

Jennifer,

Gwendolyn responded as the CEO and decision-maker at BRIDGE, which Berkshire SURJ has been operating within as a part of BRIDGE's Towards Racial Justice and Equity campaign for the last two years. Berkshire SURJ first came into existence as a mechanism within BRIDGE's ongoing organizing work--this is a crucial piece of information of which Misha is fully aware.

This group spent a considerable amount of time meeting about your last communication, Jennifer, which--yes, was certainly shared given the importance of transparency within any accountable relationship, and which--as Gwendolyn stated--was experienced as extremely disrespectful to BRIDGE's work and mission. This is not something you have reflected on or acknowledged in your most recent response, which continues to cause great concern about SURJ values, accountability, and integrity.

Gwendolyn asked that we provide more context around BRIDGE's work and the model that BRIDGE has developed to hold white folks accountable to actually following the leadership of People of Color. She also asked that we share the following documents, as supplemental information and context. Attached is a testimony that we wrote to celebrate Gwendolyn receiving the Woman of Achievement Award earlier this year, a [statement](#) that we originally put out in 2017 to signify the shift to have B-SURJ operate as BRIDGE's TRJ white caucus for racial justice, and finally, a [report out to TRJ](#) that the white folks in BRIDGE's Accountability group gave last month.

BRIDGE has an ongoing campaign that began in 2009 called [Towards Racial Justice and Equity in the Berkshires](#). The Race Task Force was established by BRIDGE with local leaders from all sectors and the Department of Justice Community Relations Division, as an active response to racial disparities and incidences of overt racism in the county. Under BRIDGE's leadership, the campaign has formed a network dedicated to education, dialogue, and actions surrounding race and ethnicity to effect change and create a safe and inclusive community. Other POC-led organizations and collaborations were formed and continue to exist as a result of BRIDGE's TRJ campaign, including the revival of the local NAACP chapter.

Towards Racial Justice-South grew out a call from clergy for Southern Berkshire County-based race dialogues and a space to process the police killing of Black men. BRIDGE also holds Real Talk on Race courses, an educational space designed to help folks unpack personal identity and bias in relationship to systemic racism. During this time, BRIDGE charged graduates of Real Talk on Race to take accountable action and also to get engaged locally with communities of color in our community through Macedonia Baptist Church, the Latin Mount, NAACP, and later on, Harmony Homestead.

BRIDGE called for a SURJ chapter to form with an accountability relationship to BRIDGE, after Gwendolyn and Luci (a BRIDGE member) were invited to a fundraiser by Quintin Cross a Black male founder of Staley B. Keith Social Justice Center (a Black-led justice organization) organized and run by Hudson SURJ. Cross thought that the model might help Gwendolyn stabilize BRIDGE to do the required work in the Berkshires. Quintín himself had just experienced extreme racism working as a professional in our community. The SURJ leaders Kaya Weidman, Brooke Lehman and Greg Simpson, offered to come start a Berkshire SURJ and were also joined by Western Mass SURJ rep, Ryan Pryor. We saw this as a potential model

for organizing Real Talk on Race graduates and other white allies and resourcing BRIDGE with volunteers and fundraising.

When Berkshire SURJ formed, white people (including the people who now facilitate BRIDGE white caucus meetings, Ari, Sara, and Lily) flocked to attend meetings, organize, and follow/like the page on social media which extracted momentum and resources away from BRIDGE. The Berkshire SURJ meetings were well attended by white folks who knew about, but did not regularly attend BRIDGE events or trainings, and the chapter almost immediately had the same number “likes” on FB as it had taken BRIDGE nearly a decade of local organizing for racial justice to accrue. BRIDGE lost key staff, volunteers, Real Talk on Race alums, and engaged community members, who left the organization due to the toxicity and tension of B-SURJ organizing. This disrupted any momentum that BRIDGE had built and resulted in BRIDGE losing at least 9 engaged individuals, that we know about.

It was clear that white folks would rather work with white led organizers in order to maintain our comfort and internalized superiority--in direct contrast to what BRIDGE was asking for: white folks to show up for, and follow the local leadership of, Black women organizers and scholars who have been fighting for racial justice in our community for over ten years. This is white supremacy that we promoted as our chapter formed.

Additionally, BRIDGE was already and continues to host community meetings through TRJ, which usually include a race education component or group discussion alongside ways to get involved with campaigns for racial justice from BRIDGE and trusted partners. BRIDGE also holds racial justice education and cultural competency courses and other community education and engagement opportunities. The original Berkshire SURJ meetings duplicated this work and undermined BRIDGE’s extensive leadership and knowledge in racial justice work and community organizing. These are a few clear demonstrations that the original SURJ model as we understood and implemented it does not work for Berkshire County with its demographics and geography, and within the context of our white supremacist culture.

