

Summary of FREC 2019 Mini Grant Program

Starting in 2018, with the support of the Bush Foundation, FREC began making mini-grants to support anti-racism/racial justice work in Greater Minnesota. Here is a summary of our second round of grants. It's our hope that these summaries help organizations get ideas for applying for grants and increase racial justice collaborations.

Itasca Community College, Grand Rapids, MN: Red Cliff Cultural Immersion Service Learning, May 20-28

FREC's \$1,500 grant supported the launch a service learning program for students at Itasca Community College at the [Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#) northwestern Wisconsin. Five students attended. Sociology Professor Suzanne Dustrude Starr applied for the grant with the intention of making it an annual event.

The program's goal is "to bring a world-expanding opportunity to ICC students by inviting them to live and work on an Indian reservation, opening a door for relationship-building and a concrete conversation about racial injustice and the history of Native Americans in our country," Dustrude Starr wrote. "Students will reflect on diversity and the human condition from a sociological, historical, philosophical and artistic point of view. Through living and working alongside the Red Cliff people, students will build understanding, address racism, and create positive social change through informed actions. They will return as change agents."



Students spent time at Red Cliff's child care center and on its farm. Since the start of the 2019-2020 school year, Dustrude Starr and her students have presented their experience to more than 100 people, including students and community members. Prior to the current health crisis, they also were recruiting for a 2020 service learning project. Two students from 2019 planned to return and 19 new students had shown interest.

Other next steps included continuing on-campus and community-wide conversations about racial diversity, tolerance, appreciation, understanding, and equity, and seeking a Native American professional to teach at the College's Native American studies program.

Kootasca Community Action, Community Engagement Department, Grand Rapids: “Igniting New Learning Around Race & Privilege.”

FREC’s \$2,000 grant supported two events, the Sept. 10, 2019 performance of *Acting Black: Demystify Racism* by Carlyle Brown, and the Feb. 25, 2020 training *the Cycle of White Supremacy* by Donte Curtiss.



“Acting Black” is a 60-minute solo performance, part spoken word, part stand-up comedy, part Ted Talk.

Its goal is “to inspire open and honest conversations about race and diversity. ... Acting Black takes us to the roots of American racism and its consequences for all of us by exploring the evolution of the Black stereotype, tracing the birth of its beginning from a single individual on a specific night in Louisville, Kentucky in 1828 to the racial conflicts we still endure to this day.”

It drew more than 200 participants, including many students from Itasca Community College. The post-performance Q&A got important issues on the table. Some college students wondered “why is it that Black people don’t just try harder to fit in?” Some community members felt Carlyle was inflating our racist history.

Yet the majority of participants seemed to want the community to engage in a deeper way around racism. As one participant wrote: “This was a powerful event and the community conversation on racism that followed was particularly both moving and somewhat frustrating. Moving, in that it really helped to create a space where white people like me could talk about racism, if just for an evening, and moving, in that it helped strengthen the idea that having a conversation about racism is something we (white people in my community) can do, want to do, and do need to talk about.”

The follow-up “Cycle of White Supremacy” training was an interactive workshop that invited attendees “to explore the ways that white supremacy is harming us and the work that we do, and offered tools and strategies to break the cycle.

Context is important. The Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission cancelled a Jan. 29 meeting to discuss refugee resettlement due to rumors of more than 100 community members who intended to show up to protest. The Cycle of White Supremacy also drew a lot of social media criticism. As one poster wrote: “Is this an early April Fool’s joke? Because White Supremacy is not a thing.” This negative energy may boosted event registration. We had 68 attendees.

Event sponsors wrote that it was “wildly successful. ... Many community members were incredibly thankful that we were finally talking about this.”

Minnesota Council of Nonprofits: Racial Equity Workshops, Bemidji, MN

FREC's \$1,500 supported three Racial Equity workshops in Bemidji. (Organizers hosted a fourth workshop using their own revenues. The collaboration included the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (which has a northwest organizer located in Bemidji), the Northwest Indian Community Development Center, and The Northwest MN Foundation.

The workshops were:

- Feb. 27th 1-4 p.m., Kevin James, Relearning from the Past. Location: Northwest Indian Community Development Center.
- April 24th 1-3 p.m., Ruthie Johnson, YWCA. White Privilege 101 and engaging in difficult conversations. Location: Bemidji. Location: Northwest MN Foundation.
- June 19th 1-4 p.m., Peter Eichens: Overcoming Racism in spite of White Supremacy. Location: Northwest Indian Community Development Center.
- Aug. 14th, Sinda Nichols and Susan Gust. What Went Wrong? Overcoming Racism in Partnerships. Location: Northwest MN Foundation.

