

<https://www.times-standard.com/2019/01/01/womens-march-organizers-speak-out-about-canceled-eureka-event/>

Women's March organizers speak out about canceled Eureka event

[Shomik Mukherjee](#) January 2, 2019 at 2:05 pm



The Women's March drew thousands of attendees in 2017 and again, as pictured here, in 2018, but there won't be a 2019 event. (Jose Quezada — The Times-Standard file)

Organizers behind the Women's March in Eureka defended their decision to cancel the January event, saying Monday they determined the event's leadership was "too white" after speaking to people of color who didn't feel comfortable with the leadership team's "lack of diversity." "After meeting periodically for several months, it became clear we were lacking a leadership group that properly represented our community," event organizer Allison Edrington told the Times-Standard.

Agreeing the event's vision was limited to the experiences of its "mostly white" leadership, organizers decided to cancel the event, Edrington said.

"We could've and should've done more outreach," Edrington said. "But so far, we've been unable to get more voices to the table."

The leadership group doesn't have many contacts within communities of color in Humboldt County, added organizer Kelsey Reedy.

"We spoke to individuals of color who didn't think the event was for them," Reedy said. "It wasn't something they felt comfortable involving themselves with."

Beyond race, the organizers determined that event leadership didn't include enough gender nonbinary people. Not all women have female reproductive parts, Edrington said.

In light of the cancellation, the group is "moving the focus" to an International Women's Day event planned for March. This time, organizers said, they plan to invest more time into outreach. Women's March leaders made the initial announcement Friday. A heap of attention, criticism and support rose to a national level over the weekend as mainstream media outlets and publications reported on the cancellation, most drawing upon the phrase "too white."

On Monday, Edrington released a follow-up statement on behalf of the leadership team, saying the organizers had failed to be more inclusive of other communities. In the statement, organizers point to local activism efforts led by communities or individuals of color, including the sanctuary county movement, the McKinley statue removal and the "Justice for Josiah" campaign.

"We really took the time with the second press release to offer a well-explained and thought-out response," Reedy said, "and clarify what our reasoning is."



Thousands of women and a few hundred men marched in the 2018 Women's March, overflowing the streets of Old Town Eureka. (Jose Quezada — The Times-Standard file)

The decision to cancel comes amid a growing national controversy surrounding the Women's March founders, whom social critics say have been too slow to denounce anti-Semitic statements made earlier this year by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, a notable supporter of the Women's March movement.

But local organizers said the anti-Semitism claims were “not central” to their decision-making process.

“We didn't feel that (the controversy) was something we had enough information about to act on,” Wylie said.

Critics both locally and nationally said the organizers were being “reverse-racist” and denying Humboldt County's racial makeup — white people comprise about 74 percent of the county's population, [according to U.S. Census data](#).

The organizers dismissed both claims, emphasizing that the “too white” description applied to the event’s leadership, not its attendance. Reedy said critics have demonstrated “white fragility,” or an inability to handle any criticism of white majorities.

Some from progressive communities said the organizers were “blaming” people of color for not showing up in large enough numbers, another claim Reedy said was not in-line with the statement’s meaning.

“We understand that there is impact of our words that goes beyond our intent,” said Beth Wylie, another organizer. “These are tough conversations, but not enough people are having them.”

Sharrone Blanck, the president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, praised the Women’s March leaders’ decision.

“It’s absolutely fantastic,” Blanck said Monday afternoon. “It’s like, they checked themselves. That’s what you want in the world, people checking themselves. We don’t always want to do it for them.”

Blanck attended one of the first Women’s March organizing meetings. She counted two women of color besides herself. Everyone else was white, she said, and old; at 53, she felt most present were around her age or older.

That alone, she said, was an indication that the organizers weren’t tuning into the views and experiences of a younger generation.

Blanck eventually pulled out of the organizing team, saying she had to lend time to other projects. But she’s happy with the outcome — if the Women’s March is going to capture the power and experiences of women, it’s going to be stronger with a more diverse group, she said.

“I think talking about the dynamics between black youth and the police, the university recruiting students of color, all of that gets lost when you don’t have diversity,” Blanck said.

She does intend to work with the organizers for the International Women’s Day event, she said.

“They have a renewed message,” she said. “These people really get it. It’s a very exciting thing.”

Shomik Mukherjee can be reached at 707-441-0504.