



ANTI-RACISM REPORT

January – March 2021

Introduction

As STAR staff returned to work in January with hopes of a better year to come, we were instead faced with the reports of a violent mob storming the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, January 6th. As an organization centered around the prevention and response to trauma, we acknowledged this for what it was: a traumatic event. In response, we released a statement, [Trauma Histories and Futures: STAR's Response to Recent and Ongoing Political Violence](#).

Since then, more attention has been brought to the [rise in reported hate crimes against Asian people](#) over the past year in the U.S., resulting in many Asian people across the nation feeling unsafe in their communities. Advocacy group Stop AAPI Hate released a [report](#) on thousands of reported incidents of anti-Asian harassment and violence reported to them over the past year. On the same day this report was released, a white gunman in Atlanta [killed eight people](#), six of the victims being Asian women. STAR [issued a statement](#) in response, while other responses brought attention to how inextricably linked sexual and racial harassment are for non-white women in the U.S.

This March, the trial of Derek Chauvin began, heightening anxiety for many around the question of whether justice will be served or denied for George Floyd, and whether a legacy of a deadly lack of accountability will be continued or disrupted. Witnesses in the trial have shared about the trauma they experienced from watching George Floyd be murdered.

Recently, we received a message that STAR should be “laser-focused” on “our” issue, meaning sexual violence. We are remaining focused, though not laser-focused. We are focused on recognizing and amplifying the many ways human beings experience sexual violence, including sexualized racism. We are focused on the many forms of trauma and institutional barriers that prevent equal access to justice and healing after a sexual assault, including barriers that are based on race. We are focused on working toward our vision of a healthy community free from oppression and sexual trauma.

Below are updates on our developing efforts to dismantle how racism functions in our organization and better embody our vision and values in our work. For background info, please visit our [website](#) to learn more about these efforts.

Progress

OBJECTIVE 1

Launch an anti-racism committee.

At STAR's March staff meeting, we engaged in a staff-wide conversation about proposed STAR initiatives to promote a healthy and inclusive workplace. During this discussion, we sought feedback about STAR's Anti-Racism Committee, which was established last fall.

Over the past six months, we've thought through broader initiatives to better address and ultimately eliminate racism at STAR, most of which were not being advanced or driven by this committee. Additionally, this committee was initially composed of mostly white staff members and later solely of white staff members, as we increasingly received feedback from POC staff members that they did not have the bandwidth for these conversations and this work at this time.

Based on feedback from staff at this March staff meeting and after further conversation at our subsequent committee meeting, we decided to suspend the Anti-Racism Committee and transition our approach.

Moving forward, we plan to host what we're informally referring to as "staff engagement meetings." Each meeting will focus on a different issue, with STAR leadership providing updates related to the topic and seeking staff questions and input to drive our approach and next steps. These meetings will be open to all staff but attendance will be optional. We hope this will encourage more staff involvement and input in our efforts to address racism and build a healthier, more inclusive organization, while also being mindful of individual staff members' capacity.

OBJECTIVE 2

Facilitate critical conversations among staff.

We envision the staff engagement meetings described above as opportunities to engage in critical conversations as a staff. Our March staff meeting opened up conversation in sometimes uncomfortable but important ways, and we hope to continue fostering workplace dialogue that brings hidden issues out into the open during regular team and staff meetings. Though these conversations can be difficult, we are getting feedback from staff that they feel better once things are out in the open. We want to foster a workplace culture where direct and sometimes uncomfortable conversations prevent the worse realities of toxic stress, harm, and trauma.

We are also working to coordinate more staff in-services to build staff knowledge and skills in working with survivors who hold marginalized identities. We will be hosting our first critical conversations session on April 22nd to discuss serving nonbinary and trans survivors. This session will be facilitated by Louisiana Trans Advocates.

OBJECTIVE 3

Develop policies and procedures, and provide staff training in key areas to change STAR culture.

