



CAN Board of Directors Meeting

1/14/22 Minutes

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting

Present: **Tamara Atkinson**, Capital Area Workforce Solutions; **Moin Baig**, Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce; **Nora Comstock**, CAN Community Council; **Devon Darden**, Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; **David Evans**, Integral Care; **Hal Katz**, Integral Care; **Sherri Fleming**, (for Travis County Judge Andy Brown); **Simone Talma Flowers**, Interfaith Action of Central Texas; **Vanessa Fuentes**, Council Member, City of Austin; **Suchitra Gururaj**, UT Austin; **Jeremy Martin**, Greater Austin Chamber; **Ofelia Zapata**, Austin ISD Trustee; **Juan Garza**, (for Mike Geeslin, Central Health); **Mike Geeslin**, Central Health; **Denise Hernandez**, Travis County Attorney's Office; **Kenny Hill**, Goodwill Industries Central Texas; **Rudy Metayer**, Pflugerville City Council Member; **Walter Muse**, Precinct One Commissioner's Office; **Jo Anne Ortiz**, Capital Metro; **David Smith**, United Way for Greater Austin; **Nancy Gilliam**, CAN Community Council; **Rachel Hampton**, CAN Community Council,

Other guests: Joseph Allen, Austin ISD; Lawrence Lyman, Travis County; Ara Merjanian.

CAN staff in attendance: Raul Alvarez, Carlos A Soto, Jelina Tunstill

Call to order and Introduction: Board Chair Suchitra Gururaj called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm and introduced the meeting.

Minutes: The 12/10/2021 CAN Retreat minutes and notes were approved, with edits, after a motion submitted by Suchitra Gururaj which was seconded by Hal Katz. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Community Council Update: Rachel Hampton, vice-chair, reported that the Community Council will meet later in the month. They are currently working on finalizing the vice chair role. There are two candidates being considered. The nomination should be finalized at the January meeting. There are also a few openings on the council that they are working on filling. As the year closed, the Council was focusing on three main priority issue areas: eviction, food insecurity, and mental health. Members engaged in dialogue with expert panelists, researched local conditions, and gathered their findings in report format. The Mental Health report and the Food Insecurity report will be completed this month and shared in February. The group is still working on their priorities for 2022. The general consensus appears to be moving towards taking a deeper dive into mental health and aligning efforts with the CAN Board.

CAN Executive Director's Report: Raul Alvarez announced that there is a new opening for an Administrative/Communication Specialist. The position has already been listed. The process for establishing CAN as an unincorporated non-profit association (TUUNAA) continues. We are now ready to move forward in executing some of the member agreements. We will begin with the partners who are on the Executive Committee. This month we will work through questions, issues, and recommended changes from those partners, and then bring the revised materials that come out of that to the rest of the CAN members. There are also three Expanding Opportunity Forums scheduled, as follow-up conversations to the Regional Summit in November. These are scheduled for January 26 (Communities of Color and the Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery), February 9 (Building a Family-Friendly Workplace), and February 23 (Women and the Post Pandemic Economic Recovery).

Next, Alvarez discussed the budget for the upcoming year. He noted that it is nearly identical to the previous budget with a few minor modifications. Revenue levels have not changed because partner dues have not changed and no new partners have been added in a few years. In the past, committees have been appointed to review membership and partner contribution levels. The strategic plan includes an item about looking at partner contribution levels to come up with a more formulaic way of approaching those instead of the current ad-hoc approach. The chair and the Executive Director will meet to further discuss, including whether to bring a

recommendation to the Executive Committee to form a committee. A motion to accept the recommended budget was submitted by Sherri Fleming. The motion was seconded by Simone Talma Flowers. The motion was approved unanimously.

Overview of Dec. 2021 Retreat and Status of 2022 CAN Workplan & Priorities: At the retreat two main priorities were identified for CAN were: “ensuring an equitable economic recovery” and “addressing community mental health and wellness.” Regarding the retreat, some of the topics that stood out in response to the prompt related to what should CAN be working on were: CAN could help to engage difficult to reach populations; adopt a more regional focus by engaging with more Hays and Williamson County members; cross-partner engagement on priority issues; and connecting with local and regional community leaders. There were also comments on improving and building resilience to our emergency response, especially as it relates to future pandemics and severe weather events. Some participants were interested in knowing about success stories, case studies, and other information about initiatives or programs in other cities or communities in Texas or the region. These examples could be highlighted to get a better idea of what works.

CAN Partner Discussion: Partners were prompted to discuss priorities within the issue areas of “mental health & wellness” and “ensuring an equitable economic recovery” to determine specific ways that CAN may have an impact. Partners discussed the work they are engaged in or planning to engage in related to the two issue areas, and what help they may need to address them.

Cost of living is a challenge for community members, so improvement of wages is paramount. Returning to work will also look different, as a return to work, as it was before the pandemic, is just not feasible. The Austin Chamber plans for 2022 include developing the next 5-year strategy of their Opportunity Austin plan. This initiative, launched in 2004, has served as the community and economic development strategy that the Chamber implements. The focus is on helping existing businesses stay and grow, invest in education, workforce development, talent development, and to ensure we have the infrastructure and regulation in place to be business friendly today and prepare us with a resilient economy for the future. In terms of mental health, the Chamber is working to recognize organizations that promote a good, supportive workplace and to ensure that organizations have access to the necessary resources.

