

Recommendations of the AKRI Reparations Committee to the Board of Directors of AKRI

We recommend that AKRI members, especially those members who serve as Directors, consultants and other conference staff members, broaden and deepen their knowledge of the implications and influence of chattel slavery, colonialism and White supremacy on the public and private systems that govern our day to day lives. The legacy of slavery and colonialism is embedded in major systems in the United States today and continues to have a negative impact on the experiences of people of African descent in this country and abroad. As AKRI affirms its intent to provide experiential learning and promote application of this learning to everyday life, we believe that an understanding of the above mentioned issues will provide a deeper and more nuanced recognition of the psychosocial, economic, political, and cultural elements that bedevil society and lurk in the social unconscious.

While these recommendations stem from an attempt to address the question of how AKRI can acknowledge and address the matter of reparations for people of African descent, we do not ignore the presence and participation of other non-White members who may also be impacted by White-centered policies and institutions. Often others, eg. Indigenous/Native, Latinx, and Asian- identified folks, can become invisible in the time-worn conflicts located in Black/White dynamics in conferences and beyond.

In order to achieve the above, there are areas that need to be addressed specifically:

Education and Group Relations Role Preparation

We recommend reviewing what we mean by “training” to check whether we aren’t unconsciously and unwittingly passing along the British leaning towards aristocracy and assumption of power through claim to lineage.

We recommend the use of the term Group Relations Role Preparation instead of the use of the word Training. We need to evaluate whether the concept of “training” may trigger master-slave behavior in both trainer and trainee. There has been some evidence of that.

We recommend assessing the one-on-one nature of the mentor/mentee piece of the current program. For a program that looks at group dynamics, the current program has an individualized one-on-one structure. This may leave “trainees” stuck in a relationship that enacts dangerous dynamics. In addition, it may be

useful to have group settings that allow candidates to have a forum to exchange experiences with each other.

We recommend that AKRI require its consulting and mentoring staff to participate in a series of conversations with an in-depth curriculum that focuses on the dynamics of race, power and privilege. The goal of these conversations would be to deepen and engage the complexities of race, to move beyond so-called 'politically correct' positions that often hide more difficult thoughts, feelings and attitudes. Some might call the space for these conversations 'brave spaces' and our recommendation would be to have them led by a consultant.

We recommend having conversations around "fitness" of mentors regarding the capacity to self-reflect and hold curiosity about where one might fit in the social order of racism and institutional racism vs. bringing in embedded White supremacist leanings, and/or baked-in power assumptions.

We recommend that AKRI members obtain education, attend workshops, and participate in reading groups designed to develop a deeper awareness of how systems of oppression operate. The goal of these experiences would be to notice how Whiteness is often centered and to learn to de-center it.

To accommodate the above, **we recommend** that AKRI form reading groups on reparations, moral injury, White supremacy, guilt, shame, war, violence and domination.

We recommend that AKRI provide ongoing didactic events and guest lectures to members on Blackness, race, intersectionality, society, structural violence and so forth from a range of disciplines such as psychoanalysis, depth psychology, sociology, ethnic studies, education, queer studies, and anthropology (to name a few) to enrich and enlighten AKRI member learning.

We recommend the hosting of experiential events like Listening Posts, Social Dreaming Matrices, Social Dreaming Drawing, Social Photo Matrices, and Balint groups with a focus on Race/Reparations/Society.

We have started a resource library on matters related to people of African descent, Blackness, White supremacy, Race and Social Systems that can be utilized for education by AKRI members and **we recommend** that AKRI expand and maintain this library.

We recommend that AKRI sponsor the creation of a reader centering Blackness that allows Black authors to contribute to and/or enables Directors to write about their experiences/learnings regarding Black centered themes. At the same time

we recommend exploring Whiteness and White supremacy themes and encourage authors of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to engage in documenting their experiences and observations around this theme.

We recommend affinity groups based on race and ethnicity to meet and explore issues of social identity. We recognize that there already have been some informal affinity groups that have met regularly.

