The Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA) believes that our nation is in a particular historical moment that calls for a more expansive approach to advancing racial justice in the United States. Aligned with the resonant call of American Indian and African American leaders such as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Waziyatawin, Diane Wilson, Bryan Stevenson, Rev. William Barber, and Rev. angel Kyodo williams, HECUA, as part of its new strategic plan, is committing itself to a journey of learning and institutional transformation focused on truth, race, and reconciliation.
We move into this learning journey not as experts, but as vulnerable learners willing to be transformed, healed, and strengthened through our efforts. Our multi-year commitment is grounded in the assumption that we cannot have a healed society, we cannot have reconciliation, we cannot have racial justice, if we do not engage in a deep and authentic process of reckoning and repair in relation to our nation’s past as a colonial settler society built on hundreds of years of patriarchal white supremacy, colonization, slavery, genocide, and ecocide.

In short, we don’t believe we can emerge from something we haven’t owned and recognized. The history of this country has not been honestly spoken, and many people of all races don’t know the true history. Equal numbers have a limited understanding of the current violence and trauma that is part and parcel of the structure of colonialism as an ongoing process of political and economic domination. Because of this, we have a lot of unattended trauma, mistrust, tension, ignorance, resentment, and violence in our society.
We see embracing our history as one important act of reconciliation. Many countries have pursued national reconciliation, including Algeria, El Salvador, Canada, Namibia, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Chile, Sierra Leone, Morocco, Timor, and South Africa. These reconciliation efforts took many forms, but they all included goals of addressing historical trauma and a commitment to a more just and equitable future. (See Spangle 2017).

We want to grapple with what it means to acknowledge the history and legacy of colonialism in our lives and work beyond acknowledging the territory where we live and work. We know this partly means creating greater institutional mindfulness of the privileges we enjoy today because of colonialism. We also want to consider how we can develop relationships with peoples whose territory we are living on and where HECUA has existed.

**RECONCILIATION REQUIRES BOTH PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN ATTITUDES, ORIENTATIONS, AND BEHAVIORS.**

The point that deserves special emphasis is that reconciliation as healing involves more than apologies. Reconciliation requires both personal and institutional transformation in attitudes, orientations, and behaviors. Many believe that reconciliation and repair requires reparations.

In the U.S. context, truth, reconciliation, and reparations at the national level may be unrealistic. But HECUA believes that reconciliation can begin and accomplish some of the same purposes in communities or organizations and from there expand into national groups. Indeed, we believe a grassroots approach has greater potential for advancing healing and inclusion than traditional top-down approaches. (See Spangle 2017).

The purpose of our truth and reconciliation work is to engage in transformational praxis as an organization through creating a space and process that will allow us to begin the work of reckoning and repair. We will strive to use this process to map a path forward toward reconciliation, to support individual and collective healing, and to decolonize our organization.

And we want to identify what we might be doing that perpetuates settler colonial futurity rather than considering alternative ways forward. We want to interrogate the extent to which we are colluding with and participating in—consciously and unconsciously—lingering systems of colonial domination. The central question we are asking ourselves is: How can we responsibly and generatively lead on a permanent basis with truth and reconciliation as core ethics embodied in all facets of how we operationalize our mission and vision?

We enter this conversation not as leaders, but as learners willing to be broken up and transformed by our efforts. However, we do hope that our example will encourage other organizations and institutions to explore what truth and reconciliation might mean for them. All U.S. settler populations and institutions have a responsibility to interrogate the privileges, status, and power enjoyed today because of our violent history of colonialism, white supremacy, sexual terrorism, and racialized capitalism and the continued and ongoing theft and appropriation of peoples, cultures, and land on a day-to-day basis.
We are aware that this new initiative does not offer the instant gratification of other racial justice efforts. However, we believe that making a long-term investment in love, healing, truth, and reconciliation holds the most promise for deeper transformational justice at the organizational and national levels. We also know that discernment, healing, and transformation can only happen in relationship with others. As a result, HECUA will reach out to our higher education and community-based partners to dialogue about our new initiative. We look forward to the possibility of others joining our learning circle and being a part of this journey of mutual transformation grounded in love, community, and justice.