

March 14, 2023

To whom it may concern:

Submission of formal complaint: workplace toxicity at The Workers Lab.

This letter is to file a formal complaint of egregious, sustained harassment of a contractor within the Workers Lab. I believe the complained of behavior – which was led by the CEO - contravenes California anti-bullying and anti-racism law. It is evidenced with unusual solidity in emails from the CEO that confirm specific incidents.

I have not at this stage consulted a lawyer. But I understand my first step is to submit a detailed complaint to the organization and allow three weeks for TWL to formulate a response before taking any further action. I believe I am expected to outline what I consider acceptable restitution. These are the purposes of this letter.

1) The parties involved

- **MM4A (Modern Markets for All) non-profit [“MM4A”]**: This is the British organization I founded and run. I work in the US with a B1 visa. MM4A systematically elevates non-standard employment (including “gig work”) for the lower skilled. Communities of color are disproportionately reliant on this sort of work.
- **The Workers Lab [“TWL”]**: A 501(c)3 focused on innovation that empowers lower income workers across America. Adrian Haro (“AH”) is the CEO. [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] ([REDACTED - TWL STAFFER]) was a project manager, now Director of Programs.
- **[REDACTED]: First implementation partner (not involved in complaint)**

Key dates in the relationship:

Aug. 2020	I was introduced to AH by a workforce board director. We begin exploring possible partnership.
Mar. 2021	TWL release an initial investment of \$[REDACTED] in [REDACTED - FIRST IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER] which is used for MM4A services.
Nov. 2021	TWL commit by email to making [REDACTED - FIRST IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER]/MM4A the focus of their 2022/3 Design Sprint.
Mar. 2022	Contract signed to formalize the above. Initial disbursement schedule agreed. TWL announce \$1m investment (without caveats) in the above Design Sprint.
Nov. 2022	TWL announce four cities that have agreed to go public about working with the Design Sprint to expand the MM4A platform: [REDACTED - CITY], [REDACTED - CITY], [REDACTED - CITY] and Chicago.

Legal note: for purposes of “toxic workplace” legislation, California law defines anyone who is financially dependent on an organization as entitled to the protections of an employee of that organization. My organization (MM4A) was financially dependent on TWL in the period covered. Thus, I can be considered a contractor of TWL for these purposes.

Emails referenced in this complaint can be provided in one document on request. Almost all are already on TWL servers.

2) Background to this complaint

All of us at this end were excited to begin work with TWL in earnest in early 2022. This design sprint is enormously ambitious; we seek to move America’s multi-billion-dollar public workforce system towards support for non-standard workers with at-scale city launches of a platform developed within MM4A.

This mission is complicated by federal workforce targets that compel public workforce boards to focus exclusively on individuals seeking traditional regular-hours employment. Our core task has been finding larger cities that will launch and have everything in place to do so. I saw TWL’s brand, networks, and staff as powerful accelerators of our efforts before the design sprint.

As the relationship developed, factors such as these emerged:

- **Financial dependence:** AH consistently encouraged us to “leave funding to me”. Although we were funded by [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] Foundations prior to TWL, fundraising was a huge drain on my time, now better spent on outreach to cities. Plus TWL had a full time fundraiser and brand power that we couldn’t match. I suspended fundraising activity, aside from some already ongoing dialogue, to focus on project outcomes.
- **TWL welcomed into my relationships:** I introduced people in my networks to TWL, particularly allowing an informal, meet-monthly, unpaid group of advisors from philanthropy and government who supported my efforts to be transformed into paid advisors to the design sprint. AH subsequently collaborated with group members on other projects.
- **A tight group:** I progressively realized that TWL’s staff seemed to have been formed from a core of AH’s friends. And the group very strongly identified as queer and people of color. I am white. I have outed myself as gay in countless social encounters and business meetings plus on national TV. But I would not necessarily identify – or be perceived – as “queer”.

As detailed below, this identity acquired an increasingly exclusionary edge. Staff have lectured on the problems of communities of color and queer people. Significantly I saw no concern within TWL for marginalized people outside their own defined group. Our project deals with the unhoused, people of Jewish heritage, individuals (like me) who have no education beyond high

school, and much of our design sprint focuses on childcare, while we are all non-parents. Sensitivity towards these groups has not been raised, even fleetingly. I don't believe TWL has any African-Americans on staff, a key constituency if people of color are a focus.

During our design sprint, the most egregious insensitivity I experienced towards an external stakeholder was in a Zoom call with a Legislative Director in [REDACTED - STATE CAPITAL] that I invited AH to join. The person identified in email signatures, Zoom handle, and on-camera appearance, as non-binary, using the name "K [REDACTED]".

