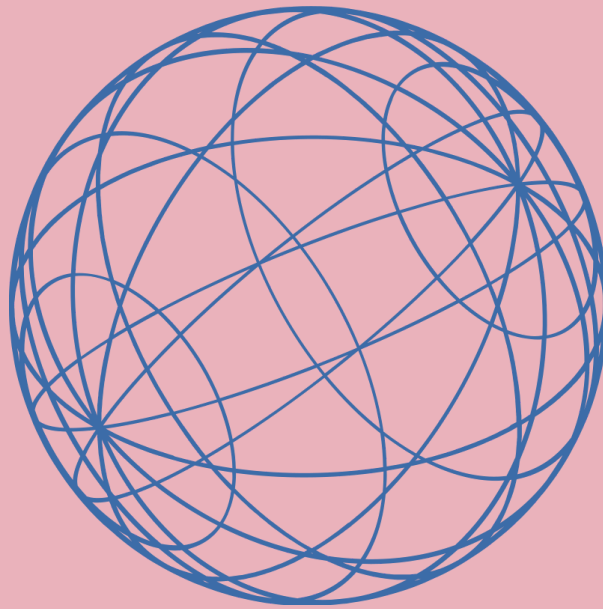




2022

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES REPORT



prepared by
Natalie Roach

2022

SPECIAL THANKS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Lina and Jake; my fellow Edmonds fellows, Hallie McRae and Veronica Bido; Kristi Rudelius-Palmer and Kristina Eberbach; and all of the regional representatives that participated in my research. I appreciate the community that I found in all of you this summer, and the work I did would not have happened without your encouragement, knowledge, and support! A special thanks to the legacy of Kirby Edmonds for making this fellowship possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Context	3
Data Collection	4
Key Takeaways	6
Long Term Recommendations	7
Short Term Recommendations	10

2022

CONTEXT

Project B: Strengthening HRE USA Regional Representative Community

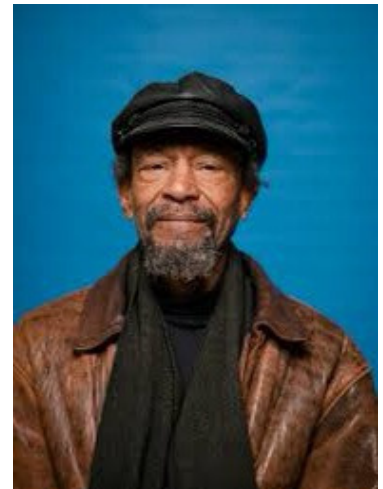
This summer, I supported efforts to assess and strengthen the HRE-USA Regional Representative community by cultivating key data on needs and priorities of current serving regional representatives and developing a plan for continued, sustainable opportunities for collaboration, learning and fellowship. This was accomplished via a survey and series of interviews.

This report shares the outputs of that research, including a needs and skills assessment, recommendations on future best practices for regional representatives, and a crafted plan of potential opportunities to strengthen regional representative community.



THE EDMONDS FELLOWSHIP

In August of 2020, Human Rights Educators USA (HRE USA) lost one of its sustaining sources of inspiration and committed leadership – Kirby Edmonds. As a founding member of HRE USA, Kirby was instrumental in the establishment of HRE USA, directly shaping our mission statement, organizational structure, and most importantly our values framework and the consensus-based policy for decision-making. He served as Co-Chair of HRE USA for nearly a decade. In honor of his legacy, HRE USA has created the Edmonds Summer Fellowship to support hands-on leadership experience in human rights education and further Kirby’s work to engage young people in building human rights-friendly schools and communities.



DATA COLLECTION

Survey:

