systemic racism and oppression and the lingering effects of bias and systemic injustice, or the need to identify and eradicate these where possible.
- There are strong status-quo biases in the WES governance structure that limit the degree to which minority voices can effect change. For example, amendments to the WES Statement of Purpose (SOP) require a vote of WES membership, and unless an amended SOP receives 80 percent of the vote, the original version remains in place. Amendments to the WES Constitution similarly require a two-thirds majority vote of the WES membership to pass.
- The WES Certificate of Incorporation, signed in 1953, states WES's objective as constituting a “liberal religious fellowship, without restriction of race or creed.”

This is a limited list of dimensions of difference, and perhaps most notably, does not include sex.

- Some, but not all, job descriptions include a commitment to anti-racism and social justice work.
- There are no explicit inclusivity principles, goals or criteria built into the selection of key WES officials or participants in various tasks, though social justice is named as being under the Senior Leader's purview. Examples include lay leaders chosen to draft revised WES Statements of Purpose, members of the Lay Leadership Development Committee, the Community Relations Committee, the Board of Trustees, the moderator for membership meetings, and the members of leadership search committees.
- If most/all leaders in WES's hierarchy are from a dominant identity group (cisgender, white, etc.), the Stepwise Conflict Management system laid out in the WES Bylaws may limit effective redress for individuals from oppressed groups, especially if a conflict were to involve those identities.

Recommendations for Focus Area 1: Governance Documents

1. The Constitution could be amended to include "sex" [and "immigration status"] and highlight inclusion in addition to diversity. (2/3 vote of membership required.)
2. Governance documents could be amended to explicitly identify the existence and impact of systemic racism and oppression and the lingering effects of bias and systemic injustice, or the need to identify and eradicate these where possible.
3. The employee handbook could be amended to address issues of sexual harassment directed at employees from members.
4. The Leader's Caring Fund could feature an encouragement to consider ARAOMC goals of inclusion as a factor in directing funds.
5. The Senior Leader could be tasked with developing explicit inclusivity goals for the selection of key WES officials or participants in various tasks or committees.
6. In summary, WES's governance documents include some errors of commission, but more frequently errors of omission. There are elements of WES's governance to be proud of and opportunities for our structures to more explicitly anti-racist, anti-oppression and inclusive, by addressing head-on how entrenched systems of privilege do affect the way we make decisions, form views and carry out the processes and mission of WES.
7. As a follow-on activity in this area, we propose to add an analysis of the evolving racial and gender composition of the Board and other key WES groups over time.

Focus Area 2 – Employment

The audit of employment practices include the review of several documents: multiple job descriptions, a draft of the anti-oppression hiring policies, and the WES employee handbook.

- WES employs four full-time staff, plus several part-time employees.
- In multiple job descriptions, expectations were clearly stated for non-discrimination practices. Specifically in the Senior Leader job description, this person is accountable for leading the implementation of ARAOMC engagement policies and plans.
- In the newly approved anti-oppression hiring policies, WES proposes to actively seek and engage people of color and other marginalized communities to apply for positions or to an active member of the hiring team - for example, by requiring that at least one member of the search team be a person of color and that a minimum of 40 percent of the candidate pool be people of color. WES does not have an explicit affirmative action policy in the sense of targeting a minimum level of representation by marginalized groups.

Recommendations for Focus Area 2: Employment

1. Update all job descriptions with the expectation that ARAOMC training of staff should be done on a regular basis.
2. Implement the newly approved Anti-oppression hiring policies.

Focus Area 3 - Communications & Media

The audit was completed through interviewing Robyn Kravitz, Communications and Administrative Coordinator.

- Media images reflect speaker's photos, nature or inspirational, as well as "images that speak beyond their appearance"; focusing on non-gender conforming images and different body types and abilities; broadening the range of people we see, particularly on people of color.
- Staff has worked to improve targeting of certain groups with Facebook, Meetup, etc.
- Clear improvement in the past couple of years

Recommendations for Focus Area 3: Communication & Media

1. Cultural competency training is encouraged for those who do outreach or any paid or volunteer position at WES.
2. Increase advertising to those who are not electronically accessible
3. Diversify targeting to certain audiences based on gaps in our current outreach - possibly in student newspapers or other streams. This could include LGBTQ magazines and alternative local newspapers.
4. Ensure inclusion of ARAOMC principles into the job description of Communications and Administrative Coordinator.
5. Provide Spanish translation of brochures and website.

Focus Area 4 – WES building

The audit included a review of the WES facility & equipment, architecture, cultural references, and artwork.

- Accessibility: there is an elevator to facilitate movement between the two floors; internal door widths allow wheelchair access; “companion chairs” are reserved in order for someone to sit next to a person in a wheelchair.
- Chairs do not have arms making it easier for larger people to sit comfortably.
- Assisted listening devices are available for attendees in the main hall for platforms (though not other events); Spanish translation is available in theory.
- WES has added new artwork by a Latina artist. However, there is little other culturally diverse artwork displayed.
- There is a “Black Lives Matter” banner and a rainbow banner on the front of the building.
- WES informally offers free space to Family & Friends of Incarcerated People (FFOIP).
- WES also rents out the building to majority POC groups, including two mosques, an Arabic language school and an “AAAA” group. WES has faced challenges with some renters, including excessive noise, starting early or ending late. Due to these potential intercultural issues around times and rules, staff has taken cultural sensitivity training.

Recommendations for Focus Area 4 – WES building

1. Consider the use of automatic door openers for people in a wheelchair or other assistive device to enter the building, unaided.