As I wrapped the conversation, AH completely unprompted said, "I have to ask, what does the 'K' stand for?". Our attendee had to awkwardly reiterate they were non-binary and explain it's now just "K". (WR timestamped Notability record.) It was an embarrassing moment. Our dialogue was discontinued by [REDACTED] in a later email. (EMAIL P: FW: Feb 8, 2023: [REDACTED]> WR/AH: Subject: Updates)

- **Assumed superiority:** Despite the deep experience and thinking my colleagues and I have around non-standard employment, TWL staff increasingly positioned themselves as having superior knowledge and instincts. Examples:

In a Zoom call on 8/15/22 AH apologized for not being more involved in the design sprint. He said earnestly and verbatim: "I am really talented. I just am. It's nothing to do with me, just a gift from above. I need to be more involved." (By this point I had begun capturing statements by TWL staffers that alarmed me in contemporaneous emails to myself and later in the routine follow up emails sent after meetings. This one is confirmed in email G: Aug 14, 2022: AH > WR/LC: Subject Follow up.)

The assumed superiority extended to claimed ability to see inside my head. In one follow up email (EMAIL F: Aug 14, 2022: AH > WR/LC: Subject Follow up) I had recorded how AS had stated "You say you want to partner [with TWL] but I know it's not what you think".

Suggesting how our design sprint could be improved was regarded as hostility. I naively attempted to tackle some of the challenges I was experiencing in email A (Apr. 14, 2022: WR > AH/LC: Subject Aligning the Design Sprint). In it I noted, "There is no problem here, just friendly suggestions". This email provoked the first "pile-on" detailed below.

- **Demands for loyalty:** AH appeared to demand emotional loyalty to TWL and him, not merely professional commitment. Email D (Aug. 15, 2022: WR > WR: Subject Record of call with Adrian Haro 8.30AM to 9.30AM) records how I asked him if he would honor a promise to introduce me to contacts within Los Angeles County. He said that was too "transactional", I needed to focus on problems in our partnership (insufficient fealty) instead of advancing the project. (His terms.)

- **Lack of guardrails:** I have not seen any equality statement or nominated recipient for complaints about harassment relating to TWL. But, as the behavior (below) intensified, I saw TWL's Managing Director, [REDACTED] as my go-to if someone needed to be asked to intervene. We had only talked once, but she struck me as a mature and capable manager. She departed TWL in October 2022.

Since her departure, I have been stuck with no obvious safety net if problems with TWL become completely unmanageable. I tried at one point to cultivate [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] as a back channel who might reassure me about Betsy's departure and/or try to push AH to behave more appropriately. ([REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] is a personal friend of AH).

Either [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] or [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] reported that conversation to AH who then phoned me in a rage, threatening – again - to cancel the partnership and funding immediately. He later apologized for his outburst, while maintaining he stood by what he had said, in a text message which can be supplied.

It has steadily become clear there is no apparent route for tackling these issues other than a full-blown complaint which must be thorough and legally solid because of likely retribution.

3) Sample incidents

Below is a selection of incidents illustrating workplace harassment, racism and bullying, spanning April 2022 to February 2023. Incidents before this were not recorded in emails. The selection here is chosen primarily for the unambiguity of evidence and the small number of emails required to share it.

However, if TWL regard the incidents listed as insufficient to merit concern, a detailed dossier of events and evidence can be compiled and circulated to board members.

Threats to arbitrarily terminate funding: Events that offended the CEO led to furious denunciations and unfettered threats to end the partnership immediately with no enquiry or process. I estimate this happened on 6-7 separate dates. As one example, I offer Aug 11, 2022. In a follow up to our weekly meeting (Email F) I reminded AH (copying [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER]) that in the meeting:

You threatened three times to cancel our agreement to work together saying I needed to "decide if you want this partnership". You stated TWL would pull out, starting with our session with [REDACTED - CITY] CBO's next week, if you did not adequately receive this assurance. You then declined to cover the rest of my agenda for the weekly meeting.

There was often an element of calculated humiliation in these rages, a demand for supplication to assuage his anger. After the one above where AH threatened to abruptly pull out of a meeting and embarrass me in front of our key supporter in [REDACTED - CITY] before cutting funding, an immediate email to myself noted:

[AH] said I needed to think about [his threat to end the partnership] after this call, if I was serious I had to write him an email asking for a meeting before Thursday, but 'we are not going to go over this again'. I pointed out AH and I had a one on one call on Friday next week that I needed to move anyway, could we fix a time to bring that earlier in the week and talk then? He said no, 'you need to reflect on this and send an email'.

Attacks on my ethnicity: This has been another recurring theme. As example: in the meeting cited above, the CEO told me in front of his team "You need me with you in meetings because you present as a white man with a British accent, possibly colonial". He later said I remind people of slavery. In my write-up of decisions/actions at the meeting, I recorded these statements exactly as spoken. (Email F).

Key points on this incident:

I would never dispute the terrible history of Britain's actions, or those of other nations. But race legislation protects white people equally. In law, this statement is as offensive and destructive as a Caucasian CEO instructing a black contractor "You must take a white person with you to meetings because you will remind attendees of America's race riots".