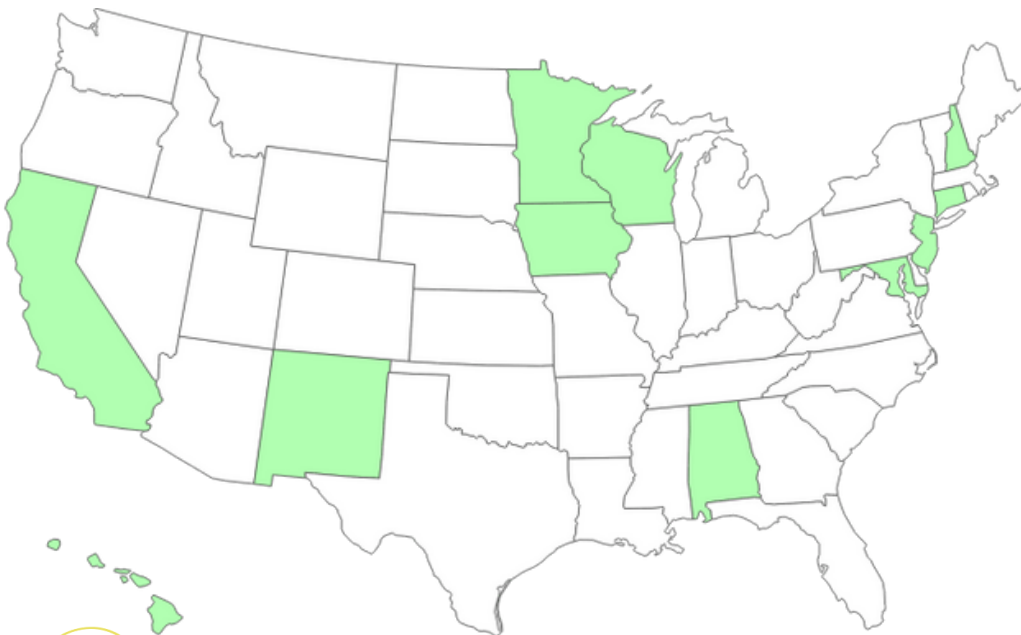
A survey was created in Google Forms. It contained 14 questions and was sent out to the Regional Representatives listserv. A survey reminder email was sent out to the listserv, as well as to individual members. I also attended one monthly regional representative meeting, in which I verbally shared a reminder. 9 responses were gathered. Survey responses can be viewed in the appendix of this report.

Interview:

I conducted 4 phone or Zoom interviews with regional representatives. Three of these representatives were not able to respond to the survey, and one had responded to the survey and the interview consisted of follow-up. The interviewees were carefully selected to provide key perspectives of the program, based on geographic area, experience, and presence on the steering committee.

Observations:

I was able to attend one regional representatives meeting and one steering committee meeting. These experiences allowed me additional data on the flow and content of the organization's meetings and current project.



SPATIAL DATA

This map represents all of the regions in which we were able to gather data from the regional representatives (whether survey responses or interviews). As can be seen, there are three main clusters that were well represented; California (which has multiple representatives), the Northeast, and Minnesota/Wisconsin/Iowa.

DATA COLLECTION

- What is your name?
 - What state/region do you represent?
 - What is your preferred email address?
 - How long have you been affiliated with HRE USA?
 - How long have you been a regional representative?
 - What or whom motivated you to get involved with HRE USA?
 - Why did you become a regional representative?
 - What are the biggest barriers to human rights education in your state/region?
 - Please list (with brief descriptions) the activities that you as a regional representative have engaged in this past year.
 - What are some of the challenges you have encountered as a regional representative?
 - Is it challenging for you to balance your position as an HRE representative with your other responsibilities? If so, which part of your position is the hardest to balance?
 - Do you currently collaborate with other regional representatives? Is this something you are interested in doing?
 - Do you plan to continue on in your position as a regional representative in the near future?
 - What goals do you have for your work? What are your hopes for what you would like to do, given sufficient resources?
 - We are assessing the needs of regional representatives to better improve the network. How can the broader HRE USA network better support you in achieving your goals for your state?
-

The survey created consisted of the above set of questions, and was sent out to the regional representatives listerv. The interviews conducted were loosely based around these questions as well.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

These six themes comprise the main areas for improvement that regional representatives identified via this evaluation. Representatives are looking for more cross-region collaboration of all kinds. They are looking for improvements in the organization's internal communication, including email lists, the newsletter, and information on what is going on in other parts of the country and organization. Representatives also think that participation in the program will be much more successful if there were more concrete actions for members to take and participate in. Another theme that consistently came up was the power of personal connection in acquiring and maintaining people. Strategic coordination was also requested by representatives, in order to better connect and build collaborations nationwide. Lastly, all representatives were struggling with membership retention.



Cross-Region Collaboration



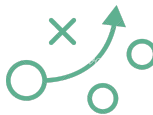
Internal Communication



Concrete Actions



Personal Connection



Strategic Coordination



Membership Recruitment

LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Centering the Frontlines: K-12 Teachers

In my experience learning about HRE USA, centering and connecting educators seems to be the roots of its purpose. Many representatives reflected this: they expressed a need for HRE USA to better connect educators with the network. They are looking for more regional representatives that are teachers, and more members that are teachers. Many joined because their conception of the organization was a flexible network of K-12 educators sharing ideas and inspirations with each other. Getting these people at the frontlines of human rights education in the country is crucial to the success of the organization.

One tried and true way representatives have been able to attract K-12 educators is making events that it would directly benefit educators to attend, and marketing them in a way that makes that it clear the event directly connects with their work. Educators have little time on their hands to spare, and having to attend meetings that are mostly administrative are not the most valuable way we can use their time.