We recommend the AKRI Training (Group Relations Role Preparation) committee incorporate, as a requirement for candidacy, mandatory participation in a number of the above mentioned/suggested events and that candidates need to document participation in a number of the above mentioned/suggested events in the form of writing/processing.

We recommend that the Board consider a model that would be similar to a continuing education model that would require people to attend a certain number of events (that help members to examine the White supremacy within themselves and the groups we move in) over a particular time. Flexibility around what gets chosen would be given to members. Issues of the downside of mandated continuing education programming would need to be considered.

“Beta testing” new conference designs while preserving traditional conferences - How do we interrogate the model for the 21st Century?

We understand that the current conference model was designed by White British men in the post WWII era. AKRI needs to explore what that means in terms of race, power, class and the perpetuation of White supremacy that is embedded in our conference design.

We recommend a series of working conferences that would be designed to explore, among other things, the dynamics of class, race, reparations, and social justice. Such conferences would explore the model so it aligns with the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century (for example: globalization, polarization in politics, less rigid boundaries, social media influences and fake news, 24 hour news cycle, the future possibilities of AI, reliance on technology, climate change, extreme inequalities, changing demographics, the rise of Fascism).

Beta testing several new conference designs would mean inviting directors who are interested in experimenting with novel design.

We acknowledge that many affiliate centers have taken it upon themselves to experiment and design conferences that explore themes related but not limited to race, reparations, and social justice. **It is imperative** that AKRI take this up itself

as an organization in order to demonstrate its commitment to promoting contemporary and relevant conferences.

Recruitment

We recommend that AKRI actively work to recruit and enlist a more diverse pool of conference participants, more representative of the broad swaths of society to deepen learning and opportunities for members to engage with people of all walks of life who might benefit from group relations learning.

We recommend that AKRI approach undergraduate business/marketing programs at colleges and universities and offer AKRI's membership recruitment and marketing issues to students in need of a project.

Financial Support

Along with active recruitment, **we recommend** that AKRI provide financial support for conference and program participants as well as AKRI members from historically underrepresented communities in the form of a system of fee setting that acknowledges the profound income and opportunity disparities in the US and abroad. (Eg. scholarships, and/or a tiered pricing model in which the racially privileged participants would in-effect subsidize those with limited financial resources.)

Another possible financial intervention might be to take a percentage of the profit from conferences and events, that would be allocated to a reparations fund, or programing that supports Black leadership development within AKRI.

Initial money for a reparations fund has been donated by Allison Pinto. **We recommend** that this fund be formalized and made visible/available for donations on the AKRI website.

Research

We admit that we don't know what members learn from conferences with any kind of consistency. We understand that we don't 'prescribe' what members will learn from their conference experiences, but we do purport to offer opportunities for learning about authority, leadership, group dynamics, systems and roles. We would like to know how well we are doing at this and in addition to the stated learning opportunities, we would like to know how well and what type of learning

members are experiencing around race, class, queerness, and other social issues that bedevil society. This is in keeping with a goal of providing learning opportunities that members can use in their real world social and organizational dilemmas.

To this end, **we recommend** that AKRI commit to developing and utilizing research/survey tools that would be relatively simple to implement and that would be used consistently in every conference we sponsor.

We recommend that AKRI support research efforts to examine behaviors, theories, and practices in conferences with regard to White supremacy, oppressive dynamics, and cultural influences as well as whether spaces for reparations are made available within conferences. It is essential that AKRI 'interrogate' every aspect of the conference design to determine if we are meeting the goals we seek to achieve.

We recommend that AKRI develop a 'research wing' that can more intentionally pursue this.

We recommend that AKRI work together with graduate students and faculty of programs in organizational psychology, leadership and authority, and other related fields to develop research tools.

Organization- Reparations begins at home

We recommend that AKRI and its members continue to work to examine how White supremacy is embedded in the organization and within group relations conferences.

