



## **Community Advisory Group**

Spring 2023

### **Charge**

On [April 24](#), President Williams wrote, in a message to campus, that the best, most inclusive communities are those in which people with different opinions and world views, strengths and imperfections can co-exist and learn from and with one another. In the wake of not only the strike by Teamsters Local 251, but in the wake of the myriad responses to it, The President invited us to take up the less tangible work of asking ourselves hard questions about what type of community we want to be and what type of community we can be.

The Community Advisory Group was therefore appointed at Cabinet, and charged to work collectively to prepare for the next moment when our community is put to a test. The group was asked to lean in together to this difficult and uncomfortable space, and to do so as an investment in our community. The group was charged with identifying immediate steps to be taken to help us come to terms with and learn from recent events, and to reconcile. This group will determine immediate and longer-term opportunities to share experiences and take action.

### **Working method**

We have assembled on a weekly basis since Weds 4/26 to discuss our immediate experiences, our understanding of the broader conditions on campus, and our sense of what the root causes for the problems we and our friends and colleagues encounter on campus might be. In our final session we have turned to consider possible remedies. We have used a consensus model in which no proposal can advance over strong objection without debate. Where consensus still cannot be reached, we would vote with any measure requiring a 2/3rds majority to advance. Due to time constraints, and to the newness of this group, we have not had sufficient time to complete our deliberations, however the recommendations and possible actions we share below were all agreed on this basis. Our full membership roster is detailed at the end of this document.



## Assessment

We begin by noting the prevailing sense that RISD is not who or what it says that it is for far too many members of its community. We note the determining effects of collective exhaustion across campus, and the prevalent sense in so many of being overwhelmed by work at any instant. We note the distrust that permeates parts of our community, and the extent to which various forms of siloing aggravate that distrust. We have endeavored to confront ourselves, within this group, with the question of whether we can individually and collectively acknowledge when, where, and how we have fallen short of our stated values, and whether by engaging in dialogue we can draw our community closer together. We share the following recommendations and possible actions in hopes of supporting further dialogue and healing.

### Recommendations & possible actions

- I. Generate opportunities for the community to air grievances *and* to be in dialogue at various scales, *regularly*, and always in relation to clearly defined topics. Use passive and active methods (i.e. Textback, Feedback forms, Town halls etc). Think carefully about location, and the virtues of being on-campus vs. off-site. Work conscientiously to address language barriers in these settings with proper planning.
  - A. Small-scale gatherings of students, faculty & staff in discussion around specific themes: labor, migration, nutrition, etc.
- II. Work across departments and organizational units to create and *sustain* greater awareness of the contributions of the Campus services staff, and develop better practices of supporting their work.
  - A. At departmental levels, and across other organizational units, orient all new members of the group (students, staff or faculty) *with* those staff whose labor is essential to the running of the unit. Ensure that people are known to one another in those units and spaces intentionally.
- III. Strategically, intentionally and consistently create multi-constituency social events that collapse RISD's professional, departmental and divisional silos
  - A. Create some pressure relief and community building into the first year, including days in Fall and Spring where classes are canceled or homework is suspended, and students, staff and faculty interact together.
- IV. Create campus-wide monthly still periods in which class does not run, meetings are not scheduled, and in which other forms of intentional gathering occur.



- A. A designated monthly time period of three hours where no classes or scheduled meetings will occur, that allow students, staff and faculty to come together to discuss ways of contributing to the RISD community. This period could also afford students time to attend to their wellness, and to spend time intentionally engaging in relationship building across the campus.
  
- V. Work in a more conscientious and ongoing way to ensure that *all* of our community members have a greater understanding of the ways they can engage in the institution, and to ensure that the full complement of hard and soft benefits to which our community members are entitled are fully understood. Cultivate different models of outreach for different constituencies: physical vs. digital, verbal vs. written, in-person vs. email etc.
  - A. Informing students, faculty and staff of resources like the *Language Line* (for translations) or their entitlement to a free New York Times subscription, or to discounted Zip cars etc. Generate some infographics on risd.edu that diagram and contextualize the institution's operating units at various scales: show how they interact, how we work.
  
- VI. Develop cohort-style strategies or structures for onboarding staff (and ideally faculty) *together* in specific, intentional combinations, so that the interdependence of people's work is more clearly understood.
  - A. Design a year-long series of interactions that facilitate new people across staff and faculty groups meeting one another, and coming to understand their distinct roles at the college.
  
- VII. Retain the Community Advisory Group in AY2023-24, and evolve its membership over the course of the year to rotate in varying perspectives and experiences of RISD.

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## Members of Group:

### Karma Johnson (Co-Chair)

Vice-President, The E-Board of the Student Alliance  
Experimental & Foundation Studies, 2026

### Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa (Co-Chair)

Interim Assistant Provost for Social Equity & Inclusion; Associate Professor, Photography  
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Communications & Training Specialist (IT)  
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### Lizzie Brown

FAV, 2024  
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### Soul Brown

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### Jeanette Cosentini

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EFS, 2026