

Board Report, NOW, Inc.
Lisa Seigel, Chief of Staff
July 5, 2018, San Jose, California

Role of Chief of Staff

- Serving as strategic advisor and counsel to the President
- Assuming day-to-day responsibility for projects and tasks
- Creating and maintaining cross-departmental relationships to enable leadership success

National Action Center (NAC) Staffing Update

NOW has faced the challenge of a high turnover rate over the past few months. While some staff members moved on as a natural next step in their career paths, others left the organization with serious misgivings about how NOW functions. This experience reflects a huge need for the organization, including the Board of Directors, to recommit to ensuring the organization move forward with integrity, transparency, and a commitment to collaborate to achieve our mission.

In the past two months, NOW has hired five new staff members:

- **Supria Bhatia, Chapter Services Specialist**, is a graduate of Ohio State University and worked as the Refugee Health Coordinator at Ohio State Wexner Medical Center. In that role, she worked directly with women who suffered genital mutilation and other health challenges.
- **Marie Barnhart, Accounting Associate**, worked for 12 years at NACCHO, The National Association of County and City Health Officials. She comes to us with deep experience in non-profit accounting and our accounting software, MIP.
- **Brittany Oliver, Assistant Director of Communications and Advocacy**, a Baltimore native, fierce feminist with strong connections to many feminist organizations. Brittany worked formerly for the ACLU of Maryland and the Democratic Party of Maryland.
- **Julianna Gesiotto, Coordinator of the President's Office**, graduated this spring from the University of Maryland where she majored in Women's Studies and was the editor of the Women's Studies Undergraduate Newsletter. Last spring, she was a legislative intern in the Maryland House of Delegates.
- **Lisa Seigel, Chief of Staff** (more about me at the end of this report).

I have been responsible for onboarding all of these new employees, as well as saying goodbye to our employees who have left us.

Beginning May 30th, we have welcomed six summer interns: Emily Garrett, Hayley Margolis, Emmalyn Brown, Josh Cohen, Grace Ward, and Sofiy Inck. NOW is fortunate to receive many qualified applicants for our internship positions, and this group of interns is no exception. The skills they bring to us, along with those we teach to them, have ensured that essential functions of the National Action Center continue, even in the face of our staffing shortage. Internships at NOW offer rich Washington experiences. Our summer interns, thus far, have attended local protests, visited House and Senate hearings, and participated in press conferences, as well as experienced enrichment opportunities such as visiting the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture or volunteering at the Congressional Women's Softball game.

My work at NOW has included training and managing our interns, including organizing and providing access to all of the above experiences.

NAC Human Resources Management

One of the first projects Toni asked me to take on in January, as a consultant at that time, was a long overdue update of the employee handbook. Working in consultation with Toni and Marcia Cohen, NOW's legal counsel, we developed changes to consolidate and update policies. Some of the changes included:

- Updating the social media policy
- Consolidating a huge amount of various leave policies (e.g. vacation, sick leave, bereavement leave, leave for your child's educational appointments, etc., etc.) into one Paid Time Off (PTO) policy
- Adding in information on using google calendar, protecting organization information, etc.
- Updating the sexual harassment policy

With old staff leaving the organization and new staff coming on, it has been essential to create and follow consistent procedures for new staff. At Toni's request, I developed a one page document that can be used to ensure that all paperwork for new employees is completed and recorded in the employee's personnel file. I also have been systematically checking each of our employee benefit accounts to ensure that employees have been enrolled and terminated appropriately. As an example of mismanagement prior to my taking on these duties, as late as April of 2018, our dental and vision insurance plan still had several employees listed and covered (and whom NOW was still paying for) who had left the organization at different times throughout 2017. As Chief of Staff, I have worked with our health insurance broker, payroll specialists, and others to ensure that NOW's human resources processes and procedures are efficient, consistent, and follow the law.

NAC Organizing/Advocacy

The most exciting part of being at NOW is how we can make an immediate impact through communicating to our grassroots or by working in partnership with others. When the media exposed the abhorrent family separation policies of the Trump Administration, Toni immediately wondered what we could do. As an immigrant rights advocate in the DC area, I connected with others to see how we could make an immediate impact. Through local networks, I connected Toni to Congressman Gutierrez's office as he was leading a group of House Democrats to organize a press conference on June 13th, followed by a potential civil disobedience action to shut down the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) building. Toni and Ellie Smeal participated in that action alongside members of Congress such as Rep. John Lewis, Rep. Jan Schakowsky, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, Rep. Grijalva, and several others.

When federal agents refused to arrest the group at CBP, they reorganized and planned a huge action for the following Wednesday. NOW committed to recruiting at least ten local children to participate in an action on the House floor on June 20th. These children, part of a larger group of about 40, then accompanied the members of Congress, Toni, Ellie and other advocates, to a press conference on the House Triangle. We were proud to stand with children and members of Congress to demand an end to family separation.

While organizing and advocacy may not be a huge part of my role as Chief of Staff, I welcome the opportunity to jump in as an organizer whenever possible, to help NOW achieve its mission.

My Background

I have a Master's degree in Education from Bank Street College of Education in New York. My professional background is as a special education teacher, but over the last four years, I have worked tirelessly to organize and advocate on behalf of public schoolchildren in Montgomery County, and on behalf of immigrants in the Langley Park area of Maryland, the neighborhood in the country with the highest percentage of non-native born residents. As a Spanish speaker committed to social justice, I have been able to develop deep and lasting relationships with many local community members.

I received the Advocate of the Year award, in 2017, from the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, for my work around equity in outdoor play spaces across the county. My advocacy efforts led to the appropriation, in 2017, of \$750,000 towards outdoor

playspaces, and another \$3.5 million over the following two years. As president of the PTA at the Title I elementary school of 900 students where my children attended, I was responsible for leading the recruitment and organization of over 100 volunteers, and managing board relations during a very contentious transition period. My number one priority was increasing the involvement of those traditionally underrepresented in school volunteer activities.

My advocacy passion is in immigrant rights because of my relationships with neighbors and friends in my own community. I helped advise and organize the passage of legislation in Maryland this spring to allow undocumented parents plan for custody of their children in the event that they were detained unexpectedly by ICE. I am also the founding board member and Treasurer, of a non-profit organization, Direct Support for Immigrants, Inc, which just received 501(c)3 status in May, as a result of my leadership.

While I came late to NOW, becoming a member following Hillary's election loss in 2016, I have been actively involved in my local chapter. My work with Montgomery County NOW included researching, writing, and pushing out email Action Alerts and updates. My feminism has always been inspired by Toni, whom I have known all my life. I could sense Toni's feminism even before I understood what the word meant because the way she treated me as a child was different than how other adults treated me. She treated me with the full respect of a child with the potential to do anything. We are not just connected because she is my dad's cousin's partner. We are connected because we believe passionately in social justice, intersectional feminism and ushering NOW through these traumatic times.

While I was privileged to get an inside view of NOW through the Schlesinger archiving project that I worked on last fall, NOW's core issues are very broad, and I fully rely on the expertise of all of you, NOW's most committed leaders, to guide the organization's actions with your deep experience in women's rights.