

Why we chose Creative Discourse to do racial justice work in Essex

July 31, 2020

The Town of Essex is proud to announce that it is working with Creative Discourse to build the capacity of leaders in the Essex Police Department and Essex Municipality to engage with the community in authentic conversations about racism and social justice, and to lay the foundation for changes in attitudes, practices, and policies so Essex can become a more welcoming, inclusive, anti-racist community where all residents can thrive. Creative Discourse is a woman-owned, culturally diverse organization, which includes Associate Tabitha Moore.

When municipal staff began looking for people and firms to help guide discussions around policing and social justice in Essex, Ms. Moore quickly rose to the forefront as an expert in the field.

Ms. Moore is a woman of color with a long history of work in social justice, particularly including expertise with law enforcement. Highlights of her experience include, but are not limited to, being President of the Rutland Area Branch of the NAACP and serving as the Vermont Director of the NAACP, being a member of the Vermont State Police's Fair and Impartial Policing Committee and a member of the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council's Fair and Impartial Training Committee. She is currently working with the Vermont Department of Corrections on anti-racism. In addition to bachelor and master's degrees, Ms. Moore also holds an advanced certificate in Diversity, Social Justice and Inclusion from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs and is a licensed School Counselor in the state of Vermont. She is working toward her Ph.D. in Transformative Social Change at Saybrook University with dissertation research focusing on systemic equity in government and large community systems.

The Essex Community Justice Center approached Ms. Moore to see if she was interested in working with Essex, and Ms. Moore agreed to sign on, but asked if she could do the work through her affiliation with Creative Discourse. Creative Discourse is already working with the Essex Westford School District on racial and social justice issues, and expanding that work to the municipality will make it possible to build on existing efforts and ensure alignment across different sectors of the municipality.

Creative Discourse founder Susan McCormack also has an impressive history of combating racism and leading discussions about racial and social justice. Ms. McCormack has spent her career working with municipalities, school districts, and grassroots community organizations to design and implement productive public conversations that lead to change. In addition to her Creative Discourse work, Ms. McCormack is a Senior Associate with Everyday Democracy, a national organization that leads dialogue to change efforts with communities around the country, with a special focus on ways structural racism and inequities impact community issues and problem solving. In 2008 she co-authored *Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation*, an Everyday Democracy discussion guide being used around the country to help communities address race relations and racial equity.

The Town's Purchasing Policy allows a purchase to "be awarded without competition when the Department Head and Unified Manager determine, after conducting a good faith review of available sources, that there is only one qualified source for the required supply, service or construction or that one source is uniquely qualified for a service due to experience or knowledge of the project."

Between Ms. Moore's expertise in fair and impartial policing, social justice, and leadership positions in the NAACP, as well as Ms. McCormack's anti-racism work with municipalities and schools, including ongoing work with the Essex Westford School District, Town staff had no question that Creative Discourse was uniquely qualified to guide the community through discussions about racism and social

justice, and to build the capacity of the municipality and police department to make Essex an even more welcoming, inclusive, anti-racist community.

By entering into a sole source contract with the people best-suited to work with Essex on topics of racial justice in the police department and broader community, the Town was also able to avoid the delays that would have happened by going through a request for proposals process.

Ms. Moore and Ms. McCormack are equal partners in the venture with Essex, and are equally splitting the compensation for their work.

The Town of Essex looks forward to continuing this important work with Creative Discourse and our entire community.

Evan Teich, Unified Manager

Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager