

## 1996 Report from the Task Force on Involving People of Color in the Council

Seventeen members of the Task Force on Involving People of Color in the Council met in Washington, D.C., June 16-18, 1995. During the two-day meeting, chaired by Charlotte K. Brooks, the group examined and discussed documents related to involving people of color, including historical policies, recommendations, and practices of the Council. Examining the past and projecting for the future, the Task Force focused on developing systemic ways of involving people of color in the National Council of Teachers of English. Following the Washington meeting, members of the Task Force participated in preparing the final report.

In examining the history of involvement of people of color in NCTE, the Task Force on Involving People of Color in the Council found that for twenty years task forces and committees have been appointed and charged with developing policies and strategies for involving people of color in NCTE.

In 1975 and 1976, reports were written by the then Minority Affairs Advisory Committee to address the issues.

- In 1980, a policy statement which evolved from the 1975 and 1976 reports was approved by the Board of Directors as the Policy on Minority Involvement.
- In 1981, an implementation plan for the Policy on Minority Involvement was developed.
- In 1984, a letter of protest was forwarded to the NCTE President concerning the failure to implement the 1980 policy.
- In 1985, the Task Force on Minority Involvement submitted a plan to increase the numbers of people of color as participants in all areas of the Council.
- In 1986, the Task Force on Minority Involvement submitted another report recommending practices and policies for involving people of color.
- In 1987, the Task Force on Racism and Bias and the Minority Affairs Advisory Committee became actively involved in annual convention planning, developing the Rainbow Strand. Additionally in 1987, the Minority Affairs Advisory Committee submitted a report on the involvement of people of color in NCTE committees; and the Minority Affairs Advisory Committee and the Committee on Racism and Bias met with affiliates to discuss involvement of people of color.

These committed and hardworking groups have provided numerous recommendations for policies and procedures to increase the involvement of people of color. However, it is apparent from a review of the history that this making and providing recommendations has become cyclical, resulting in occasional and limited change.

One of the strongest practices developed from efforts to increase involvement of people of color has been the Rainbow Strand. Over nine years, Rainbow Strand Planners have been actively involved in convention planning, developing sessions which focus on issues and strategies related to teaching and affirming culturally and linguistically diverse students. The sessions have been instructive and very well received.

Each year the Rainbow Strand Planners submit reports and recommendations to continue increased involvement. Yet, despite these accomplishments, the procedures developed over the years have recently come into question by some convention program planners with attempts to redesign the selection process for Rainbow Strand Planners.

There have been other successes based on recommendations from people of color. The Black Caucus and the Latino Caucus have sponsored cultural programs at conventions, bringing in highly acclaimed, successful writers and other creative artists. People of color have been elected to various levels and some have chaired task forces, committees, and commissions, but there are no set procedures to insure consistent representation on the NCTE Executive Committee. Nor is there a person of color in a policy director role at headquarters. NCTE must build a plan to assure the continued and systemic involvement of people of color at all levels and in every facet of its structure. The Task Force asks why the Council in 1995 is back to where it was twenty years ago?

- How can we stop the cycle?
- How can we consistently use the creativity and perspectives of people of color in the NCTE dialogue?

- How can we build upon the successful programs and strategies developed by people of color, i.e., the Rainbow Strand, without having to reestablish them?
- Are the policies on involving people of color more “on paper” than systemically implemented?

Using these questions as guides, the Task Force, working in subcommittees, examined the history of involving people of color and looked at convention programs and directories for 1965, 1975, and 1995 to track the level of involvement of people of color. The group prepared a vision statement with goals and developed a list of recommendations to strengthen systemically the involvement of people of color in NCTE.

### **Recommendations**

The “Policy on Involvement of People of Color” is still a viable document that requires implementation and periodic review. The following recommendations must supplement the policy:

- To the policy that people of color be appointed on all commissions, boards, committees, task forces and other official groups, we recommend adding a stipulation that there be people of color among the leadership of those groups (ie, chairs).
- We recommend that people of color be among the reviewers for NCTE publications, especially those having to do with people of color.

### **Headquarters**

1. Question all candidates for new Executive Director in depth about their views on multicultural education and literacy in the profession, i.e. in classrooms, headquarters staff and the Council membership. Ask candidates to state and explain specific strategies to implement a policy of involvement in the Council. The Executive Director is to provide an organization plan to insure incentives for promotion and career ladder opportunities for people of color.
2. Recruit people of color for all staff positions. Use special efforts to recruit people of color including such special arrangements as bringing in candidates from other geographical areas.
3. Institute a People of Color Fellowship Program or a sabbatical program in which graduate students and scholars of color could be brought to headquarters to work as Scholars in Residence.

### **NCTE Elections**

1. Nominate only persons of color for Vice President on a regularly scheduled basis. This should be over and above, not in lieu of, the existing policy to include people of color among nominees presented by each year’s nominating committee. Include a person of color on every slot on every ballot. Place a person of color on a cycle rotation for Vice President.
2. Restructure present procedure for NCTE nominating committee work, including expanding time frame for committee work.
3. Examine nomination process, develop structural changes and meeting structures that can facilitate elections of people of color.