Aside from the CEO, that email was received by TWL's then Director of Programs ([REDACTED - TWL STAFFER]) and Project Manager ([REDACTED - TWL STAFFER]). Both were present at the meeting it records. Neither voiced any concern about the statement during the meeting. No-one disputed what I had written. No-one reached out to see if I was OK. This briefly encapsulates how normalized racist behavior is within TWL.

The determination to attend everyone of my meetings was not eventually followed through on. That does not detract from the malice behind the intention.

Elevation of minor mistakes: In countless meetings with stakeholders on this project we have all made mistakes and triggered misapprehensions. There have been typo's, off-the-cuff remarks, missed emails, badly calendared meetings. But two minor mistakes that happened to feed a narrative of my supposedly offensive white privilege have been surfaced by TWL staff on multiple occasions afterwards. They need to be outlined in some detail:

The [REDACTED - LARGE FUNDER] Zoom: In early 2022, Irvine Foundation introduced me to Family & Workers Fund who they finance. A [REDACTED - LARGE FUNDER] manager proposed a meeting to explore my project and I suggested that TWL also be invited. (Email A1: Apr. 14, 2022: [REDACTED - LARGE FUNDER] > WR: Subject Introducing [REDACTED]) They added [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER], to the invite.

TWL then took over the meeting, deciding they would set the agenda. It was formulated in a pre-meeting which I attended. As their write up shows, it was agreed [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] would “drive the meeting”. (EMAIL B: Apr. 21, 2022: > [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] / [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] / AH/WR: Subject Agenda for Call). I acquiesced in this.

On the day, AH took control of the meeting, throwing out the agenda. He jumped in to answer questions about my work at length, including glaring factual inaccuracies. He positioned us as being less ahead than we are, saying issues which we had resolved needed to be tackled in the design sprint and – I felt – talked for far too long, about subjects he little understood.

I could see the two [REDACTED - LARGE FUNDER] attendees were confused and disengaged. I attempted to resolve this by trying to correct the record when AH paused. I was frustrated, agitated, and upset that my meeting had been – I felt - hijacked by a display of ego.

Afterwards TWL informed me I had exhibited micro-agression towards one attendee, a woman of color. I said if that the case it was entirely unintentional, and I wanted to apologize in writing immediately. AH told me not to, saying that would just make it worse. He would do it for me. (Email B-1: May 13, 2022: AH > WR: Your [REDACTED - LARGE FUNDER] conversation).

[REDACTED - CITY] presentation: On Oct 12, 2022. [REDACTED - CITY] organized a group of community organizations to see me demonstrate our platform. In an hour-long session, with 14 attendees, I was at one point asked an operational question by a woman of color. My response should have included the phrase “selling people’s labor” (as staffing agencies do). Unfortunately, that got garbled and came out as “selling people”.

My questioner noted, I believe wryly “we tried selling people, it didn’t work”. I was visibly mortified and of course apologised for my slip. She made clear there was no problem and I have no doubt the incident was soon forgotten. The [REDACTED - CITY] network has since thrown itself behind our launch.

But it has not been forgotten by TWL. Like the [REDACTED - LARGE FUNDER] meeting, that exchange has been brought up several times in the months since. Most recently last month. I was days away from [REDACTED - CITY] for a round of meetings brokered by [REDACTED - CITY] and others. (I had invited [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] to attend and share the administrative load but he did not.) In an email otherwise about admin. matters, he - unprompted - reminded me I must be sensitive to racial issues while there.

I pointed out that that was always my intention and that only TWL harped on about the mistake above. This triggered lengthy emails which included:

I don't raise this to be a thorn in your side, but rather to ensure that the importance of that sensitivity, which really should just be common place, is

respected. I know you know this, but somehow, I do still feel the need to reiterate it

Some key points about this email chain (Email R: Feb. 28, 2023: WR > AH/[REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] : Subject Adrian [REDACTED - CITY] /[REDACTED - CITY] Dates):

- When I ask [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] what he is urging me to do that I am not doing, there is no answer. His message simply seems to be “you’re white, and you offend people, you don’t seem to fully understand this, so we need to keep reminding you”.
- AH is copied in on all the emails. The later was unnecessary, if [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] was really concerned about my being racially insensitive, he could have phoned for a quiet word, or emailed one-on-one (we communicate frequently without involving the CEO). Copying his boss when putting me down seems to be internal virtue signalling: “look I can beat up the white guy as well”.
- AH did not intervene.

Pile-ons: A tendency to “hunt in a pack” can also be seen in occasional prolonged bouts of collective fury from the TWL core group. Email A was my response to concerns about sluggish progress in the design sprint. It makes suggestions, attempts to explain why MM4A has learned to adhere to certain processes, and points out there is no animosity or substantial differences between us.

