

Shanasia,

It is a gift to receive such an honest reflection on your experience. It is a call to action for me, the management team, and our entire division.

As a leader of the 250th team, I regret how I addressed the issues that you described early in the project. These issues were sparked by a set of comments we received that critiqued the strategic planning effort's emphasis on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Rather than respond to these comments in a constructive manner, I brushed them off in support of letting the planning process play out despite your and others' call not to. Your request to be removed from the project team shortly afterwards was a wakeup call, but we focused on the unintended harm we caused to you, not the more significant issues that arose for the team.

This led to noticeable stumbles during the workshop. Even then, we chose to advocate for our usual process for strategic planning, which was rejected by the entire working group on the morning of the second day. With no other choice, we pivoted off our approach. This led to much more meaningful outcomes by the conclusion of the workshop. I am grateful to the participants for giving our team the space to learn and grow through our obvious missteps that week.

As we continue to build and expand upon the outcomes from the 250th workshop with the participants, our effectiveness remains diminished by not having people of color on the planning team. We are also reminded of the importance of needing greater awareness, grace, and humility across our entire portfolio of work to create and maintain a truly safe space for open dialogue that can lead to actions and positive change.

I am hopeful that our division's sustained JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion) learning strategy will contribute towards that greater goal. We are committed to using the process to take a critical look inward. As the central planning office for the agency, we have a responsibility to effect real change within our organization and within our planning efforts for the parks and public we serve. I strongly believe this will help us begin to address many of the concerns raised in your letter to the division's management team. This requires not only engagement from those like me who have lots to learn, but also empowering those who are well-versed and have lots to share.

I know all of this may feel too little, too late. Moving forward, the best way that we can honor you is to strive towards a more equitable and inclusive workplace that is not only a safe space for people of color, but one that allows them to thrive.

Respectfully,
Chris Church
DSC Planning Division Chief