

Progress Report on VCN's 2024 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice WorkPlan

VCN is committed to building a more equitable and diverse organization and Network. The following work plan outlines concrete steps we set out 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 changing. While VCN's DEIJ Work Plan is an important tool to hold ourselves accountable, we also know that as we continue to listen and learn, we must also 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 just one year. This is a long-term process that will take commitment over decades and adjustments as we go.

The following is a progress report on Virginia Conservation Network's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice plan that was developed through feedback and input from the VCN staff, board and Network Partners. Below is the update on how we're coming on the plan (Fall 2023 – Summer 2024).

While the work is ongoing, to help best visualize progress, we used color indicators to show where we felt VCN fully accomplished what we set out to do (■), where we made progress on an item but did not fully accomplish what we set out to do (■), or where we made no progress (■). Note that a green box does not mean we will stop doing that action item in the future, only that we feel as though we accomplished the action item to the fullest extent that we planned in the time period set.

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

- ■ 100% participation in the anonymous staff survey in June.
 - This survey was completed by all staff members and results were discussed at our staff meetings in July and August.
- ■ 100% participation in the anonymous board survey in June.
 - 9/15 board members completed this survey. Results were discussed by the board at the summer board meeting.
- ■ Revisit our annual DEIJ plan as a staff twice a year
 - The DEIJ work plan was discussed at our summer board/team meetings and will be shared at our Annual Meeting & Partner Retreat.
- ■ VCN staff member's work plan will include working towards equity and inclusion
 - While this comes up regularly, there is no formalized process to ensure it is 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 Annual DEIJ Learning Cohort/Series.

- 2/2 new staff members have attended one cycle of the most recent learning series. 0/2 new board members have attended one cycle of the learning series.
- ■ Update DEIJ Work Plan Annually
 - Progress report - shared at Annual Meeting. VCN is working with Ebony Walden Consulting to assess and plan priorities for the next 18 to 24 months.

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

- ■ Organize an Environmental Career Panel
 - In Partnership with BlackOak, VCN hosted its 3rd conservation career panel featuring Kendyl Crawford, The Climate & Clean Energy Equity Fund; Danielle Simms, VA Department of Environmental Quality; Josephus Allmond, Southern Environmental Law Center; and McKenna Dunbar, Sierra Club VA Chapter. You can read more about this year's career panel here: <https://vcnva.org/black-in-green-conservation-career-panel-returns/>
- ■ VCN's paid Environmental Advocacy Fellowship program
 - VCN hired three full-time paid summer fellows who worked directly with one of VCN's managers, focusing on their choice of policy or outreach. You can read more about this year's fellow cohort here: <https://vcnva.org/welcome-aboard-2024-summer-fellows/>
- ■ Maintain a dues waiver program for Partners
 - Five (5) organizations have had their dues waived through our dues waiver program. However, VCN lacks an effective annual review method.

PILLAR: Offer Resources, Trainings, and Education to Partners

- ■ Run an Annual DEIJ Learning Cohort/Series on core principles of DEIJ
 - Our third Annual DEIJ Learning Cohort/Series launched in June 2024. After two years of running this learning cohort, Ebony Walden Consulting recommended a new approach to advance the deepening of VCN members' racial equity journey, while offering a more time-efficient option for Network Partners. This recommendation is a shift from the original plan, proposed under consultation. Instead of a 10-month cohort program, Ebony Walden suggested a 4-part virtual training series ("Racial Equity Learning Series") designed to broaden and deepen VCN members' knowledge and engagement in racial equity and DEIB. These trainings are: "Cultivating Workplace Belonging", "Key Elements of Inclusive Leadership", "Operationalizing Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (An Overview)", and "Measuring Success • Racial Equity and DEIB Data and Metrics". Each session was 2 hours long and had 50 unique participants.
- ■ Create a Racial Equity Cohort alumni group
 - An alumni group of past racial equity cohort participants was created. This group received the first opportunity to continue their training in the Racial Equity Training Series due to a limited amount of spots available, and was used to recruit for VCN's Equity Review of Our Common Agenda. However, this listserv has not been actively engaged.
- ■ Reach out to our smaller community-based organizations for their training and educational needs

- VCN has not reached out to its smaller community-based organizations for their training and educational needs. VCN is working with Ebony Walden Consulting to develop better outreach strategies and support these organizations more effectively, addressing their specific needs.
- ■ Annual Survey to all Network Partners
 - A 2023 Annual Survey was not sent out to Network Partners.
- ■ Repackage VCN's DEIJ Work Plan
 - VCN's DEIJ Work Plan was not repackaged.

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

- ■ Ensure VCN's recruitment & retention process reflects best DEIJ practices.
 - VCN is working with Ebony Walden Consulting to help facilitate staff discussions, aiming to understand and address factors that could affect recruitment & retention process, such as workplace culture and microaggressions. While initial staff conversations have taken place, further conversations are needed to ensure VCN's recruitment & retention process reflects best DEIJ practices
- ■ Review VCN's staff policies annually
 - VCN is working alongside Ebony Walden Consulting to help review VCN's staff policies, including dress code and pay policies.
- ■ Create space ahead of team activities to discuss comfort level and expectations
 - VCN holds staff and 1:1 conversations that cover any safety concerns and address group comfort levels before engaging in the activities outside of job descriptions.
- ■ Strive towards a board that is fully representative of the Commonwealth's racial, gender, and geographic diversity
 - VCN has 15 board members, consisting of 66% white, 27% Black, and 7% Asian representation. The board lacks Hispanic/Latino representation. In comparison, Virginia's population is 69% white, 19% Black, 5.5% Asian, and 6% other, and 7.9% of Hispanic/Latino representation across all racial groups. Regarding gender, the board is 47% male and 53% female, reflecting Virginia's approximately 50/50 male – female ratio. Geographically, the board is represented across the state with members from Richmond/Petersburg (4), Northern Virginia (3), Fredericksburg/Rappahanock (2), Charlottesville/Piedmont (2), Shenandoah Valley (1), Hampton Roads (2), and Southwest Virginia (1). There is no representation from far Southwest Virginia (e.g., Abingdon) or Southside Virginia (e.g., Danville/Martinsville)
- ■ Budget for honorariums for VCN speakers
 - VCN has a \$2,500 budget for speaker honorariums, which has been used for speakers at VCN's Annual Meeting & Partner Retreat.

PILLAR: Ensure equity principles are embedded in all policies pushed by VCN

- ■ Develop statewide Environmental Justice policy priorities in Our Common Agenda
 - VCN published a briefing book paper, "Implementing Environmental Justice," in this year's Common Agenda that outlines the policy background of environmental justice in Virginia and offers potential opportunities to improve environmental justice.
- ■ Equity Review Committee for the briefing book.

- This year's equity review committee had 12 members. These are members of the Network that look at the policies specifically with the lens of ensuring our policies don't disproportionately impact low-income communities, communities of color, or rural communities and – where possible lift up these communities.
- **Highlight the Equity Review Committee in Our Common Agenda**
 - The Equity Review Committee members were highlighted on the copyright page, and the process was highlighted within the “how the briefing book gets drafted” section.
- **Develop an Environmental Terminology Guide to accompany Our Common Agenda**
 - An Environmental Glossary is attached at the end of Our Common Agenda, which defines DEIJ concepts and insider terminology from the environmental field.
- **Send Briefing Books to Universities and Colleges in Virginia**
 - VCN distributed briefing books of Our 2024 Common Agenda to universities and colleges in Virginia, including to HBCUs and a racially diverse group of professors.