

Virginia Conservation Network's 2024 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice Workplan

Updates are highlighted in yellow. Please send feedback to nicole@vcnva.org by Nov 15 for inclusion in the 2024 DEIJ Workplan.

VCN is committed to build a more equitable and diverse organization and Network. The following work plan outlines concrete steps we plan to take to address the culture and capacity of our own organization and our Network Partner's organizations to embed the values of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. This plan is updated and released annually to hold VCN accountable, providing a platform for partners and advocates to give us feedback, and to share ideas for partners to implement in their own organizations.

VCN recognizes that this work is ongoing and changes. While VCN's 2024 DEIJ Workplan is an important tool to hold ourselves accountable, we also know that as we continue to listen and learn, we also must be ready to adapt and change. It is also important to note that while we set a plan and goals to hold ourselves accountable, none of these actions themselves nor this entire plan together will move the needle where it needs to be in one year. This is a long-term process that will take commitment over decades and adjustments as we go.

PILLAR: Create spaces for discussion around VCN's DEIJ work.

- 100% participation in the annual anonymous staff/board survey in June.
 - This survey, conducted annually for the last 4 years, collects feedback on what we're doing well, what we should do better & specific ideas on what we should do next. The survey leads to staff and board discussions to update the annual VCN DEIJ plan.
- Revisit our annual DEIJ plan as a staff twice a year
 - Ahead of our summer and fall board meeting to discuss our progress to date.
- VCN staff member's work plan will include working towards equity and inclusion
 - These plans will be addressed at least monthly in regular staff check-ins with their supervisor.
- New staff and Board Members are required to attend one cycle of VCN's Shared Learning Cohort
 - New staff and Board Members, and those who have yet to, will attend at least one cycle of VCN's Shared Learning Cohort during their tenure with VCN.
- Update DEIJ Workplan Annually
 - VCN will share a progress report and updated DEIJ Workplan for the following year at our Annual Meeting to ensure both accountability for the partnership but also create space for the network to discuss DEJ efforts.

PILLAR: Create a pipeline for a more diverse group of environmentalists joining our Network.

- Organize an Environmental Career Panel

- In Partnership with BlackOak, the panel will target students and recent college graduates of color and feature leaders of color in our movement to showcase the type of careers available in the environmental space - organizing, advocacy, legal, foundations, etc.
- VCN's paid Environmental Advocacy Fellowship program
 - This paid summer fellowship is meant for individuals looking to launch their career in the environmental field, who may not have the ability to take an unpaid summer internship. Environmental Fellows will join the VCN team over the summer to gain invaluable experience by immersing themselves in a summer long project designed specifically for the fellowship. Fellows will work directly with one of VCN's managers concentrating in their choice of policy or outreach.
- Maintain a dues waiver program for Partners
 - Our dues waiver program allows groups who center low-income communities and communities of color in their work to waive Partnership fees.

PILLAR: Offer Resources, Trainings, and Education to Partners

- Run an Annual DEIJ Shared Learning Cohort on core principles of DEIJ
 - Through our shared learning cohort organizations will grow their understanding of the intersection between DEIJ issues and the environmental movement. Included will be time for organizations to share their own organization's DEIJ plan, and get tips and ideas from their fellow Cohort members.
- Create a Racial Equity Cohort alumni group
 - As our second cohort comes to a conclusion, VCN will make and maintain an alumni group of past participants to share new/updated racial equity resources. In addition, VCN can rely on cohort graduates for assistance in other program developments.
- Reachout to our smaller community based organization for their training and educational needs
 - VCN will endeavor to grow and direct its smaller trainings to address the specific needs of these smaller organizations, by reaching out directly to these organizations and asking them what they need/want to see.
- Annual Survey to all Network Partners
 - The Survey asks about trainings and offerings related to DEIJ that our Partners would like as well as organizational capacity for smaller Black, Indigenous and People of Color led groups.
- Repackage VCN's DEIJ Workplan
 - Using VCN's branding guide, staff will redevelop our work to make the workplan easier to follow and look more professional to achieve higher credibility. An updated DEIJ Workplan should better serve as a resource for organizations to replicate for their own plan.

PILLAR: Ensure VCN's internal processes follow the best DEIJ practices

- Ensure VCN's recruitment & retention process reflects best DEIJ practices.
 - Advertise positions in a variety of places including locations that specifically target individuals of color. Authentically reflect our work on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice on VCN's website. VCN will work with a legal team to start collecting demographic information that we can use to improve our recruitment and retention for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Review VCN's staff policies annually
 - To ensure best practices are reflected including equitable paid time off, health care offerings, grievance policies, etc.
- Create space ahead of team activities to discuss comfort level and expectations
 - Before activities outside of our job descriptions, particularly activities with any degree of risk, staff will have a discussion that covers any safety concerns and address group comfort levels before engaging in the activity.
- Strive towards a board that is fully representative of the Commonwealth's racial, gender, and geographic diversity
 - Through VCN's annual board recruitment drive, hosting an annual board orientation for new members and annual board survey to collect feedback on what board members enjoy and what they'd like to do more to make the board more effective and enjoyable. VCN will assess additional marginalized identities who may not have an opportunity to engage in VCN's board due to barriers of entry and set goals for recruitment / engagement based on that assessment.
- Budget for honorariums for VCN speakers
 - For events, panels, etc. focused on equity and inclusion. The allocated budget currently is \$2500. Furthermore, VCN will create a memo that details the usage and allocation of this budget.

Ensure equity principles are embedded in all policies pushed by VCN

- Develop statewide Environmental Justice policy priorities in Our Common Agenda
 - VCN will work with Partners doing on-the-ground equity work to develop environmental justice policy priorities.
- Equity Review Committee for the briefing book.
 - Each year select an equity policy review committee that does a review of all policies in the briefing book to ensure none of our policies disproportionately impact low income communities or communities of color - and, where possible, lift up these communities.
- Highlight the Equity Review Committee in Our Common Agenda
 - VCN will highlight the work and process of the Committee for the Network and general public within the Briefing Book.
- Develop an Environmental Terminology Guide to accompany Our Common Agenda
 - To support the policy papers withing Our Common Agenda, staff will develop an Environmental Glossary which defines DEIJ concepts and insider terminology from the environmental field to make our Briefing Book more accessible and inclusive to those aren't as familiar with DEIJ or environmental policy work.
- Send Briefing Books to Universities and Colleges in Virginia
 - Outreach will include HBCUs and a racially diverse set of professors.