We recommend that AKRI provide resources for current Black leaders as well as encourage and develop future Black leadership within AKRI through creative and traditional forms of support with an emphasis on challenges that Black leaders may face in their roles. This recommendation comes from the hypothesis, based on anecdotal observations, that Black leaders within AKRI seem to suffer greater illness and earlier death than their White counterparts which might be related to the type of projections that Black leaders receive in their leadership roles. Support groups, spiritual groups and other forms of community could be cultivated within AKRI.

Conference Theory and Design

We recommend AKRI and conference directors work towards finding ways to make space for multiple interpretations about behavior that emerges in conferences to include more culturally nuanced explanations and interpretations.

We recommend that group relations staff invite themselves and members to deepen their exploration of multiple ways that experience can be explored, known or expressed, such as somatically, aurally, and visually in group relations conferences and within designing a conference. Different cultural and ethnic groups incorporate modes of communication that may differ from formalized, eurocentric and western traditions. Given that the exchange of ideas and communication in group relations conferences has historically privileged the verbal and written prose word, we recommend adopting a more pluralistic lens through which the incorporation, exchange, and interpretation of emerging somatic, aural, visual, or poetic forms of expression and information are considered.

We recommend that AKRI re-examine and rework ways to enhance the RAG portion in AKRI's conference. We need to be mindful that our members don't live in conferences most of their lives, they live in the real world.

Given that the historic model was designed in its image with a bias towards historically centering the privileged of the time (White heterosexual cis-men of a wealthier class) we need to think about how the application of such biases might be perpetuated in how we think about conference application in the RAG portion of conferences. The failure to examine these biases may passively reproduce the very oppressive structures we are hoping to interrogate and understand in order to allow for the greatest degree of member learning and freedom. We are operating under the assumption that the model is not culturally neutral.

Thus, it is essential that RAG consultants continually re-examine the model in terms of an intersectional lens, particularly supporting members in integrating the ways race, class, and power intersect in the RAG portion of a conference, rather than solely zooming in on more intrapsychic and interpersonal material void of racial dynamics.

We recommend that directors continue to play with the design of group relations conferences, incorporating other ways groups can be structured into traditional group relations events to create respites within the experience of group relations

conferences (e.g. weaving in the art mural, peace circles, restorative justice circles, 12 step programs, yoga etc).

We recommend that AKRI revisit the question of what is fundamental to group relations, eg. the exploration of authority, identity, the unconscious, group-as-a-whole dynamics, and so forth. Additionally we might ask, 'what might be fundamental to leadership, authority and group functioning, that might not have been addressed or emphasized in a model that was developed in the mid-20th century: eg. spirituality, attachment, interdependence?'

We recommend that AKRI host post conference community meetings in which the community receives a review of a conference (the annual conference and possibly also conferences that have been sponsored by AKRI) and then open it up for discussion. This would be a means for conferences to be received as a consultation to the organization and also give room for accountability, education, and reflection. **We recommend** that this occur under a lens that takes race, power, and privilege into consideration.

Application Work of Reparations in Group Relations

It is crucial for AKRI to consider forming partnerships with other organizations that are engaged in reparations and explicit social justice work (joining with other organizations). This may be something we consider when/by selecting external board members.

We recommend that AKRI encourage scholarly writing about reparations from a group relations perspective.

Concluding Recommendations:

We recommend that the AKRI Board adopt the Reparations acknowledgement letter, present it to the AKRI membership, and post the acknowledgement letter on the AKRI website.

We recommend that the AKRI Board form a change team that works on implementing the suggested recommendations.

We recommend that AKRI treat the matter of reparations with urgency, as members of African descent see this as an alarming concern for the wellbeing

and safety of not only members of conferences that are still ongoing but also Black identified staff who are harmed by the lack of proficiency in racial competency.