2. While there is an elevator, WES needs more convenient access to and from the back of the building.
3. Consider adding a curb cut at the front of the building entrance to accommodate those who park at the handicapped parking spot.
4. Facilitate carpooling or pay for transportation to WES for those who do not have cars.
5. Consider getting ear mics, beyond peach ones, for those with different skin tones.
6. Consider changing the stage background to accommodate people of all shades.
7. Install ramp or other device to allow people in wheelchairs or other assistive devices to access the stage.
8. Diversify the building's artwork to reflect the WES and greater community.
9. Spanish translation needs to be more consistent and contact info visibly posted in Spanish.
10. Consider use of assisted listening devices for other events, beyond platforms.

Focus Area 5 - Events and Commitments

This audit was completed through interviews with lead staff.

- Camping Trip in May, annually
 - Overview: Approximately 100 people participate, involves money and physical access that may be difficult for people with various physical abilities.
 - Obstacles to inclusion - financial, physical accessibility, and transportation.
 - Recommendations for Camping Trip:
 - Outreach should be conducted to ensure that attendees are from diverse backgrounds. For example, if members from marginalized groups are personally invited, there could be a greater possibility of them attending. WES should promote that all members are welcome, offer a sliding scale, and provide the loan of camping supplies, if needed.
- Auction/Follies "WES Tonight," periodically performed
 - Overview: \$25 entrance fee plus separate costs for childcare
 - Recommendations for Auction/Follies:
 - Active outreach for diverse attendees.
 - Make entrance fee a suggested donation, on a sliding scale so that no one can be turned away.

- Stone Soup/Schmoozapalooza/Neighborhood Potlucks
 - Overview: Events that involve a potluck or social meal.
 - Concerns raised about when people cannot afford to bring a food item or pay a fee, like \$5.
 - Recommendations for Stone Soup/Schmoozapalooza/Neighborhood Potlucks:
 - Clearly and consistently advertise that donations are suggested, but not mandatory
- Global Connections
 - Overview: Cost covers airfare, which may be several hundred dollars. Scholarships and fundraisers are available.
 - Recommendations for Global Connections:
 - Ensure attendee list is more diverse through active outreach.
 - Clearly advertise application costs and travel expenses can be negotiated to fit the members' needs.

Overall recommendations for Focus Area 5 - Events and Commitments:

1. Implement a sliding scale for admission to various WES fundraising events. This might mean less income for WES; however, people should not feel that they may be turned away due to lack of funds. Also WES could add a section asking people to contribute towards others' admission or transportation costs.
2. Provide childcare costs and transportation assistance to remove barriers.
3. Consider providing free or subsidized transportation to some of these events, like the camping trip.
4. Actively consider new WES events that can be more welcoming to people from various marginalized groups.

Focus Area 6 - Platforms & Sunday Ethical Education for Kids (SEEK)

This section of the audit was performed through interviews with WES lead staff and analysis of data provided by them. Data revealed the following:

- Racial Diversity in WES membership has increased from 4.5% in Dec 2015 to 8.3% in Dec 2017 on an expanded base of 326 members. Twenty-eight percent of the children participating in the SEEK program are persons of color (POC).

- Percentage of POC officiants has been high: between 27-29% in the past two years. The percentage has dipped temporarily this year to make space for the participation of the clergy intern.
- Of the external platform speakers, an increasing percentage have been POC: 8%, 15% and 28% in the past two and the current year respectively. Around 12-14% of the platforms have had an ARAOMC focus during the past 3 years.
- While the WES chorus continues to be all white, increasing percentages of external musicians (14%, 29%, 30%) performing at WES have been POC over 2016-2018.
- Over the past three years WES has used 164 pieces of music, some of them performed several times. The number of performances adds up to 310 of which 229 (74%) were drawn from Western/White traditions; 56 (18%) came from African American traditions; 13 (4%) from Latin music traditions; and 12 (4%) from other traditions.
- It was possible only to do a partial review of the SEEK curriculum review looking at materials used during March 2016, March 2017 and March 2018. While a full review is underway, even this more limited review revealed interesting data: the materials well represent our ethical principles, including difference and inclusion. However, where the materials had children as characters, all those children were white.

Recommendations for Focus Area 6 - Platforms & SEEK

1. Complete SEEK curriculum review using an ARAOMC lens.
2. Develop better (non-intrusive) methods to measure demographic characteristics of WES membership: we currently rely on staff's informed impressions about gender/ethnicity/sexual orientation.
3. Enrich the diversity of the WES chorus and Band through sustained outreach. Look for opportunities to participate in multi-cultural music events with other groups - choral events focused on non-white musical traditions and cultures, for example.
4. Find teaching materials that represent children from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds. To help meet this goal, (especially for materials created in-house) we recommend that staff sets a specific target— for instance, that written/visual materials must include children of more than one racial/ethnic background, children of varying abilities, etc. Materials written by other groups could be reviewed using this lens as well, and supplemental visuals/reading materials added as needed.

5. Develop a more systematized record of SEEK materials used, curriculum and attendance.

Summary:

- The ARAOMC Audit team will offer a 90 day comment period soliciting any feedback about the audit report and the recommendations included.
- After the comment period, the Audit Team may offer additional feedback and recommendations to WES. This report plans to integrate the results of the assessment completed in Summer 2018 and the talking groups in the Fall of 2018, as these were unable to be included in this report.
- The ARAOMC Audit Team will provide this brief update at the WES Spring Membership Meeting in 2019.