

January 17, 2022

To: Tides, BLM Global Network Foundation Advisory Council  
Cc: BLM Canada Board of Directors and Executive Director, BLM Grassroots

Hello everyone,

I'm writing to you today with some serious concerns about the management and operations of Black Lives Matter Grassroots. As this is the body that is currently entrusted with the Tides Collective Action fund, and as there is serious consideration about transitioning the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation over to this body, I feel a sense of urgency in letting you know how things are currently operating.

It is my view that the Black Lives Matter Grassroots team, of which I am a part, is ill-equipped at this time to run and manage a multi-million dollar organization. In the over two years we have been working together, we have been unable to build an infrastructure through which the organization can operate.

What's more concerning is what is very serious risk and mismanagement of the organization, in part due to an unwillingness to adhere to generally accepted principles of democratic governance. I have tried to raise these issues in a constructive manner, as have others, and they have led to reprisal and attempts to reduce the participation of those with concerns as a members of the team.

I am very nervous about the potential impact of these ongoing issues on all of us who are affiliated with Black Lives Matter. If some of these ongoing issues were to be publicly revealed, I worry that those of us who are still engaged and those of us who have moved on would be publicly harmed.

Below I itemize for you concerns that I have raised with the team last year in an attempt to course correct. I believe I have failed in attempting to constructively engage the BLM Grassroots team in trying to resolve these issues internally—there is simply no interest from the majority of the leadership. I send this to you for your consideration as stewards of the funds that have been raised to support initiatives that bring us closer to Black liberation.

I am looking forward to our transition meeting. I understand claims may have been made about a shift of the CAF board membership, but please be aware that the CAF membership remains as initially constituted, and each member who initially signed on to steward the CAF remain committed to attending the transition meeting, in addition to Audrena Redmond.

The issues as I see it are as follows:

## **1. LEADERSHIP**

We have a leadership problem. As much as we are calling ourselves a leaderfull organization, we have over the last two years, permitted leadership power to concentrate to one person. That is antithetical to the way we describe ourselves. The consequences are significant.

One of the central ways in which this shows up is the intense monitoring and control of our weekly agendas. If members of the team bring up ideas the current Director does not agree with, they are given little time on the agenda, or ignored. In the past, this has included

concerns such as security in Michigan following January 6, a desire to engage in land and property justice work, support for local healing initiatives, direct chapter support, and, more recently, attempts to adopt policies to address some of the concerns below.

At this point, CAF meetings are being called without proper notice, without the Chair, and in secret. At the most recent so-called CAF meeting, members who were told about the meeting voted to implement a six-figure salary for themselves, without the participation or discussion of voices who were likely to dissent.

Additionally, some members of the Grassroots team secretly took a book-writing retreat trip to Jamaica without notifying the entirety of the team, or without approving a budgetary expenditure.

The implications of these issues are significant. Were anyone to find out about these decisions, and ask myself or any of the other Grassroots members who have been marginalized to account for them, we would have no ability to do so as a fiduciary, as these decisions have been hidden from us. I cannot imagine what negative impacts this could have on the broader movement for Black lives should they be discovered and publicized.

I would recommend considering a neutral, external chair to chair Grassroots meetings going forward to address these issues.

**2. LACK OF OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE CONCERN:**

We have no mechanism to voice concern on our team. One might suggest simply speaking up is a mechanism, but it is not. Speaking up is met with significant retribution. After members of the team expressed concern in a democratic forum, other members of the team are called and told that members who express concern have goals to remove the Director, or other nefarious ulterior motives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Members need to be able to express concerns so that the team can adequately consider any risk or threats. For a team so small, it's extremely toxic that we do not have a mechanism to honestly voice concerns without fear of retribution, being counter organized, or being blatantly disrespected.

**3. RETRIBUTION FOR VOICING CONCERN, QUERIES OR EXPRESSING OPPOSITION:**

*a. Co-directorship:*

I have had significant concerns for over a year that we have failed to develop a clear communications strategy. My efforts to prioritize building one were met with messaging that I was too fearful to be a co-Director, and insistence that I should step down and focus on international work.