This prompted replacement of our entire hour-long weekly meeting by, first AH, then [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER], then [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] pouring out their anger and disgust at my lack of gratitude for everything they had done for me and the impossibility of working with me. (Referenced in Email F) Again, another organization, even if profoundly offended by a partner making suggestions might turn to a reflective one-on-one to seek understanding.

Belittling statements: Once again, these have been a pattern. They contrasted with statements by AH such as “Funders love us (TWL)” and “Funders love me (AH)” which I recall, but didn’t document. Two belittling statements are captured in Email F:

“Everyone in philanthropy told me to stay away from you”: This has been a recurring refrain from AH. I have pushed for actionable learning from it (“Who said that?”, “What am I doing wrong?”). Declining to provide details, he eventually modified the trope to “Most people in philanthropy told me to avoid you”.

There is zero evidence of this. Multiple funders expend considerable time and social capital advancing my project. The claim is particularly galling because, in fall 2022, [REDACTED - FUNDER] gave TWL a \$500,000 grant. The internal effort to deliver that was led by the program manager who had overseen three successive investments in my

project totaling over \$750,000 and who was introduced to AH by me. (AH already knew the former CEO of [REDACTED - FUNDER].)

“Your messaging is crap”: This solution to this often aired conviction of AH’s is apparently for TWL’s communication consultant (a former business partner of AH I understand) to prepare a slidedeck that we must then use. Outreach to cities and introductions to funders have been made conditional on my willingness to ditch my collaborative way of talking about my work and use a structure and content set by someone who knows little of the issues, but is part of TWL.

Seeing no alternative, I tentatively submitted to this path. It took three months for the deck to arrive. (I was invited to fact check it, but not contribute to it beyond initially briefing the consultant.) It would have taken me a few hours to consult with TWL and others then build a fresh deck. Eventually even AH admitted the consultant’s slides were inadequate. His solution: she must start on another with introductions paused until it arrived. Several months later it still hasn’t appeared.

Accusations of mentally unstable behavior: As the bullying continued I became frightened of triggering another outbreak. Sometimes I would intuit that something I had started talking about in a meeting could likely lead to another bout and declined to continue with my point. (I now understand this is common behavior for people experiencing workplace harassment.)

[REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] first labelled this as “Passive-Aggressive Behavior”, while trying to provoke me to finish my abandoned point.

Passive-Aggressive Behavior has now been delisted as a clinical definition by the American Psychiatric Association. But it remains a signifier of mental instability; applied to a person who is inwardly hostile and unbalanced but outwardly ingratiating. AH joined the pile-on about my mental health referring to a concern of mine at one point (Email F) as “paranoid”.

TWL staff knew this distressed me. I recall pointing out for example “I don’t enjoy these conversations”. But, again, there has never been an apology, withdrawal, or reframing (as a misplaced joke for example) of these repeated statements. The effect was to close off my attempts to raise issues.

Acceptability of CEO’s temper tantrums: Staffers seemed aware that the CEO was prone to fits of temper and resigned to it. I never experienced them directed at anyone but me, presumably because I was othered by the dominant group. But their recurring, if unpredictable, nature was captured in January 2023 (Email J: Jan. 27, 2023: WR > AH/[REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] : Subject: Follow up to project meeting 230126). My recap of our weekly meeting to AH included:

Good to catch up in our routine meeting yesterday. The apology for loss of temper last week appreciated, (the view “it will probably happen again” less so).

For clarity: The complained-of behavior pertains to only the three people named in this letter. Within TWL, I have also dealt with Eddy Morales, Thomas Lawler, Seph Baclig, and others. I have not experienced the complained-of behavior from them and have no reason to believe they are aware of its scale.

4) Why now?

Problems within TWL have been festering through the design sprint. I have processed those issues and their aftermath day-to-day. I am filing a formal complaint now because an inflexion point has been reached as likely success for the design sprint contrasts with increasing uncertainty and a deteriorating situation inside TWL.

Specifics:

- **Likely project success:** [REDACTED - CITY] and [REDACTED - CITY] appear to have everything in place for a swift launch of our platform, including heavyweight local political support. The key barrier is funding for an on-the-ground project support in each case. This has highlighted the disparity in status within our design sprint:

Last year I proposed split responsibilities. I would lead on launch of our platform on the west coast and AH would lead in Chicago (an easier launch because of the size of the local economy). This was agreed. TWL then contracted the New America think tank – with no experience of launching these markets – to drive launch in Illinois.

Meanwhile, TWL declined to fund even my travel to [REDACTED - CITY] , [REDACTED - CITY] , or Long Beach in recent weeks. I have had to take on a week's work with Canadian agencies to persuade an Ontario philanthropist to underwrite four further weeks of travel to push this design sprint to its next stage. On Friday, I fly back to Britain: there is no funding to keep me in the US where my expertise is so badly needed.

This allocation of resources can only make sense in an organization that views my time as inferior and of little value. That view has to be confronted.

