

# The National Collegiate Choral Organization

## Minutes from the Meeting of the National Board

Thursday 13 August 2020 / 12:00–3:30p ET via Zoom

### **Building Capacity for An Anti-Racist Organization**

#### *Our Work for the Next Round*

#### **In attendance → Executive Board**

Dominick DiOrio, President  
Miguel Ángel Felipe, President-Elect  
Elizabeth Swanson, Vice President

Matthew Ferrell, Treasurer  
Marie Bucoy-Calavan, Secretary  
Mark Nabholz, Chief Editor of Publications

#### **In attendance → National Board**

##### **Central Region** (8 of 10)

Nicole Aldrich, Marques Garrett, Brian Schmidt,  
Andy Morgan, Elise Hepworth, Mariana Farah,  
Tracey Gregg-Boothby, Nicholaus Cummins

##### **Eastern Region** (9 of 10)

Caron Daley, Marguerite Brooks, Tim Reno, Brandon  
Williams, Helena von Rueden, Daniel McDavitt,  
Jeffrey Douma, Nicolas Dosman, Rollo Dilworth

##### **Midwestern Region** (9 of 10)

Erin Colwitz, Michael McGaghie, Eduardo  
Garcia-Novelli, Richard Schnipke, Gabriela  
Hristova, Cheryl Frazes Hill, Steven  
Hankle, Merrin Guice Gill, Lee Nelson

##### **Southern Region** (6 of 10)

Jennifer Sengin, Alicia Walker, Gary  
Packwood, Ianthe Marini, Jason Max  
Ferdinand, William Powell

##### **Western Region** (8 of 10)

Shawna Stewart, Timothy Westerhaus, Kellori  
Dower, Jace Saplan, Alec Schumacker, Jeffrey  
Benson, Katherine FitzGibbon, Reed Criddle

#### **In attendance → Guests**

Brian Gorelick, Meeting Secretary

Rev. Dr. Jamie Washington, Meeting Facilitator



#### **Part 1 → Introduction**

Dominick began today's National Board Meeting by introducing Elizabeth to the attendees. Elizabeth welcomed the board members to NCCO's Anti-Racism Summit and thanked them for attending virtually to do this important work for the organization. She expressed how much every member's contributions and perspectives are valued, so NCCO and choral field can take this opportunity to evolve into a new future. She understood that today's conversations will be emotionally charged and how this was necessary because change has not been taking place in

our profession. She closed by stating that NCCO wants to provide a platform to become anti-racist and to serve everyone in our organization in a just manner.

Dominick thanked Elizabeth and the attendees as president of NCCO. In a recent email to the membership, he outlined the way NCCO has been diverse in the past but expressed that this was only the beginning, which led to today's "unprecedented, first-ever meeting of our National Board and Executive Board outside of our every-two-year conference gatherings." He stressed that examining racism in our tertiary programs is necessary and we are the gatekeepers of our programs. His goal is to use today's conversations to inform the priorities of the organization moving forward to "long-lasting, systemic change that will set the standard for the profession for the future."

Dominick expressed his gratitude to the Executive Board in walking this path to prepare for our deeply necessary work. He thanked the fifteen board members with us today who offered their advice and names to seek out for our consulting work. He also thanked eight National Board members who took part in a first gathering with our facilitator. These members were Rollo Dilworth, Kellori Dower, Jason Max Ferdinand, Jace Saplan, Helena von Reuden, Merrin Guice Gill, Gary Packwood, and Marques Garrett.

Dominick closed his remarks by introducing our facilitator, the Rev. Dr. Jamie Washington, president of The Washington Consulting Group.

## **Part 2 → *Building Capacity to Explore and Engage Systemic Racism***

Jamie thanked Dominick and Elizabeth for the opportunity to lead our organization in this summit. He informed us that he valued choral music and singing very much. He has a music minor from Indiana University and was a singer in the African American Choral Ensemble, and he also sang in choir at Slippery Rock University.

The title of today's summit is "Building Capacity for An Anti-Racist Organization: Our Work for the Next Round" (Slide 1).

Jamie shared his understanding of being a minority in choral spaces, believing that we are not the ones who need to be convinced that anti-racist work matters. He truly is "preaching to the choir" but also "the choir needs rehearsal" which is "preparing the choir to be more effective, build its capacity, and own its responsibility for the people not showing up" because sometimes the choir is not an inviting place.

Jamie invited all of us to engage in a Land Acknowledgement (Slide 2). From his geographical place, he honored the original homeland of the Piscataway tribe and their painful history. He thanked the original caretakers of the land and expressed that the work didn't start with him and won't end with him. The attendees were asked to enter land acknowledgments in the chat box.

Jamie introduced the idea of Old Technologies (Slide 3) with icons of flip phones, VCR tapes, and dial telephones. He pointed out that we have been doing diversity, equity, and inclusion work with old technologies that are ineffective now. He then listed Old Technologies for Diver-

sity (Slide 4), emphasizing that “multiculturalism, We Are The World, Holiday Concerts with all-Christmas music, gospel choirs at convocations, and spirituals in concerts” are from the 1980s and 1990s and were only changing the most visible aspects of our choral world. He told us that “to be more anti-racist in our work, it’s time for an upgrade which will not feel comfortable, but if it is not done, we will not be able to achieve the missions we are called to.”

The next slide presented was **The Upgrade** (Slide 5). Jamie stressed four large areas of work that need to be accomplished:

- Define Terms: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
- Developing our Voice
- Doing Self Work
- Intent and Impact

Jamie shared how clarifying our intentions is vital to this upgrade (Slide 6). We need to “deepen the level of authentic conversations about interpersonal relations and systemic racism.” Jamie made clear that we often say just what is easy and then have a “meeting after the meeting” to address what is needed. A much better way is to create a learning environment that engages systemic racism directly. Key tools are self-awareness and common language. Jamie stated that “the leader is important, but the infrastructure needs to be built for when the leader is gone.”

To prepare for being more interactive in the summit, Jamie invited us to use the chat box, and the reaction button to support each other when individuals “put truth in the room” and not leave people alone when they “say the unsaid.” He stressed that joining in was not necessarily agreement but a “thank you for offering the idea in the room” to discuss further (Slide 7).

To begin conversing on the subject of racism, Jamie asked us to text 37607 with the message “Jamiewashing110” or click on a URL to find the same poll. Unfortunately, the technology did not work so Jamie changed to give voice to our response to “I enter today...thinking...feeling...” in the chat box. Members entered their thoughts and feelings, but this did not work effectively for the group as a whole, so Jamie moved ahead.

Jamie projected a new slide and asked everyone to go to breakout rooms and complete the statements on the slide as a way to initiate our first conversations (Slide 8). The board engaged in breakout rooms in pairs for 10 minutes. The statements were as follows:

- “I experience Racism or its impact on my role as a choral professional...”
- “I feel confident in my abilities to identify/address issues of systemic Racism...”
- “I hoped for our time together today...”

We returned as a full group and Jamie asked the board members to determine the contextual dynamics for creating a more anti-racist community. Members entered ideas in the chat box, which included the need to integrate the choral music canon, understand who our audiences are, reflect upon our legacy of standards and traditions, and acknowledge the religious affiliations of our institutions. Jamie expressed to us that “who am I” is also part of the context and suggested that we “begin with me, then us, then the music department.” He spoke to the fact

that the structure of our choral programs, which we designed in a certain way because of our training, might contain some inherent, implicit bias.

Jamie reflected on how the context right now also contains the double pandemics of COVID-19 and the country's profound awareness of systemic racism because of the killings of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor. These events have turned everything into a trauma-impaired moment and created the perfect storm for slowing down and engaging race. In the past, our institutions only viewed diversity in general, but did not directly engage race and anti-blackness as a dynamic.

Jamie asked for statements of what we want to achieve today. One board member spoke to having racial conversations only at crisis times, which get addressed but are quickly followed by normal choir activities and not made business as usual. Jamie recommended that we move beyond a crisis to crisis mode. He also reminded us that the summit's goal is not to finish the work today but to choose one goal for the fall semester that can be accomplished.

Jamie projected next **A Primary Role of Higher Education** (Slide 9). "To prepare the next generation of leaders. Leaders will need the competencies, skills, and capacity to engage and lead effectively within, across, and about difference." Jamie made it clear that this was not a left-wing political approach, but an expression of value that all of us matter. He felt that those people who do not believe in this will find the effort uncomfortable. Our job, then, is to prepare the next generation of leaders, and we must teach them how race and gender inform their lens. As one member expressed in the chat, "if we are graduating folks who don't understand how race or gender inform our knowing and our lens, then we have failed them." The approach from the 1980s and 1990s allowed for proximity with gospel music and striving to make the unrepresented other comfortable. The new work needed must lead to the capacity to engage with all students prepared for the future. Jamie expressed that we do not need to be experts, but we do need to understand.

To build a stronger choral ensemble, Jamie recommended creating the environment first through **Learning Community Agreements** (Slide 10). This means engaging the members in how race matters in the first rehearsal. One of the first signs that racism exists is when "we" statements are discounted, as leaders can always find one person to disagree, and then call the issue raised "too sensitive." Jamie reflected on how in the 1980s we used "I" experiences and did not engage the group experiences. He made it clear that we cannot create an anti-racist organization without engaging conflict and discomfort and "airtime" for everyone is crucial.

Jamie then asked us to consider on a scale of 1 to 10 how open and honest our organization or choir is as well as for all the bullet points on Slide 10. He reminded us that it is common for people to agree to operate in these ways in the training session but leave the tools in the session

room and wonder why nothing has changed. He insisted that “we must do the work to get to the space we need to get to.”

Jamie asked for chat entries about what we do well from the list on Slide 10. As we go back to our choirs and organizations, and also for NCCO, he told us to “do what you do well and watch what happens. If you practice your strength, we will be in a new place this time next year.”

### **Part 3 → Let's Talk About Race**

Jamie began the second session of the summit with an important quote from Ibram X. Kendi (Slide 11). In his book *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi wrote: “Being an Antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination.” Then Jamie asked the board members to talk about race in breakout rooms for 15 minutes in pairs. He presented these questions to answer (Slide 12):

“How do you identify racially?”

“Where did you grow up and what was it like racially?”

“Was race discussed in your family? If so, in what way?”

“What relationships did you have across race?”

“When do you remember being treated differently because of race?”

“How do you witness or experience racism or Anti-Blackness in your work as a choral professional?”

We returned as a full group and Jamie asked for vocal contributions about what was discussed in the breakout rooms. Many board members shared their experiences and feelings about race and gender with power, vulnerability, and inspiration.

One told of how saying private, black-group conversation statements to white people was scary. When Jamie asked why, the member spoke to not wanting to be offensive to the other but also not wanting to reveal “secrets” about their personal life.

Another member wondered if a professor without tenure can take these chances, because of what happens in the meeting after the meeting. They were concerned about black people being called upon to speak when there is a crisis and how this is a burden to bear, especially when navigating relationships and doing everything a choral faculty needs to do. This was confirmed by a colleague who spoke to the truth that this doesn't change with tenure and how microaggressions continue.

Other board members spoke to how black voices only matter when there are issues going on, rather than all the time in all ways. They told how receiving many invitations to speak about diversity in the classroom and in repertoire is fine, but restrictive, too. And as the only black

faculty member, one must be on search committees and be part of diversity efforts all the time, but really should be invited to talk about non-black subjects.

Issues with being multicultural were presented by several board members, who explained how hard it is to know where to fit in, especially when raised to grow up white, to make life easier.

Gender roles as well as racial roles also lead to too many responsibilities being assigned to a single faculty member and being chosen for committees when it is convenient for others, even when not feeling qualified.

After a short break, Matt Ferrell reintroduced Jamie, who spoke to how we can influence the parts of the organizations we have responsibilities for and how our identities matter in the space we are in charge of. Jamie stressed the importance of having a common language (Slide 13). “Individual racism” refers to individual racist assumptions and can be conscious and unconscious. This is learned from a broader socio-economic history. “Systemic racism” includes policies embedded as normal practice in established institutions and results in the exclusion of designated groups. Jamie reminded us that navigating on the individual level leads to the belief that we are not racist because we treat everyone the same. We need a systemic racism lens and we must analyze our policies to see what exists in our systems as biases.