Migration and the Human Rights Impact in Afghanistan ✕
vs.
Building Cultural Competency with Your Students From Afghanistan ✓

Improvements to Internal Communication

Multiple regional representatives shared that they had trouble receiving communications from HRE USA. Some had signed up for the newsletter multiple times but never received it, some noticed there was information others were receiving that they were not, and some noted discrepancies in different HRE USA email listservs. Almost all representatives not on the steering committee were hoping to receive information more regularly about HRE USA happenings. It would be valuable to conduct an internal communications audit in order to understand how to create a more decentralized, effective internal communication structure.

Financial Investment

At a certain point in the evolution of a volunteer-based program, financial resources must be brought in to make it sustainable and allow it to reach its full potential. This is the point that the regional representatives program has reached. Ideally, in order to truly maintain an effective national network, two staff members would be hired to oversee the program. They would be able to facilitate communications to members, collaboration between regional representatives, and strategic coordination for the program. A core grant would be needed to support these positions and other costs of a more robust program. These staff members could fulfill a role of Regional Representative Coordinator, as outlined below.

Regional Representatives Coordinator Position

- Schedule guest speakers for bi monthly meetings
- Identify and facilitate collaborations between representatives/chapters across the nation
- Run the localized outreach system to members across the country
- Identify and coordinate logistics for shared projects
- Facilitate regional clusters of representatives
- Facilitate pairing of clusters
- Onboard new regional representatives
- Function as the chair of the representatives meetings (maybe?)

Strategic Coordination

There is a lack of strategic coordination in the current regional representatives network. Regional representatives do not have the bandwidth to proactively track what is happening in other regions and external organizations, never mind initiate collaborations. This should be the job of an HRE USA staff member. Staff could alert representatives to new members in their region, prompt regions engaging in similar efforts to collaborate, and inform regional representatives of potential collaboration opportunities with external organizations.

Localized Outreach

In order to truly engage members across the country, we need to make human rights education relevant to them. They need to understand how these big national issues are showing up in their communities, and how they can take action on a local/state level. And they need personalized support on how to combat these issues in their specific political climate. Ideally, a communication system would be constructed that would send localized alerts out to members about different actions they can take. For instance, if there is a state representative pushing against critical race theory in one district of Connecticut, members in that district would be sent an alert giving them information on how to lobby against it. This system would require an SMS bulk messaging software as well as staff to track state and local level lobbying and legislation.



National Goal Setting

There is potential in the regional representatives program to make a collaborative national impact. When the organization is rolling out initiatives, the regional representatives program has great potential to be the arm of the organization that distributes information about and adoption of those initiatives across the country. With some changes to the program and some intentional reflection on goals (or aligning with the pre-existing organization goals), HRE USA can take this program from individual actions to a coordinated national approach to human rights education, which could exponentially increase the impact of the organization.

There are already ambitious actions being taken in different regions, for example state standards and curriculum changes. If there is interest, these efforts happening in different pockets of the network can be recognized as a goal for all states to achieve, and resources can be put into coordinating and tracking progress on the goal.

This national-to-regions approach would have to be navigated collaboratively so that it doesn't place too much strain on regional representatives. It also would need to be designed to protect the autonomy of individual representative agendas and respect the goals that regions set for themselves.

Updated Organizational Structure

There are limitations to the current organizational structure of HRE USA. Regional representatives expressed that they would appreciate a structure to the organization that is less hierarchical, less dominated by meetings, more decentralized, and more flexible.

One specific limitation is the pay-to-enter structure. By instituting a membership fee, the organization is discouraging young people and people from lower socioeconomic classes to join. Even if there are exceptions made for different financial situations when requested, many people in the above groups will not ask and will be stopped from joining by the fee. If membership expansion is a top priority, a new model for membership must be created. Some short term solutions to the membership fee limitation include creating a tier of membership that is free, and making it clear that people can join a regional chapter without being a member.

I recommend exploring different organizational structure options. There are many organizations (notably ones run by young people) that have newer structures that work well. Other peer organizations are also grappling with this potential transition; for instance, the California Council of Social Studies Teachers is having conversations about changing their model right now.

SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Monthly Updates

There is an existing listserv, but it is underutilized. I recommend that once a month, the chair of the program should send out a “monthly updates” email, and each regional representative should respond with a quick update, including any upcoming events, any progress they want to share, and any roadblocks they want advice/support with. Their update can be about HRE USA specific work, and/or other human rights work they are engaged in. This will create a monthly email chain that keeps the community in communication regularly. If email is not a popular choice for monthly updates, there are other communication platforms that can be considered.