### **Annual Convention**

1. Institute regular meetings for new members as part of convention and conference programs (informally, open, with printed materials and persons prepared to help with program. People of color must be involved). For example, the “cracker barrel” session could be reinstated with leaders present who would help answer questions on the organization and the teaching of English/language arts, generally.
2. Feature teachers from the “Teachers for the Dream” Program.
3. Keep “Teachers for the Dream” winners involved, asking that they return to the convention in subsequent years.
4. New Members at Convention:
  - a. Ask the Emeritus Assembly to develop mentoring programs for new members (two strands: people of color and those who have been supportive of people of color; within strand one, perhaps: Marjorie Farmer, Jesse Perry, Charlotte Brooks, Miriam Chaplin, Vivian Davis, Bill Cook; within strand two: Al Gromman, Bill Irmischer, Janet Emig, Alan Purves, Nancy McHugh).
  - b. Set up receptions for first timers as part of--probably the first event--convention (maybe with book publishers as host, a Scholastic-dinner like event, perhaps, where past presidents are introduced).

- c. Select “ambassadors” to assist first timers. Ask emeritus assembly members to take on this role.

### **Spring Conference**

1. Develop guidelines for involving people of color in Spring Conference program planning. A policy must be adopted to assure that Spring Conference planning meets the same criteria for involving people of color as the annual convention.
2. Encourage people of color to attend the Spring Conference and become involved in the planning at all levels. Special attention must be paid to the geographical areas in which the conference is held. Target promotional materials to people of color at the local level. Further, when the local arrangements person is assigned, he or she must include people of color on the main leadership committee as well as on subcommittees so as to insure involvement.

### **Emeritus Assembly**

1. Encourage Emeritus members to recruit people of color and to mentor people of color.
2. Encourage Emeritus assembly members to become advisors for people of color who want their work published.

### **President’s Scholarship for Person of Color**

1. Redesign the President’s Scholarship for Person of Color so as to provide a mentor for the winner who will regularly support and involve presidential scholars in the Council.
2. Feature presidential scholars on convention program.
3. Encourage presidential scholars to publish in NCTE journals.

### **Affiliates**

1. The “Affiliates Conference Attendance Policy” must become the policy of all affiliates.
2. Continue inclusive focus on involving people of color in all affiliate activities, including recruitment and retention.
3. Address under-representation of college membership in affiliates.
4. Select chairs of different ethnicity or persons committed to diversity to chair affiliate programs.
5. Include Teachers for the Dream winners and 4C’s Scholars for the Dream winners as featured speakers at affiliate meetings, conferences, and workshops.

### **Public Campaign**

Focus on the recruitment of people of color in any public campaign to recruit new members. Provide evidence that people of color are given a central role in the recruitment. Provide membership information and surveys on people of color. Obtain mailing lists from organizations of people of color.

### **Miscellaneous**

1. Target programs that deal with multicultural issues.
2. Ask editors of NCTE journals to assist authors of color.
3. Recruit and assist multicultural authors to develop manuscripts that deal with multicultural issues and multicultural literature.
4. Develop a mentoring program for person of color interested in teaching. Encourage new teachers and new members through a strong mentoring program.
5. Develop an attractive membership brochure which features persons of color in the Council. (See “Power of Teaching” brochure from 1993.)

In addition to the above recommendations, the task force strongly recommends that the Council endorse and publish the following vision statement:

### **Vision Statement – Involving People of Color**

The National Council of Teachers of English values racial and ethnic cultural diversity and it honors, respects, and celebrates the contributions of people of color. It embraces the obligation to address the educational and professional concerns of people of color. Students of color are central to the demographic changes in our classrooms. Therefore, the Council has a responsibility to recruit and educate teachers to function effectively in such classrooms. The Council will provide leadership in addressing the pedagogical issues involved in teaching a diverse student body. The Council will seek and include the knowledge of people who represent diverse cultures. Toward these ends, the Council will

utilize the resources and expertise of people of color within the organization by providing avenues through which knowledge can be shared. Further, the Council sets the following goals:

- Increase the membership of people of color in NCTE by the year 2000;
- Develop systemic opportunities for people of color to achieve leadership roles at all levels in the Council;
- Achieve racial and ethnic diversity in staffing at NCTE headquarters;
- Develop professional services to address the diversity of school populations;
- Continue to provide accurate visual representation of people of color in all Council publications.

With broad, visible, and meaningful involvement of people of color in all areas and at all levels in the Council, NCTE can meet the demographic and democratic challenges of teaching English/language arts in the 21st Century and beyond.

### Recommendation

Widely publicize the Vision Statement Involving People of Color in NCTE publications (i.e. in *The Council Chronicle*, in journals, as a brochure, etc.).

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