In order to build an accountable base of white activists, BRIDGE took the time to work through to find a model that worked. Around this time, the DiDi Delgado article came out critiquing the SURJ model, which aligned deeply with BRIDGE’s experience dealing with Berkshire SURJ organizing. Gwendolyn and BRIDGE invested considerable amounts of time, energy and resources in building out a model that worked for our local rural context and did not extract resources from BRIDGE. Out of her work with Haymarket People’s Fund and the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, Gwendolyn developed a local caucus model as part of the TRJ structure, which includes a POC-caucus and a white caucus that report back to BRIDGE’s multiracial TRJ space. The white caucus is facilitated by Sara, Ari and Lily--all folks who were involved in organizing Berkshire SURJ. The purpose of TRJ White Caucus for Racial Justice is to name, explore and unpack collective and individual complicity and responsibility in white supremacy and the impacts of harm while being fully transparent to the larger TRJ group. The group is also asked to work to resource BRIDGE, through donations, fundraising and volunteer time. Additionally, BRIDGE now holds monthly Accountability meetings, which grew out of the relationship with and evolution of Berkshire SURJ and the need to hold space to account for extraction, harm, and damaging aspects of white supremacy culture that the white folks in the group brought into the work. The Accountability group also support accountability within

BRIDGE spaces such as board, staff and programs while network building and organizing through TRJ.

BRIDGE is a catalyst for change, and part of the grassroots organizing BRIDGE does to promote collaboration, education, training, dialogue, fellowship, and advocacy in the Berkshires is done through the TRJ structure which prioritizes accountable action. Accountability members are a part of this structure, and we are committed to organizing for, and in accountability with, the many campaigns BRIDGE leads, including Not In Our County, the Great Barrington Trust Policy, and the Honoring of W.E.B. Du Bois to name a few.

Our understanding, based on communication with Misha, is that the following criteria are the main requirements for being a chapter. While we have had, and have expressed, ongoing questions surrounding SURJ's accountability practice, the BRIDGE TRJ white caucus meets these requirements and does so within the accountability framework developed by BRIDGE as a means of necessarily centering, rather than extracting from, POC leadership in racial justice work.

1. Have a core group that meets regularly (at least monthly)
2. Engage a broader base/public in events and moving people to action (especially towards campaign work)
3. Have relationships with people of color that inform their work. i.e. accountability partners. (new chapters can be in the process of forming these relationships for 3 months)
4. Agree to the SURJ mission, vision, values and theory of change which includes a core focus on organizing and centering poor and working class leadership and liberation.

Misha also emphasized regular communication, which we have not prioritized, due, firstly to our commitment to not value white presumptions of authority over accountability to local POC leadership, but also to the consistent lack of clarity and inadequate answers when National SURJ was repeatedly questioned about its accountability relationships and the impact of its models on local POC-led organizing. We were told by Misha in her in-person visit, that accountability council would be formed and more information would be available soon however that information has not been provided. If accountability partners are not willing to disclose their relationship with National SURJ, why not? How authentic are these relationships? How are you modeling accountability for SURJ affiliates to practice? Why are new chapters not required to develop relationships with people of color led organizations *before* forming a SURJ chapter?

In addition, the commitment of this group is to directly support and prioritize local initiatives and responses to racist incidents led by BRIDGE and its partners. Misha has visibility to this work, as she is on the TRJ email group and BRIDGE mailing list.

In regards to fundraising, a hundred percent of what we raise financially goes to BRIDGE. Within the frameworks of repair and redistributing white wealth, it would make much more sense for SURJ National to support fundraising for local POC-led orgs (with less visibility and white influence/support) than for the folks organizing white caucus within BRIDGE to fundraise for SURJ.

The tone and content of your email communications recently continue to display white superiority and a lack of respect and consideration for the work that BRIDGE has held in this process and as a leader in racial justice organizing. The white folks in this group also acknowledge that our lack of communication and organization in communicating has been problematic and created scenarios in which Gwendolyn is needing to respond.

Your hostility in communicating with Gwendolyn and this group exemplifies elements of white supremacy that we observed and exhibited as B-SURJ before becoming an integrated part of TRJ and BRIDGE, and that we are now continually struggling to name, challenge, and unlearn as we work towards accountability to BRIDGE leadership. We have extreme concerns about the efficacy and direct harm caused by this model to POC-led organizing and the way National SURJ conducts itself. Moving forward, we ask that you communicate with this group in a way that is non-violent, human, and reflective of your understanding of white supremacy as it shows up in the way you communicate and organize.

As Gwendolyn noted in her previous email, we agreed to respond this week and our plan is to continue operating Berkshire SURJ through BRIDGE's white caucus model and plan to have a redirecting message to BRIDGE, with a list of local minority-led justice work, for anyone who contacts. If based on the information shared above, you feel that we no longer qualify as a SURJ chapter, please share that in a way that does not threaten, criticize, or insult the work that BRIDGE does and has invested in creating structures and relationships that facilitate this group of white people to begin showing up accountably in the work, and BRIDGE will decide how best to move forward.

BRIDGE Accountability Team