While I have no desire to engage in Director work, I am concerned that serious and considerable concerns for a failing that is central to organizing work was so maligned and irrationally dismissed.

*b. Power dynamics:*

Several members of our team have previously voiced concerns about power dynamics, and these concerns have been met with retribution. Concretely, members

of our team who have expressed concern are actively being told we are *no longer on the leadership team and now have no decision-making power*.

**c. *Health Concerns***

Members who have been temporarily absent due to health concerns or concerns for sick family members during the pandemic have led to insistence that their stipends be suspended without notice or discussion. The Director has unilaterally made decisions to this effect, leading to a toxic work environment. Directors should not have this singular power.

**4. ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES:**

**a. *Retreat***

This team has had three retreats in less than one year, and no infrastructure or initiatives to show for it. These expensive retreats were held in Southern California, Boston, and Jamaica. Another retreat is being planned for February.

The Boston retreat occurred in October. Due to a surge in the pandemic, about of the Grassroots members expressed concern about travelling, and did not attend. We decided we would create an electronic way for folks to participate. Instead, the three members who attended the retreat *simply made decisions without the rest of the team*, much of which is the source of current frustrations.

The retreat never should have moved forward. Three people cannot impose decisions on the rest of the team. Frustration that has been brought up about this since October have been ignored.

**b. *Budget***

Apparently, a budget exceeding \$7 million has been created. This was not collaboratively created, or approved by the entirety of the Grassroots team. In fact, members of the Grassroots team who have been calling for these anti-democratic procedures to be addressed have been removed from viewing the document.

As an organization that has failed to hire even one full-time staff member, a \$7 million budget is unlikely to be well-managed. The Black Lives Matter – Canada time, who supports 7 full-time staff, ten chapters, a group of fellows, and significant campaigns and initiatives has a budget that is less than \$2 million CAD.

While it is possible that such a budget is necessary and justified, all members of the Grassroots team should be able to participate on its adoption. The secrecy is deeply concerning.

**c. *Voting vs. Decrees***

Decisions are currently being declared by the Director, and insistence that members be permitted to vote and discuss concerns are being ignored.

**5. ASSYMMETRICAL SUPPORT FOR LOCAL CHAPTERS AND AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONAL GROUPS:**

As a result of the power imbalance on our team, ideas that do not originate from Los Angeles tend to be met with deep scrutiny or ignored. This means that initiatives to support grassroots movement initiatives are significantly imbalanced. If the Grassroots team is meant to support international and domestic organizing from all over the country, trends from the last two years of work suggest that this team will not be interested in doing so.

Very simply, we are not operating as a global organization. We are not even operating as a national organization. Should this information be discovered by the general public, who has put a significant amount of trust and funding toward our work, I fear what the consequences might be.

**6. TEAM MAKE-UP:**

Our team lacks diversity. It just so happens that the members who have tended to raising concerns and issues are younger and from locations outside of Michigan and California. As a result of reprisal and marginalization, these members are being pushed out, and told that they are no longer part of the decision-making team. The leadership team is coalescing into a more and more homogenized space. We should be expanding identities and power on the team, not limiting it. Our team does not at all reflect the movement, and deserves suspicion for that.

I want to reiterate that I have no desire to be the Director, and no ulterior motive to sending this message other than deep concern for the state of our movement. I do not wish to see the current Director ousted. I believe much of these issues can be solved with a robust policy infrastructure. So far, attempts to create one democratically have been rebuffed.

The consequences of these issues are significant. Our chapters can see the contradictions from the ground. I believe we are headed for more of the same sorts of fights and scandals we have seen time and again in this work. I want to prevent that.

The result of all of this is an inability to move forward because we are not working together, we are working under the declarative and possessive expectations of one person. My initial response to this state of affairs was to remove myself from the toxicity, and focus on the international portfolio as the one international member of the team. But I am now also experiencing retribution as a result of my resistance to acquiescing to everything.

I started working with Black Lives Matter because I thought it was one of our best options to push our liberatory dreams forward. If we keep operating this way, it absolutely won't be.

Sincerely,

Sandy  
BLM – Canada Rep  
BLM Grassroots