- **Racial marginalization is being formalized:** Earlier this month I revisited the TWL homepage. It reads:

Investments in innovation for workers should meet workers where they are, and acknowledge who they are. That's why our team is a majority first-generation, queer, people of color, and why our investments are made largely in leaders of color.

Aside from their staff/consultants/travel costs, I understand my project is overwhelmingly TWL's biggest expenditure item. The policy above feels like a bait-and-switch. We signed with Workers Lab believing their mission was simply to advance the best innovations for boosting power of all low-income workers. Now, internal belittling on racial grounds seems to have been bolstered by categorizing their current main investment as counter to their remit.

No-one at TWL has addressed this with me. I am not disputing the validity of their statement. But many organizations can productively focus on the needs of a discrete ethnic group while respecting all people. TWL has already demonstrated it is not one of them.

- **Contradictory messages:** AH has told me in January and again in February he is expecting more funds into TWL shortly, implying some will be directed to this design sprint. But I know he is also hoping to acquire a software company and has other costly aspirations. Meanwhile, TWL's interim financial director has emailed that he has "low confidence" regarding any funding for us beyond next month.

My forum for probing this inconsistency should be a project team meeting scheduled every Thursday at 10AM. TWL know how important these sessions are to my planning, control of workflow, and budgeting. I fought for the meetings (along with one-on-one monthly sessions with AH) and craft an agenda for each in advance.

The last four of these meetings have been cancelled. The first because I was on call to the Canadian government that day. The second because of AH's unavailability at the scheduled time. The third and fourth were just deleted by TWL with no explanation or attempt to reschedule. When I asked [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] why, he emailed:

Adrian is traveling and I have another meeting.

I continue to hold these slots on my calendar, despite pressure on my time. But I have no way of knowing when or if, meetings will resume. Critically, I don't know if they are being avoided because AH wants to duck my inevitable queries around the status of our funding. And, of course, I can imagine what might follow if I call him and challenge him about his assurances.

- **Overstatement has to be tackled:** Given the above, I must proceed on a worst-case scenario. That means I need to start reanimating discussions with other funders. The concern here is that TWL have several times overstated their contribution to this project, thereby minimizing our accomplishments. For example, they have claimed credit for our 2020 childcare pilot, something I pushed back on more than once. (They first invested in us after that pilot.) This over-egged messaging could hit our fundraising. TWL's full time fundraiser and networks will eclipse my messaging, potentially allowing them to bolster their reputation at the expense of ours. And I won't know what is being said, so I can't pushback.

There is no problem acknowledging TWL's input: the funding has allowed us to get ever more ready for expansion, the brand adds value, Eddy Morales has been a great door opener in [REDACTED - CITY] , [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] has been a significant help with admin. tasks.

But the launches that are most likely to proceed on schedule are the ones I cultivated pre-pandemic and nurtured at our expense during this design sprint. The messaging that got us this far was mine. The nuanced operational research now in hand in each city is based on our learning from Long Beach, not any insights from TWL. I need to ensure funders are aware of the full value in the operation at our end.

5) Consequences of the behavior

2022 could have been a breakout year for my work. Covid exposed the extent of irregular employment, federal funds unleashed the kind of projects ideal for our "market making" across America. Early in the relationship with TWL I offered attainable plans for a systematized outreach program which they could enable and support.

The key consequence is: A year on, we have little to show for the \$1m TWL publicly announced they were investing in March 2022 (we have actually received only \$[REDACTED] of design sprint funding to date). Some consequences listed might be deemed just disorganization within TWL, not workplace toxicity. But fear of provoking the bullying stopped me raising the issues and possibly agreeing a resolution. Thus, TWL's continuing unprofessionalism and lack of discipline is part of the consequences.

a) Organizational consequences

Each of the following can be evidenced with emails:

- **Slowed pace:** AH has repeatedly urged me to "slow down" (referenced for example in email J). His conviction was made tangible by their belittling approach, for example around a unified slidedeck (above). In another random instance, a TWL board member agreed to my request for an introduction to [REDACTED] leadership. AH insisted he must handle the follow up, not me. After numerous reminders, he eventually did it, 6 months later. The belated relationship is proving as fruitful as I expected. We would be so much further ahead if it had started half a year earlier.
- **Inputs ignored:** I arrived in the design sprint with suggestions for umbrella bodies and influencers likely to respond productively to an approach about the design sprint under the TWL brand. There was little engagement or scrutiny of those plans. They were substantially ignored; another route to acceleration that died, seemingly because TWL was determined to set the path and pace.

Over the course of several months I persuaded TWL to apply the basics of project management to our design sprint. Regular meetings, recurring agendas, and monthly oversight are proven time savers. Even having eventually accepted these concepts, there are still meetings for which they don't show or routines that are overthrown on a whim. As with much of this list, the issue seems to be a manifestation of their demonstrable view that the other party is inferior to TWL.