The new President at UT is working on a strategic plan, which will include a diversity and inclusion community engagement action plan. This will be an opportunity to think about workforce development along the K-12 pipeline. Another commitment from UT is to partner more intentionally with their higher education partners across the city. At the Austin Economic Development Corporation, UT and Workforce Solutions are calling attention to student housing affordability and improved opportunities for recent graduates in the region. In terms of mental health, children and students are struggling, contributing to an overwhelmed feeling and staffing challenges at UT.

At the Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce, a focus last year was the backlash against Asians resulting from the pandemic. Mental health continues to be a pressing concern but addressing it can be complicated by cultural barriers. It would be great to organize some sort of workshop or seminar to engage and share resources.

The Community Council will continue focusing on mental health, recognizing that it's a critical component of the economic recovery and working on mental health helps the recovery. Initiatives helping to reduce the stigma of mental health could use our support.

Travis County will embark on a strategic planning process over the next year to look at what our direction should be. They are also looking at operationalizing an increase in remote work among County employees who can do so. Starting in February they will have a diversity and inclusion officer that will work in Economic Development and Strategic Investments (EDSI), within the Planning and Budget office. They will also design a community engagement process to hear from the community about how to target remaining ARPA funds that the county has not invested as

of yet. EDSI is also pulling together an investment process similar to the work they did in 2020 with small businesses. The county is also recognizing that some of the mental health concerns experienced by the community throughout the pandemic will likely be surfacing. So there will be a focus on supporting capacity with regard to mental health. There have also been \$1M budgeted for an investment in grassroots community-based mental health services. The County has also set as a goal to invest resources assigned by the Federal Government to their department that they hope will support ongoing services. Rental assistance and eviction support continue and will continue to be essential. Travis County HHS also continues to advocate for additional investment in social services as costs continue to rise in the pandemic economy.

The City of Austin invested \$100 million in efforts related to homelessness. Mental health will be an important component in addressing homelessness. CAN's convening power will be essential for engaging the community around the city and county initiatives. Mental health will also be a specific District 2 priority. The City rental assistance fund has also been depleted, and they are looking for additional revenue sources. These include potential Federal dollars from ARPA, the Federal infrastructure package, or Build Back Better. The City is also open to feedback on what else they could be doing and suggestions about where it would make sense for them to pay more attention.

For Integral Care, an important part of the "equitable economic recovery" should be opportunity, because a returning to what existed before the pandemic is not much of a recovery for the communities that were already struggling. To that end, Integral Care will focus on a livable wage for their employees to ensure they can live and work in the community. They are also continuing to work closely with a racial equity task force to help remove organizational inequities. Integral Care is also in the final stages of hiring a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) officer and reviewing their hiring and contracting procedures. The goal with regard to re-examining contracting procedures is to ensure that they work with contractors who also have DEI policies and procedures. To support their work, they will endeavor to share their findings, initiatives, and strategies. They also want to be visible and helpful in delivering a unified message around the economic recovery and removing the stigma around mental health, mental illness, substance use disorder, and homelessness. Something that would amplify our individual partner work is some form of big, unified, collaborative, consistent message that can be shared with the community. Integral Care is also working on the local implementation of a new 9-8-8 national hotline for mental health help and service. They are also collaborating with the City and County to collaboratively address homelessness.

Austin ISD has worked on an effort to get staff to complete Mental Health First Aid (which should be adopted district-wide). Families are under high levels of pressure due to the pandemic and students and families are struggling with mental health. Cultural barriers complicate the issue. An unfinished effort is a collaboration with NAMI involving mental health mentorship within schools. The 2021 Winter Storm put education on the back burner, complicating families' ability to recover economically. Consistent messaging centering education is key. Some initiatives being implemented across the district include continuing to ensure covid protocols are in place to keep students and staff safe. This includes sustaining 11 testing sites, and a new community testing site at the Burger Athletics Center open from 8 am to 6 pm Monday through Saturday. The district also established a new department of "social emotional wellness and systems of support," which will house the "social emotional learning and cultural inclusiveness office," "the counseling and crisis and mental health department," and the multi-tiered "systems of support office." District-wide, they have begun implementing their Centering Equity and Cultural Proficiency and Inclusiveness professional learning series so every employee across the district can access additional professional learning. There is also increased focus on mental health, especially as it relates to crisis response and crisis intervention. The response plan also includes special attention to racist and discriminatory incidents. Another initiative focuses on collaborating with community members to eliminate racial disparity in the teaching discipline by

developing community informed disciplinary practices that are restorative-based, culturally-relevant, and help to eliminate disciplinary disparities.

Workforce Solutions has released a newer version of the Community Workforce Plan, called the Hire Local Plan. It emphasizes their mission to connect local people with local jobs. The plan incorporates new methodology taking on affordability with special attention to childcare and housing. They have also been contracted with \$12.3 million in ARPA funds to expend in skill building and job attachment for local residents over the next 2 years. In addition, they are placing special emphasis on childcare and training staff in trauma informed care.

CAN Partner Survey and Next Steps: Raul Alvarez guided board members through a two-question survey to gather feedback on workgroups and follow-up around the issues highlighted in the expanding opportunity forums.

Adjournment: Tamara Atkinson adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.