



# Washington Ethical Society

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*a vibrant humanistic congregation that affirms the worth of every person*

Annual Society Report 2021  
Washington Ethical Society

Leader(s): Lyn Cox, Interim Leader  
President(s): Lauren Strange (with Trang Duong during Lauren's maternity leave)  
Administrative Director/Office Contact: Tom Hutton, Business Administrator

Please provide brief updates for the following areas of your society:

## **Ethical Action**

Though we are physically distant from each other, we know we are still connected to each other and to the world around us, and we remain committed to practicing our ethics. The following is an incomplete list of the ethical actions our members have been involved with:

- Mobilize voters for the election, such as through postcards and phone banking to voters battleground states. We worked with Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice and The Frontline on mobilization campaigns.
- Friday vigils for Black Lives were held weekly to show visibility for WES's support for Black Lives Matter throughout the summer and fall.
- Immigration Justice campaigns reminded members to write and call legislators on key issues, and invited donations for direct assistance to immigrants who were excluded from COVID relief measures.
- Our Global Connections group maintained communication with our partner village in El Salvador, El Rodeo, though members had to postpone their usual trip to see our partners.
- Refugee support - focused fundraising to provide rental assistance to a refugee family WES provided assistance to upon their entry to this country.
- Earth Ethics Action Team continued greening WES's campus, such as improving the pollinator garden and planting trees. EEAT also co-sponsored a Platform speaker for Earth Day, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, who drew from her book, *As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*.
- Renewed ARAOMC work, using the UUA's report *Widening the Circle of Concern* as the basic building block and modifying it to fit Ethical Culture's background and philosophy. We plan to move ahead with an action study group to determine the next steps in our anti-racism, anti-oppression work.
- WIN Partnership - WES continues to create a stronger partnership with the Washington Interfaith Network that will involve more membership support.
- Share the Plate - WES continues to support partner organizations across the region to raise money and awareness of the work that non-profit organizations are doing in our community. Representatives of organizations were invited to share information about their work at platform monthly and the membership financially contributed to the organization for that month.

**Ethical Education:** SEEK programming took a new pivot to virtual kids platforms and check-ins when the pandemic began. As the pandemic raged on we noticed a decline in participation and

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Member of the *American Ethical Union* and the *Unitarian Universalist Association*

surveyed families about how they would like to stay connected to SEEK. Many shared that their children and themselves were “Zoomed out” as their children began and continued virtual learning for school. Many also shared a desire to reduce screen time for younger children. Some families indicated that a weekly “Soulful Home” newsletter would suffice while they navigated this new norm.

SEEK programming then pivoted to providing monthly resources packets for children preschool age- 5th grade which also experience low participations. It was decided that SEEK would continue to provide weekly newsletters with resource/event postings on the WES SEEK facebook page. SEEK Assistant Ndara Miles has kept this newsletter going, offered resource pickups for at-home ethical education, and worked on policies and infrastructure that will strengthen the program when we return to in-person operations.

Teen/ Youth programming increased after we moved Linda Irizarry into the Youth Coordinator position. She has organized outdoor, socially distanced programs for youth when the weather permitted and organized meetings over Zoom such as waffle decorating contests, guest speakers, and movie nights.

**Music:** We contracted with singer/songwriter Lea Morris to be our Interim Music Coordinator for this year, and hope to renew her contract for next year. Lea is not only talented as a musician herself, she has skills for online music production and contacts in the singer/songwriter community. Therefore, with Lea’s help, we have been able to continue with our chorus program and to bring a wide range of talented musicians to Platform while being safe during the pandemic.

**Communications:** Communications have increased in importance throughout the pandemic. WES’ Sunday Platform service has been streamed via zoom and facebook live since going 100% virtual in March 2020. Our online presence and welcoming intentions have allowed new members to join via a complete online Path to Membership class series and fully online new member welcoming ceremony. WES has managed to stay connected by utilizing 3 different paid zoom accounts -- one with a webinar feature and 2 upgrade basic accounts. Those were able to be purchased at discounts through group buying power from the UUA. WES has also maintained written communications through Constant Contact, where members and friends receive weekly blogs, weekly calendar and news articles, and an email on Saturday nights that list out all of the different zoom links in one place. For staffing, WES increased the Communications position to half time to maintain and oversee all of the communications pieces. Communications Coordinator Robyn Kravitz has made a positive impact on every aspect of WES programs this year.