- **Inability to plan**: Software development typically works on cycles of several months. This was put at the mercy of a volatile CEO explicitly threatening to terminate funding if offended. Major pieces of work have been shelved in favor of functionality that could be delivered short-term in case we had to wind-up operations the following month.
- **Workload not valued**: Constantly rejigging plans to incorporate a possible mothballing of our software has been hugely time consuming. Dropping everything to produce a response the CEO has demanded in his latest outburst destroys the to-do list of a day's existing commitments. The belittling seemed to spread a view that my time was of reduced value. In a minor recent example: [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] emailed to say I should format TWL's logo into our standard one-pager. Instead, I sent him the original so he could do it. I haven't heard anything about it since. It seems the task was only important when it added to my workload, not his.
- **Need to shield**: It is part of my job to maintain solidity for other stakeholders in the project I run. I was convinced a colleague in [REDACTED - CITY] (white, straight, keen but relatively inexperienced) must not be exposed to TWL bullying, and so try to handle actions related to TWL myself as much as possible. This shielding is evidenced in [REDACTED - FIRST IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER] emails for example: *Email H: Aug. 16, 2022: WR > NS: Subject "CONFIDENTIAL BACKGROUND: Workers Lab > your author interview this week"*
- **Reputational damage**: As explained, I have to ramp up direct outreach to funders. But they are going to ask "what have you achieved with the \$1m I read TWL put in?" To fully answer that, I will have to give some explanation of the problems encountered within TWL. However, I phrase it, that will make me look unresourceful: "Why didn't you just talk to them about all this?" It also invites a "six of one, half a dozen of the other" assumption that I share culpability for the disarray.
- **Additional work**: TWL have long been aware that their way of working adds enormously to my workload, taking me away from vital project tasks. As example, in Email F (Aug 14, 2022: AH > WR/LC: Subject Follow up) I had written:

That problem (pressure on my time) is currently off the scale; I am firefighting City Hall demand barriers, short-term finance uncertainty, and now TWL relationship challenges. There is no equivalent of [REDACTED] this can be passed to. At this end, so much of the work stays with me.

It is a recurring theme in which there is little interest from TWL. Five months earlier I had written in an email they dissected in detail (Email A: Apr. 14, 2022: WR > AH/LC: Subject Aligning the Design Sprint):

Four weeks ago I was closest I've ever been to collapse from the sheer relentlessness of 60-hours-a-week bombardment by queries, worries, mistakes, missed deadlines, uncertainties, additional hurdles and corner-cutting.

b) Personal consequences

I strive to present professionally at all times. But I understand this complaint should – however much I dislike it – reference the impact of complained-of behavior on me as a person. It included:

- **Rekindled memories:** I was severely asthmatic from age 6 to 13 and badly bullied at school for it, including extraordinarily by a teacher. Repressed memories of “why me”, “why is no-one standing up for me”, and “what am I doing to provoke this” resurfaced in 2022.
- **Inability to sleep:** The bullying was not constant. There were times when TWL staff were mellow, even fawning, towards me. (I find the later deeply discomforting.) But it is the uncertainty of never knowing when it will strike, or what will need to be done in response, that paralyses well-being. Consequences for me included insomnia that left me struggling to concentrate during the day.
- **Eczema:** One hangover from my asthma years is a tendency to itchy, blotchy, skin when stressed. In moderate form it's out of sight on the legs, at worst it flares up on the face. I experienced both intermittently in the design sprint, adding self-consciousness to my worries.
- **Indignities of placating:** It takes time and emotional energy to calm angry people. It is also personally destabilizing. To keep the organization and mission intact I found myself apologizing for TWL attacks on me (Email F contains one example). This magnifies the physical symptoms.
- **Paralysis around interactions:** I talk to people of color frequently and productively. Since starting work with TWL, I experience a critical voice in my head telling me a casual remark was inappropriate, or a self-deprecating joke about my British accent was an assertion of white privilege, and so on. It engenders stilted, charmless, encounters as well as mental anguish.

6) Lessons for TWL

It is outside the strict remit of an individual's complaint, but I wish to point out to TWL why this behavior is so damaging to your work. Avoiding its reoccurrence is part of my plan for resolution.

TWL exists to identify promising social entrepreneurs and propel them to a next level. As far as I am aware no-one on TWL's management has meaningful experience of starting a social enterprise. But social entrepreneurs are easily prone to victimization.

Absent the profit motive that attracts stakeholders to commercial start-ups we must persuade staff and others with our vision. We can then feel responsible for delivering. For those of us working on system-change in particular; setbacks, putdowns, and the world's periodic unreasonableness become day-to-day challenges to be triaged and absorbed. We are all typically over-extended financially, emotionally, and in terms of the workloads we undertake.

As example, I have worked 6 day weeks unpaid since the end of 2019 so that all our non-profit's income can go to enhancing the tech that can empower so many people's lives. (My husband supports me financially.) When it was clear public agencies in [REDACTED - CITY] were ready for a serious push towards launch, I funded an October 2022 trip there that galvanized community organizations. TWL declined to accompany me.