These workshops were foundational work for a group of 10 Bemidji organizers who were working to host a satellite Overcoming Racism Conference in the fall of 2019 at Bemidji State University. The participation goal was 53 participants for the first three workshops; the actual number was 46.

Lessons learned: For the Overcoming Racism Conference, we want to make an intentional effort to have an Indigenous panel and Indigenous breakout session presenters. An Indigenous welcoming will be prioritized.

Minnesota State University's (MSU's) African American Affairs Department: Pan African Conference, Feb. 27 - March 1, 2019, Mankato, Minnesota

FREC's \$1,000 grant supported the 2019 Conference: Dreaming of "Wakanda: Black Consciousness, Liberation, and Solidarity." Click here for the [Conference schedule](#).

The Pan African Conference is committed to developing and enhancing the leadership skills in MSU's collegiate Black young adults, as well as provide opportunities for academic scholars, professionals, and community members to discuss issues that affect descendants of Africa on a local, national and international level. The 2019 Conference theme was inspired by the imaginary city featured in the film Black Panther. Conference registration included 151 people from off campus and 280 students, faculty, and staff who attended from campus.

Keynote speakers included Phillip Agnew, artist, organizer, and co-director of Dream Defenders. Agnew helped start Dream Defenders in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's murder. The organization is committed to bringing social change by creating a sustainable network of youth and student leaders to take action and create change in their communities. Other speakers included Black Panther leader Ericka Huggins and Leslie Redmond, Minneapolis NAACP president.

Stand Up Students, Rochester's Diversity Council, June-August, 2019

FREC's \$2,000 grant supported the Diversity Council in Rochester to develop and purchase training materials for the StandUp Student bias interruption training. The Council partnered with two faith ministries to engage members of their youth groups.

The program offered 43 youth participants two 90-minute training sessions that generated shared language and knowledge in a safe learning environment. They learned effective tactics and strategies to intervene in school, family, virtual, and community hate and bias incidents. Student participants ranged in age from 12 to 17. They were from different parts of Rochester. Two adults, one from each faith institution, attended both sessions as well.

The grant paid for space, food, and beverages, and facilitator stipends.

Next Steps: The Diversity Council will continue "to deliver this training and has been able to establish better positioning in community as a result of its partnership with FREC."

Satellite Overcoming Racism Conferences

Bemidji Overcoming Racism Conference, Friday, Nov. 15, 2019, Bemidji State University

FREC provided \$2,000 to support a locally organized version of the Overcoming Racism Conference in Bemidji. Attendance far exceeded expectation, with 110 people from northwest Minnesota attending.

The event was successful and will be repeated in 2020.



The event opened with a drum ceremony and Ojibwe welcoming.

FREC had hoped to live-stream keynote speakers from the St. Paul Overcoming Racism conference to Bemidji, but that didn't happen because of technical problems. (FREC has adjusted our 2020 budget to make sure the technology works in the future.) Organizers were prepared, and used the time for table top conversations among participants, building new relationships and networks.

Breakout sessions went very well, including topics such as: "360 Water Presentation," "White Ally Tool Kit," "The Color Line, video and discussion," "Historical Trauma," "Indigenous

Worldview," "Using the Intercultural development Inventory," "Anti-Bias Education: A Tool for Dismantling White Supremacy in Education," "RuralX rural issues," and more.

In addition to FREC, co-sponsors were the Blandin Foundation, Northwest Indian Development Center, Laura Jane Musser Fund; Minnesota Social Services Association; Peacemakers Resources; and Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

Rochester Overcoming Racism Conference, Friday, Nov. 15, 2019, hosted by the Rochester Diversity Council

The morning session included facilitated exercises on privilege led by A. Koen, L. Lee and D. Sabol. The group then listened to the live-streamed presentation by Winona LaDuke (though it technical difficulties cut the live stream short). During lunch, we screened White Privilege: Racism, White Denial & the Cost of Inequality with Tim Wise.

Afternoon programming included a brief presentation of historic context followed by small group discussion on three topics: racism in our education systems, racial structures impacting law enforcement, and racism in financial systems. Conversation was excellent with good, broad participation.

Next Steps: A second convening is planned for late February with continued dialog and to continue work on developing a Law Enforcement & Equity Summit for second quarter 2020. We have heard from all presenting partners from the 2019 convening that they wish to participate again in 2020. Attendees also indicated a desire to see it repeated. MN Council of Nonprofits, a Bemidji funder, indicated that they would sponsor in Rochester in 2020 as well. While all felt the technical difficulties were unfortunate, everyone wishes to see the partnership with FREC and the Overcoming Racism Conference continue.

Unspoken Voices, Morris

FREC made a \$2,000 grant to Unspoken Voices in Morris, MN to host an event titled: Understanding and Embracing Racial & Cultural Diversity in Southern Minnesota. They were not able to pull off the project and are returning the money.