Microaggressions/Anti-Harassment Policy

We are still in the process of updating STAR's Anti-Harassment Policy. Members of our Management Team are currently reviewing the draft of this new policy and providing input. We will come together as a Management Team to discuss implementation of this new policy, which we view as a critical opportunity to further define and alter our culture in ways that foster expectations of respect and prevent harm.

In addition to covering a continuum of harmful behaviors in the workplace, this policy will better address third-party harassment and better clarify expectations for reporting and investigating harassment and related behaviors.

Climate Survey

STAR conducted its first formal climate survey in January and presented results from the survey to staff in our March staff meeting. The survey was administered to full-time staff and part-time staff who work in STAR's offices. Ninety-two percent of staff completed the survey, with strong representation from each of our branches. We appreciate staff being willing to respond to this survey at such a high rate to give us a comprehensive picture of staff experiences and perceptions on how STAR is doing as an agency and how we can improve.

Areas of improvement identified through the survey include:

- Improving our responsiveness and transparency to concerns raised by staff regarding the organization's culture and operations
- Improving the level of inclusivity of our workplace
- Reaching and engaging diverse communities
- Building trust between staff and managers to encourage reporting of experiences along the continuum of harm
- Reducing staff experiences of behaviors along the continuum of harm

These are areas we will continue to work to improve, and we will conduct annual climate surveys moving forward in accordance with our updated anti-harassment policy.

Staff Participation in Dialogue on Race Series

STAR is continuing to pay for STAR staff to participate in the Dialogue on Race Louisiana (DOR) Series.

OBJECTIVE 4

Update STAR's Core Training.

Members of STAR staff have reviewed STAR's 20-hour online Core Training and compiled recommendations for updates to better reflect our commitment to inclusion and anti-oppression work. We plan to incorporate this feedback into the training this summer, prior to our fall volunteer training.

OBJECTIVE 5

Review our community partnerships.

Last year, STAR's Person of Color (POC) Network identified lack of POC representation on STAR's Board and Regional Councils as an issue that needed addressing. This recommendation drove conversation at subsequent Board and Regional Council meetings about the importance of shifting to having these structures represent the communities we serve, specifically through being more intentional about recruiting non-White individuals to serve on our Councils.

For full transparency, here is a current breakdown of our Board and Regional Councils by race:

- Governing Board of Directors: 5 White people, 3 Black people, and 2 people who are bi-racial/multi-racial
- Capital Area Regional Council: 8 White people and 2 Black people
- Greater New Orleans Regional Council: 8 White people

Across our branches, we have identified potential Board and Regional Council members who would help us more fully represent the survivors we serve at these higher levels.

We have also compiled information on our community partners to identify what populations or areas of focus are not represented in our partnerships. We plan to use this information to guide our development of new partnerships that better represent those who are most impacted by sexual violence.

OBJECTIVE 6

Think more intentionally about leadership development within STAR.

Leadership development is a key focus for promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within organizations. Non-intentional leadership development practices can result in the advancement of those who are more privileged or those who have more similarities to people already in positions of leadership. Though we've come a long way in recent years regarding the hiring and promotion of Black and POC staff members, we still have work to do when it comes to planning for the future. For this reason, we are working to develop clearer, more intentional processes for leadership development at STAR.

We conducted a survey of staff on perceptions of what leadership looks like at STAR, and are planning a discussion at our upcoming Management meeting on this topic. We also elicited feedback on staff members' interests in professional development and advancement, which we've shared with supervisors, to guide individualized leadership development.

OBJECTIVE 7

Maintain STAR's Person of Color Network.

In 2017, STAR staff members established a Person of Color (POC) Network. The POC Network continues to offer a safe space for POC staff members to fellowship, support and learn from each other how to navigate the intersections between racism and sexual violence, and to organize events and initiatives that focus specifically on meeting needs of POC survivors and community members.

Members of this network have also developed group guidelines in collaboration with STAR's Vice President to clarify group logistics and to clarify expectations for managers to support their team members' involvement in the Network. These guidelines will be added to STAR's procedures to formalize the Network as a part of STAR's operations and ensure all staff are informed about its history, purpose, and importance.