Background:

The Reparations committee has met regularly since the spring of 2021. The committee formed in response to factors emerging socio-politically in the United States as part of the racial reckoning following the George Floyd murder. More locally its formation happened after a Keynote address at the 2021 AKRI Dialogues given by Dr. Medria Connolly. In this talk, Dr. Connolly addressed Reparations to the descendants of enslaved African Americans. She further posed a question to the AKRI community that invited conversation and reflection on whether, as an organization that studies authority, leadership and group dynamics, we participate in either 'furthering or subverting social justice'. Several members of the AKRI community self-organized to explore the question of Reparations. The group eventually sought and was granted authorization from the AKRI board to become a formal committee to investigate what steps AKRI might take to respond ethically and responsibly to the question of what AKRI might do to acknowledge and address Reparations for Black identified AKRI members and non-members.

The committee is chaired by Isabelle Reiniger, with Minnie Tao and Janice Wagner, as Vice-Chairs. The committee membership, a group whose presence in the meetings has been variable, is largely (but not exclusively) composed of White-appearing members. The meetings were at times confusing and painful, and it was unclear exactly what we could do, in so far as the organization known as AKRI had no direct role or history in the practice of chattel slavery in the United States. The lack of more visible Black committee members in the monthly meetings was upsetting to some who wanted to hear more, collaborate more, and perhaps get validation about the path we were taking with this work. However, it was made clear from the earliest meetings when White members asked Black members to talk about their racial experiences to better understand them, that some Black members did not feel comfortable taking on the role of educating White people about the Black experience. The behavior of the White members requesting Black members to educate them was a conscious and/or unconscious enactment of the White privilege that is so deeply embedded in the social systems in the United States, with AKRI being a microcosm of a larger system.

It was clear from the level of participation in the monthly meetings that even the most well-intentioned participant struggled to understand, empathize and speak with honesty

about matters of race, or Blackness and dynamics involving people of African descent. Conversations about race, across racial boundaries frequently reached an impasse and ended with anger, frustration, and some sense of hopelessness about the possibility of deepening and engaging the other around our racialized experiences. This raised questions about the competency of our conference staff members' ability to identify and work with issues of race in conferences at anything but a superficial level.

As an organization that provides experiential learning on authority, leadership, systems, and group dynamics, we endeavor to offer members opportunities for learning that can be applied to real world social and organizational dilemmas. In recognizing and acknowledging the presence and persistence of social inequalities in this country and the world, we want to attract participants to our conferences and training programs from a broad range of backgrounds who will find a consulting staff both humble and sensitive to the ways in which structural oppression operates at the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and systemic level.

Certain aspects of the model, such as focusing on the system-as-a-whole and people's roles taken and given, both individually and collectively, have been transformative to many people. Yet, there may be aspects of this model that still remain up for interrogation around what gets valued and what doesn't get valued: for example, prioritizing the identification of experiences of aggression and competition, over the experiences of attachment and collaboration. We would like to see the model and the interpretative stance be broadened to achieve its full potential as an experiential model for learning about systems, leadership and authority in a globalized and multicultural world.

A challenge for the committee has been recognizing that specifically addressing African American Reparations leaves out Asians, Latinx, Indigenous People, women, LGBTQIA+ and others who have been harmed by systemic racism rooted in White Supremacy. Our hope is that taking steps towards the repair of injuries experienced by Black identified members (that result from the legacy and continued enforcement of White Supremacy and a settler colonialism mindset rooted in our American social, economic, healthcare, and political systems), will positively impact the whole system and hence affect how members of other groups will be able to be seen and heard more fully.

After meeting approximately once a month since the late spring of 2021, we developed a draft of the above listed recommendations and the draft of an Acknowledgement letter. In March of 2023, we held three separate meetings to get feedback from AKRI (and some former AKRI) members of African descent on these documents. Feedback and suggestions gathered during these meetings were incorporated into the documents

that are now being presented to the Board of Directors of AKRI. Given our authorization to develop these documents on behalf of the Board, we ask that the Board adopt the documents and incorporate the changes as recommended.

The Reparations Committee

Isabelle Reiniger, Chair

Janice Wagner, Vice Chair

Minnie Tao, Vice Chair