Without in any way negating the suffering TWL's behavior caused me, or its consequences, we should recognize I am better qualified than most social entrepreneurs to survive it. I am 62, with a loving spouse, and a network of professionals in philanthropy and workforce development who have extended significant support to my work. I am a former television journalist, trained to capture court-ready evidence, and I arrived at TWL with experience of being threatened at work (by people whose activities I was exposing in the media).

But it is easy to image a 20-something with a burning passion to empower low-income workers who may be the wrong color, heterosexual, less-educated, or otherwise prone to othering by a dominant TWL clique. Harassing behavior, rife in TWL, could kill that young person's confidence, personality, income, and mission. It must stop.

7) Resolution

At this point, I simply want to find a pragmatic way out of problems threatening to overtake this design sprint. That requires (a) TWL honoring an array of commitments, verbal and written, on resource allocation (b) TWL helping restore my reputation (c) TWL ensuring no-one else is ever treated this way.

The specifics of my proposed early-stage resolution are:

a) Resources

TWL needs to place a decisive bet on this design sprint allowing lost ground to be regained, prioritizing that over other internal priorities. The components are:

- **Another year of core funding:** TWL is currently funding our technical maintenance/development and core Long Beach operation with this monthly investment:

Expense	April
TABLE REDACTED	

This income is currently assured until end of April 2023 only. But AH has assured us the design sprint funding will continue “until needed”. There should be a written commitment to maintain this core support until end of April 2024 subject only to the risk of TWL becoming genuinely insolvent in that time. This will allow us to regain wasted momentum.

- **Payment of backlog:** Because of financial shortfalls for TWL in 2022, we agreed to defer \$63,000 in promised payments. AH has reiterated TWL’s commitment to pay this several times since. It should be released by end of June 2023 on top of the core funding.
- **Travel budget:** The case for my doing another three-month block of work within our partner cities in the US is rationally unarguable. We charge for this at the basic allowance rate for work in each city set by UK tax authorities. The total cost with travel: \$30K approximately (depending on exchange rates).
- **Flexibility of allocation:** Currently, the way we can allocate TWL funding is prescribed. This leaves us vulnerable to unforeseeable factors like exchange rates and unable to respond to opportunities. Going forward, allocation of funds internally needs to be at our discretion; it may include my working in the US, some small element of my salary or expenses, and/or contributions to our reserves. Some funds may be moved between the UK non-profit and US partners in line with needs.

For clarity: Nothing in this flexibility negates TWL’s right to monitor its investment. We will account for each dollar in whatever accounting format TWL reasonably demand, with full backup documentation. (We already provide TWL with unfettered access to the workflow tracking system used by our developers and I.)

The above provide a reasonable chance we can recover momentum. But it remains an absolute minimum of the resources required to deliver the system change we can now see unfolding for low-income Americans outside traditional employment. At project oversight meetings we have discussed with TWL two other needs and received assurances they will be treated sympathetically. They are:

- **A third team member in Long Beach:** We have hundreds of workers on our platform within the City of Long Beach and channels to many more. But the model for our implementation adopted by the city (multiple employers of record) is highly time-consuming, although ultimately a huge boon to workers. To demonstrate it fully we need one more person, costing about \$70K a year total, to on-board workers through the processes of registration.
- **An additional Java developer:** Our platform is being called on to deliver in a wide range of scenarios by different cities. That's a fantastic proving ground and knowledge generator. But the diverse functionality still needs to be scoped, built, tested, and refined. We have talked about this collectively on multiple occasions. Total cost: around \$130K for the year.

Swift resolution to these problems demands these additional needs are prioritized ahead of any new TWL projects outside those already publicly announced on TWL's website as of today's date.

b) Recovering my reputation

TWL's contribution to this design sprint is not to be denied, merely framed accurately. AH spotted the potential of our work and pumped expansion funding in ahead of a growth curve. TWL's brand has been a welcome addition to ours for cities. But the relationships, knowledge, messaging and work that has delivered our path to a next phase has come overwhelmingly from this end. (If the Chicago launch is as successful as TWL believe, they should of course broadcast that as their accomplishment.)

The above needs to be communicated. Additionally, I need a way of sharing that there have been disrupting issues in the design sprint without getting involved in any exposition of contentious details. That requires some further output by TWL:

- **Four webinars:** I envisage a webinar in each of June '23, Sept. '23, Jan. '24, and Apr. '24 convened by TWL about this design sprint. They will be announced on TWL's website with copy making clear:
 - TWL scouts for the best innovations that empower lower-income workers. This is one that TWL has invested in readying for expansion.
 - The path to expansion was already laid by partners in the design sprint.
 - The partners have much learning and experience that TWL believes to be of value to philanthropies, policymakers, worker bodies, and government officials, all of who are invited.