Jamie explained that to be Anti-Racist means adopting deliberate beliefs, actions, movements, and policies to oppose racism (Slide 14). We must challenge ourselves and others to explore, examine, and eradicate racist policies that are embedded in culture and institutions. Jamie spoke about seeing how organizations tell us that “white is right.” Also, to be anti-racist white people must admit what they don’t realize and “get real” so BIPOC people do not have to carry the stress of this effort. In other words, white people need to show up with some capacity and skill about matters of race and be present when no people of color are in the room.

A board member spoke about how descendants of immigrants have had their heritage experiences erased by the whiteness of America. Jamie reminded us that white people do not speak about race growing up because of the privilege of not having to, but to speak about race without judgment will lead us to the work that is needed.

Jamie played a video titled [“We Need to Talk About Race in Higher Education”](#). Speaking on the video is Shaun Harper from USC and the American Council on Education. He explains that “you cannot lead on racial equity unless you know how to talk about race.” Jamie confirmed that the overwhelming number of white leaders do not know how to talk about race, primarily out of inexperience. We must take the first step and build our capacity to do this so we can lead our students, then lead our peers, and then lead “up” to our supervisors and deans.

Jamie divided the board members into breakout rooms, with 6 members in each room, and asked us to discuss race for 25 minutes. The questions to focus on were titled **Let’s Do Some Race Work** (Slide 15):

“What does racism look like in your organization or campus?”

“What are the challenges? How have you addressed racism?”

“What support could NCCO provide?”

“What does racism look like in our organization?”

“What questions should we be asking?”

“If we could do one thing in this next year to be a more racially inclusive organization, I would recommend...”

## **Part 4 → Now What?**

After the breakout rooms and a short break, we returned as a full group. Jamie asked us to have an open dialogue as an organization. His challenge to us was “if you can’t talk about it, you can’t be about it.” Dominick added that going forward the board can continue these conversations by having more virtual meetings outside of conferences on Zoom.

Once again, many board members shared ideas, perspectives, and feelings with openness and generosity. One member spoke about recruiting minority students and wanted to learn how to go into their high schools and recruit them to a primarily white school. A colleague shared how a better term for these students is minoritized or marginalized, and how they will respond to anything that you are excited about, not necessarily only spirituals and rap. Jamie supported both members by acknowledging how much psychic energy it takes to be able to speak the truth about race directly.

Another member shared how they responded to diverse choral styles in high school and how presenting all music with enthusiasm and eliminating our biases as best we can when sharing our programs will be the right way to go. Jamie summarized this as valuing authenticity and relevance above all. This was supported by a colleague whose approach to recruiting is always to be honest, transparent, and truthful, leading to trust.

Other members spoke to “not needing to be perfect but being ready to let others help,” and “doing the right homework” over the span of an entire career, so as not to turn this work into a “check the box” effort.

A final reflection from a board member was how NCCO’s conference performances and workshops do not apply directly to their home situation, where their choirs are not “CD quality.” Having equity for all our choral programs at our conferences and not excluding anyone due to a legacy of standards and traditions will require changes to our organization’s policies.

Jamie concluded our summit with his hope that now that we know what we can do differently, each of us needs to find one thing to do this coming year that will move the needle within our choral programs, working “down, across, and up.” He also challenged us to be sure to reflect on this summit at our next board meeting and deliberately make progress as an organization.

## **Part 5 → Conclusion**

Miguel concluded the meeting by thanking Dr. Jamie Washington for his leadership of today's summit, Elizabeth for all her work to make this event a reality, and everyone on the national board for attending. As an organization we have taken a step forward, and everyone was invited to continue our effort with the webinar panel discussion at 4:00 pm today.

Dominick closed by asking the national board members to send anything they didn't have a chance to share today to anyone on the executive board following the summit meeting. He informed everyone that the minutes, Dr. Washington's slides, and a record of the chat will be shared with them as soon as possible, and a report of this summit will be shared with the entire membership in two weeks.

—Written and submitted by Brian Gorelick, Meeting Secretary





