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The deadline for feedback is the end of day on March 15, 2021.

**Strategic Investment Proposal: “Race, Religion, and Social Justice”(RR&SJ)**

**Project Narrative/Concept**

During the turbulent and tragic events of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and the protests in response to the death of George Floyd exposed both health disparities and legal issues in relation to minority racial and ethnic communities in the United States. Although much attention has been paid to the differential impact of the pandemic on African-American, Latino, Native American communities, the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities by law enforcement and the judicial system, and the rise of violent hate crimes against these and Asian-American communities, relatively little attention has been given to the role of religion and spirituality in the discriminatory practices and in the motivation of different actors on the national scene. This project is designed to facilitate a better understanding of how religious ideas, values, persons, and communities have both enabled legal discrimination, health disparities, and violent extremists and also sought constructive responses, indeed solutions, to these major social problems.

UNO Religious Studies (RS) and Tri-Faith Initiative (TFI) are collaborating on a project to address these issues. This particular funding request will have three principal benefits. The seed money that UNO provides will both establish a conference on “Race, Religion, and Social Justice” (RR&SJ) on a solid footing and leverage additional funding in order to ensure sustainability. The plan is to do the following:

1. Initiate a “Race, Religion, and Social Justice” (RR&SJ) annual conference within the next calendar year (2022), aiming to advance interdisciplinary knowledge focused on the intersections of religion and race/ethnicity. Areas of focus include: belief, behavior, and belonging, religious pluralism, intersectional identities, postcolonial formations of power and whiteness, race, truth and reconciliation, identity formation, collaboration and conflict, and bridging differences. Generating original and collaborative research builds toward a more harmonious, equitable, and just future.
2. Create internship opportunities for UNO students to work with both RS and TFI on development and implementation of the conference and related activities.
3. With the conference, the UNO - TFI collaboration will develop more robust proposals to establish sustainable funding for staff support for the conference itself and related research and curriculum development projects. Specific foundations have been identified and a letter of intent is already in the hands of one of those foundations.

Our Strategic Investment Proposal: “Race, Religion, and Social Justice”(RR&SJ), is requesting a commitment of \$75,000 over three years. This investment would seed 7.5% of funding needed to leverage anticipated total funding of \$1,000,000. Tri-Faith Initiative, in partnership with the UNO Religious Studies Department, has already or will be soliciting funding partnerships with Sherwood Foundation, Holland Foundation, Jews of Color Initiative, Omaha Community Foundation, The Henry Luce Foundation, Lilly Endowment Inc., Pillars Foundation, and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation. For this particular funding request, our anticipated project start date is August 15, 2021 until August 15, 2024.

## **Principal UNO and Community Partners**

The principal partners spearheading this project include UNO Religious Studies and Tri-Faith Initiative, a nonprofit organization dedicated to interfaith education, understanding, and collaboration. Multiple current collaborations between more than a dozen UNO faculty and TFI provides a foundation for taking this public-private partnership to a new level, with significant prospects for positive outcomes for UNO, Omaha, and the United States.

Tri-Faith pioneers interfaith relations from an unprecedented model: a co-located synagogue, church, mosque, and interfaith center. Tri-Faith is particularly capable of connecting people in different organizations and sectors (nonprofits, religious institutions, corporations, and universities) for a more inclusive community life. The TFI staff brings expertise in community oriented Education, Programming, Communications, and proven success in major grant development. TFI community partners currently include: American Muslim Institute, Countryside Community Church, and Temple Israel. Additional possible community partners include the following: Inclusive Communities, OPPD, National Baptist Convention, COGIC, Archdiocese of Omaha, Urban League, NAACP, as well as other educational institutions, religious communities, and nonprofit organizations.

Religious Studies (RS) faculty bring content expertise in a variety of spiritual traditions (e.g., African religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Native American religions), training in multiple disciplines (e.g., anthropology, archaeology, history, philosophy, sociology, textual analysis, etc.), and program/project development experience (e.g., establishing and/or leading the following UNO units - Goldstein Center for Human Rights (GCHR), Human Rights, Islamic Studies, Medical Humanities, Native American Studies, Schwalb Center for Israel and Jewish Studies, Women and Gender Studies, as well as curricular and research collaborations with Black Studies, Criminology/Criminal Justice, History, International Studies, OLLAS, Political Science, and Sociology/Anthropology. In addition, RS is developing a new, open-rank faculty position, linked to an endowed professorship in “Social Justice and Religion” and prioritizing enhanced diversity of the UNO faculty. The new faculty member will have a service assignment to collaborate with this project and to support an existing endowed lectureship. Confirmed additional campus partners include: GCHR, Goldstein Community Chair in Human Rights, Native American Studies, and Dr. Peter Szto (School of Social Work), who brings expertise in community engaged visualization projects. Existing partnerships and projects within UNO will be used to expand participation by as many different academic units as possible from all UNO colleges. Participation from other UNO programs will support the academic quality and community impacts of this project.

## **Metrics for Evaluating Success**

1. UNO Student and Faculty outcomes and metrics
  - a. Increasing number and diversity of students with internship opportunities in the nonprofit sector, intentionally recruiting members of underrepresented groups
  - b. Increasing the number and diversity of students participating in this inclusive, accessible, and equity-oriented academic conference
  - c. Increasing the number and diversity of UNO faculty engaged in research, teaching, and service through access to and knowledge about community organizations at the local and national level
  - d. Increasing the number and diversity of faculty presentations and publications on RR&SJ topics generated by the conference and related activities
2. Omaha outcomes and metrics
  - a. Increasing the number of community organizations participating in the conference and collaborating towards RR&SJ objectives
  - b. Increasing the number of religious & interfaith communities participating in the conference and collaborating towards RR&SJ objectives
3. United States outcomes and metrics
  - a. Utilizing both in-person and online components, the conference will reach community organizations and prospective speakers across the United States, impacting diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in areas of race, religion, and social justice.

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