Obviously, any work TWL can do to attract invitees would be appreciated. But the real value is allowing me to point to these announcements to clarify where the value in this project lies. I can of course provide copy for an announcement on request.

- **A discrete TWL page:** Many victims of workplace toxicity demand a public apology. I am not. But I do need a way of showing a funder there were problems within TWL that can explain why I have achieved comparatively little since we last talked.

I need to be able to link to a page on the TWL website that says:

- To whom it may concern
- TWL has been made aware of sustained unacceptable behavior towards a grantee by members of its staff. The matter has been taken seriously and addressed internally. An apology has been issued to the grantee who has no wish to pursue the matter publicly at this time.
- We have taken steps to ensure such behavior will not reoccur and reaffirm our collective commitment to treating all stakeholders with respect.

This page need not appear in the site's navigation; only those who are directed towards it will ever see it. It will allow me to avoid having to explain events.

- **TWL overheads to be written off:** I know TWL have a figure they believe represents the actual investment in our our design sprint. It combines direct funding to MM4A/[REDACTED - FIRST IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER] with charges for TWL staff assigned to the project. The latter has achieved little and needs to come out of any assessment of value already invested in this work. Claiming for Eddy Morales' time on project, some of [REDACTED - TWL STAFFER] 's input, and employment law advice provided early on is of course not a problem.
- **A clear funding statement for expansion areas:** TWL – AH particularly – has made what now appear to be grandiose statements about TWL's funding for cities in which we believe we can make a market. These have been accepted as one example by the [REDACTED - CITY] workforce board director.

When these promises evaporate it reflects badly on me. TWL need a webpage formally stating the position regarding financial support for launch cities that I can direct people to. (It could say only – as example - "we are funding the core design sprint operation and are keen to help with local fundraising in cities ready for launch".)

c) Ensuring against reoccurrence

Given the centrality of TWL's CEO in the organization, and his behavior, I am including protections for less hardened TWL grantees in my plan for restitution. Specifically:

- **End the ambivalence**: TWL's homepage statement about its focus on grantees of color needs to be clarified so that staff have no grounds to resent partners of other races. I suggest the sentiment be amended to: "Our focus is the challenges faced particularly by workers of color. We hope to move to financing solutions entirely from entrepreneurs of color in the near future."
- **Publication of a comprehensive anti-discrimination policy**: A statement of intent to respect ALL persons' dignity should be on the TWL website, and included in its paperwork with grantees.
- **Complaints portal**: Lacking an HR department, TWL needs someone, ideally a board member, designated as official recipient for allegations of non-compliant behavior. A timed process for investigation should also become part of the policy statement above.
- **Internal training**: TWL has a demonstrable problem with institutionalized toxicity. Some basic staff awareness raising would be an immediate step for any concerned organization. This needn't involve expensive consultants, there are videos and books that could be used to spark discussion at internal meetings. I think such training is a legal obligation for any entity with more than 5 employees in California?
- **Repositioning of grantee relationships**: TWL staffers need to adopt a "how can we help, what can we learn" approach to grantees, rather than the current "how do I micromanage this" mindset. This should be balanced by critical appraisal. Grantees should be interrogated on their plans and given constructive, if not always positive, feedback. If this is inculcated into the team, the relaunched design sprint could quickly build a vibrant pipeline of additional launch areas.

8) Next steps

My understanding is that I need to give TWL a "reasonable period", generally interpreted as three weeks to respond to this complaint. I am of course willing to be grilled by anyone acting for TWL who seeks clarification, although I believe it would be inappropriate for the organization to detail anyone named in this complaint, or closely aligned with them, to investigate it. In the meantime, TWL is reminded of the rules covering retaliation against anyone filing a complaint.

If a resolution is not agreed by April 5, 2023, all further possibilities are open. I am reluctant to go to court because of the time required and I have a horror of becoming any kind of beacon for "white

rights” agitators. Also, it is easy to see how TWL lawyers could seek to undermine the complaint, for example by asserting that because I have worked unpaid throughout the design sprint, I fail the test of financial dependence on which protections from harassment are based. (Another example of how vulnerable social entrepreneurs can be.)

Absent a resolution, my immediate challenge will be explaining to funders why comparatively little has been achieved for the \$1m+ they have seen poured into us over the last year. I need to do this without entering into “he says, they say” attempts to explain the chaotic life within TWL and its consequences. That would tarnish all of us.

As an experienced reporter, running a project that has already attracted major national coverage, the obvious route is to find a credible publication that will first synthesize this complaint into an article. I can then link to that when approaching funders with a “high impact project that’s been held back” pitch while making clear they can draw on the article – not me – for details.

Finally, I remain committed to TWL’s mission and potential. There is no animosity at this end. Just a pressing urge to deliver on this exciting project for millions of low-income Americans. I am confident my proposed early resolution to this complaint can land a win-win for all of us over the next year, even though it may be painful for TWL to take on consequences of bad behavior in its upper ranks.

Sincerely,

Wingham Rowan