

This Marketing Collective Helps Antiracism Movements Create and Spread Their Messages

Every day, movements and grassroots organizations are popping up to fight systemic racism, police brutality and other injustices. In the advertising industry alone, various groups and initiatives—such as 600 & Rising and In for 13—have formed in recent months to help agencies diversify their ranks and become more inclusive.

With a background in marketing and communications, Veronica Marshall recently decided that she, too, wanted to use her skills to do something to help. Shortly after the police killing of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis, Marshall came up with the idea for The Humanity Lab, a collective of marketers and creatives who use their knowledge and resources on a pro bono basis to help activists with an “antiracism, pro-humanity agenda.”

Marshall, who serves as global communications lead for Invisalign at PR firm MSL, is also part of Adweek’s Executive Mentor Program. On June 2, she floated the idea to her fellow mentors in a WhatsApp group chat. According to Marshall, 60 people agreed to take part, and she began building The Humanity Lab from there.

“I’ve learned that everyone’s protest is going to look different,” she said. “For some, it might be writing a check. For others, it might be taking to the streets or advocating for diversity within your company. For me, I recognize that

marketing and communications are my protest.”

Marshall said the majority of The Humanity Lab’s volunteers are part of Adweek’s Executive Mentor Program, but anyone can apply to join on its website, as long as they work in marketing or communications. As of now, the collective has more than 90 volunteers.

Since launching, The Humanity Lab has started working with six partners, all of which have different missions. One, for instance, is a Christian group that’s supporting Black Lives Matter.

“They need help driving awareness for events that they’re having in Times Square, which is where their church is based,” Marshall said.

Another is a charter school that Marshall said wants “Black parents in particular to recognize that they have more options when it comes to how they’re educating their kids.”

In terms of who The Humanity Lab wants to help, Marshall said the collective is not necessarily looking to assist big brands and established charities with their antiracism initiatives; rather, it’s interested in the scrappier groups and people who are on the ground doing the work. The Humanity is particularly focused on helping causes related to voting, education and activism.

“We want to partner with organizations and individuals that are on the front lines,” she explained. “If they’re a 501(c)(3), that’s great, but they also can just be an individual. For example, the 15 Percent Pledge, which is challenging retail establishments to diversify their shelves, is just one individual who’s leading that movement. Those are the folks that we’re looking to partner with.”

What exactly The Humanity Lab provides depends on what each individual partner needs. Some might only require one

copywriter and brand strategist. Others, however, may need a larger team if they're looking for something like a website build.

"We have a kickoff call with partners to determine if they're the right fit for us and if we're the right fit for them," Marshall said. "If that is a yes, then we move onto a planning session, which is usually 60 to 90 minutes. That's where we dig deep into what actual work needs to be accomplished, and then we build a specific team around what the work is."

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