Incentivized Meetings

This recommendation aims to provide more purpose and content to regional representative meetings, and increase incentives to attend. For each meeting, a guest speaker/training/lecture should be offered for the first half of the meeting before the usual meeting content. These could sometimes include presentations from regional representatives themselves, if they have a case study to share, or from members of HRE USA. This educational component provides regional representatives with training/information they would not get elsewhere. It will not only reward them for their work, but grow them into better representatives and spark new ideas for HRE USA.

Formation of Chapters

Many representatives have shown interest in building HRE chapters within their states, so that they have a team of engaged members across their region working together. Some regions are already doing this in an informal way, and have reported success with the structure. One suggested way of building a chapter would be using the upcoming Training As Action series. In this way, interested parties could be trained during the fall and then potentially form a chapter afterwards. This could also involve making action plans for their local communities and giving bottom up direction to the program.

Regional Clusters

There are three current clusters of active regional representatives. The Northeast cluster is already coordinating with each other. The California cluster is collaborating to a more limited extent. The third cluster, which consists of the Wisconsin/Minnesota/Iowa region, is interested in collaboration but has not been successful yet. HRE USA should facilitate this clustering work in any way that it can. This allows for reasonable in-person connection opportunities and discussions of the specifics of regional cultural/political climates. Additionally, it would be beneficial to create a pairing program where successful clusters are paired with states that are still getting their network off the ground. These pairs would allow for knowledge sharing and mentorship.

Coffee Chats

Coffee chats have become a popular way of facilitating personal connections in an organization, particularly since the advent of COVID. In this context, a coffee chat is an informal meeting (typically virtual) of two randomly assigned members of an organization. The organization will assign members to participate in a meeting (and assign them a partner) on a regular schedule. This aims to serve as a substitute for the social aspect of in person offices, where you may form unexpected relationships due to physical proximity.

Since many representatives identified a personal connection as their motivation for engaging in the program, and a lack of personal connection as a barrier to better engaging with HRE USA as a whole, developing these personal connections should be a priority. These coffee chats should be assigned randomly, and should focus on not only connecting the regional representatives to each other, but also to steering committee members and other parts of HRE USA.

Typically, employers will institute coffee chats once a month. However, for HRE USA, this may be too often. Getting people to follow through with these chats – respond to emails, schedule a time, etc. – will be difficult, and there’s no way to track it and ensure it’s happening. Giving some leeway in time is important for the success of this recommendation.

Shared Projects

Multiple representatives suggested a shared project as a way to bring the regional representatives together and foster connection between them. This could be smaller projects, or agreed upon national policy goal setting (see the long-term recommendations section for more). Starting with a small project will allow the program a small-stakes way to better connect, develop the structure needed for larger shared projects, and aid in future coordination.

UDHR@75

This shared projects approach has been successful in the past. Glenn Mitoma created posters for regional representatives to put up in their respective areas in order to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Regional representatives considered this a successful shared project that felt impactful and connected them to the larger network. As a first step towards more shared projects, the network could do something on a similar scale to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the UDHR.

Onboarding Packet

Many regional representatives shared that they had a limited or nonexistent onboarding process, and some of the new regional representatives were unsure what their role was or where they could find resources. The program could benefit from a formal onboarding process for representatives.

This process could include documents and/or videos that outline the responsibilities of regional representatives and the resources available to them (these materials should be designed to be used year after year). New regional representatives could have a mandatory meeting with the chair of the network (or the coordinator if one is hired). They could be assigned a more experienced regional representative as their mentor. They should be sent all of the advertising materials they need to table for HRE USA regularly in their region. A scavenger hunt could be created to allow new representatives to get familiarized with the HRE USA website.

Some regional representatives had challenges with members being unclear on their role as well. The methods above could also be used to create a more robust onboarding process for new members of HRE USA.

New Southwest Representative

One specific opportunity that surfaced during this process was finding a new representative for New Mexico / the Southwest. The current representative is Rosemary Blanchard; she is in the process of transitioning out, and not able to give the attention to the role that she thinks it deserves. She is ready and willing to mentor a new representative to take over her position.

Recruitment Materials

Multiple representatives are interested in receiving HRE USA marketing materials that they can use to advertise the organization and draw in potential members. Many representatives shared a love for the HRE USA materials that they were able to hand out, and a strong positive reception by their audiences.

Materials that representatives expressed interest in include business cards for each regional representative, brochures, posters, and informational packets. Some of these materials exist already, they just need to be given to the representatives regularly at no cost. This will expand HRE USA's reach and name recognition in the regions that representatives are currently present in.