**Finance:** The pandemic continues to present a financial challenge for WES. WES managed to end its 2019-20 fiscal year with a slight surplus because we left more than one staff position unfilled for most of the year. As we develop our budget for the coming year it appears that WES will continue to face similar challenges. We also received slightly less in pledges for our 2021-22 fiscal year. The pandemic has continued to prevent us from hosting most rentals, as well as causing us to provide substantial discounts to most of the few renters we still have. This has reduced a significant source of income for WES. Thanks to the hard work of Business Administrator Tom Hutton, we were able to get a first PPP loan and have it forgiven. We also received a second PPP loan that we hope to have forgiven later this year. The PPP loans have helped, but they have not entirely made up for the rental income losses. That being said, we are

proud of our members for being as generous as they are able throughout this time. A special fundraising campaign in the fall made it possible to sustain increases in hours for Communications and Music, and brought members together with clarity about WES's mission.

**Membership:** We welcomed new members this year, including members who live a long distance away and are finally able to find a home for their Humanist values now that we have made programs accessible online. WES, like the rest of the world, discovered Zoom and created opportunities for members to connect via multiple zoom channels. Members not only met for Platform using Zoom, coffee hour became a new way for people to connect with other members they normally would not interact with. Membership Coordinator Maceo Thomas conducted three Path to Membership classes since the pandemic began and had 14 new members join. Check-in meetings via Zoom were created to give isolated members opportunities to connect with other members. Early in the pandemic, these check-ins occurred three times a week. We are now running them once a week. Our Deepening Circle small groups have continued to meet on Zoom during the pandemic, providing continuity and connection for members as they reflect on their values with a consistent and committed group. We anticipate that at least one Deepening Circle group will continue to meet online even after it becomes safe to meet in person so they can accommodate long-distance members.

### **New Developments**

All of these adaptations have happened in the context of an Interim period, as our long-term Senior Leader, Amanda Poppei, left last year to take another position. Interim Leader Lyn Cox will remain with WES through the second year of the Interim period. Members will vote on a Leader Search Committee at the spring membership meeting, and we expect that group to engage in the work of the search through most of 2021-2022.

### **Focus Goals**

These are the goals guiding our programs, based on feedback from lay leaders and taking into account the realities of the pandemic and of the Interim period.

## **1. Move toward long-term financial stability through attention to pledging/member donations and identification of new funding sources.**

### **Outcomes/Impacts:**

1. Stabilize rental income by offering payment plans to long-term tenants. Negotiate Memoranda of Understanding in response to COVID for all renters.
2. Build a more effective stewardship strategy with the goal of increasing 2021-2022 pledges during the spring 2021 pledge season.
3. Build relationships with digital attendees, such as those who attend from a distance and who engage primarily through Facebook and Zoom. Encourage engagement and financial generosity.
4. Launch a supplemental fundraising campaign to increase member giving to the operating budget in response to COVID-related expense increases and rental income decreases.

## **2. Attend to the goals of the Interim period.**

### **Outcomes/Impacts:**

1. Work with the Interim Leader and the Transition Team as WES explores heritage, leadership, mission, connections, and future.

2. As a combined effort of Leader, staff, and lay leaders, maintain strategic partnerships with organizations such as the Washington Interfaith Network, Congregation Action Network, and UU's for Social Justice.
3. Continue the momentum of Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, and Multiculturalism work within WES.
4. Support the Lay Leadership Development Committee in their work toward the election of a Leader Search Committee in spring 2021, and in preparing WES for the search that will follow.

### **3. Strengthen SEEK and Lifelong Education.**

#### **Outcomes/Impacts:**

1. Manage staffing changes in Lifelong Learning.
2. Build a foundation toward a safe, stable, meaningful, and effective SEEK program that can move toward increased activity and attendance over the long term. Depending on available staff, this may include creating and implementing safety plans and policies, membership workshops on safer practices, and creating training materials for SEEK volunteers to foster inclusion and pro-community behavior.
3. Strengthen SEEK as a community supported program/valued by all members.
4. Provide resources to families for a year of mainly at-home ethical education.