



Racial Justice Recommendations | Prepared by Mizari Suárez | December 12, 2023

Today's recommendations come from a year-long contract with the Kentucky Equal Justice Center (KEJC) and their Racial Justice committee. These recommendations are based on the time spent working with staff and the board and should serve as the next steps for moving forward as an organization.

Staff

Maxwell Street Legal Clinic

- There needs to be more connection between KEJC and Maxwell Street Legal Clinic (MSLC). Since the beginning of the project, both facilitators faced the challenge of connecting and engaging with MSLC staff. After the retreat in April, MSLC staff stopped coming to **required** racial justice training. As a facilitator, I often heard MSLC staff say they didn't see how this project had anything to do with them. This is very concerning as a racial justice facilitator. If MSLC staff can not see how racial justice work is vital to the legal services arena, I worry that this was a check the box for the organization.
 - **Recommendation: There needs to be clear communication between MSLC and the KEJC Executive Director. Collaboratively, there needs to be a communication plan drafted on how to work together and establish racial justice goals that align with the overall KEJC racial justice plan but also consider the MSLC client population. MSLC staff and client population need to feel seen, heard, and represented in this plan and throughout the organization.**
- MSLC lacks racial diversity. The positions of "authority" or "power" are occupied by white women. During the process, a staff member brought to our attention that they were not given the opportunity to interview/apply for a DOJ representative position and "automatically" given to another MSLC staff member. Every staff member should be given the chance to move up within the organization. Still, as an organization, there should be transparent processes for hiring internally, considering equitable processes for everyone.
 - **Recommendation: KEJC Executive Director and Racial Justice committee should establish a clear internal process for equitable hiring. There should be a**

transparent collaboration between the ED, the racial justice committee, and the MSLC Director. When positions open at MSLC, there should be a consideration for creating a hiring committee that includes KEJC and MSLC staff and diverse community members with lived experiences to help interview diverse candidates. The excuse that BIPOC individuals don't go to law school or are not applying for non-profit jobs is no longer valid.

- Finally, MSLC staff should be treated like everyone else and be mandated to attend KEJC-required training.

KEJC

- During the process, it was concerning to see how many new staff were hired and how many of them left after a few months. The most concerning part of this was that many of the individuals who left were BIPOC and bilingual individuals. This tells us that the working environment within KEJC is not one of welcoming for BIPOC folks. This is concerning and should be addressed.
 - **Recommendation: KEJC should work through the following**
 - **What does the salary look like for the positions that became vacant? Does the salary scale reflect an equitable start within the organization? Does it allow for growth into other salary bands? Does it also reflect a holistic compensation for professional and lived experience?**
 - **Action item: restructuring salary scale within the organization for everyone, not just new hires!**
 - **What does organizational culture look like within KEJC? Do all the lawyers eat together, and administrative staff sit at another table? How are power dynamics between KEJC staff handled?**
 - **Action item: Continue to provide staff with professional development and, within team developmental days, build in organizational culture. This may require a facilitator to come in and help the organization figure out the best ways to create a culture of welcoming and belonging.**
 - **Continue to provide the space for affinity groups. These spaces will allow individuals to continue their racial justice learning and find community within KEJC. KEJC should continue the required racial justice training throughout the year.**
 - **Organizational Chart - Staff within KEJC lack clear direction or understanding of how they contribute to the organization's mission. There needs to be clear communication with each staff member about their role within the organization and what is expected of them.**

- Continue working with DISC as a framework to establish a communication plan for each individual to know what is expected of them.
 - The creation of an organizational chart would be beneficial for all staff, but especially new hires.
 - Hiring an HR director who can adequately help onboarding new hires.
 - Consider using DISC as a framework for onboarding

Board

- The board needs racial diversity and board members with lived experience.
 - **Recommendation: The board should create a nomination committee and a transparent process for inviting potential board members into the organization and recruiting diverse board members.**
- The board is heavily legal aid-centered, and an internal conversation should include board members and KEJC staff on minimizing the number of board seats for legal aid.
 - **Recommendation: One board seat is reserved for legal aid, but leave it to the discretion of KEJC staff and board members on the number of appropriate seats.**
- The board is heavily disconnected. Board participation at the retreat consisted of three board members. Only two of the three board members stayed for the whole retreat.
 - **Recommendation: An annual retreat or events throughout the year that bring board members together to help everyone understand their role within the organization.**
 - **Action Item: Work with a facilitator for a yearly board retreat that engages all board members. This can include a check-in on the organization's mission and vision, board evaluation, goal setting, etc.**
- The board, alongside staff, needs to continue racial justice training. During a board meeting, my name was butchered multiple times by a board member. The board member not once apologized for their actions but instead continued to go through the meeting, not correctly pronouncing my name. Although this is a minor incident, it's evident that the board lacks cultural or language competency.
 - **Recommendation: Set money aside to hire a racial justice facilitator to lead training on racial justice topics. The board should not rely on their BIPOC board members to teach them about racial justice.**
 - **Board members should also attend their perspective affinity group meetings provided by KEJC.**
- The board should make an effort to connect with KEJC staff. There is a considerable disconnect between staff and board members. This establishes inequitable power

dynamics. Staff and board members should work as co-collaborators to better the organization.

- **Recommendation: Staff should continue to attend board meetings**
- **Make an intentional effort to engage staff and board in a yearly gathering.**