

VCN's 2020 - 2021 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice Plan

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 2020 DEIJ action plan 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.

1. Create more spaces for shared discussion on what VCN is doing on DEIJ & where we can improve - across the staff, board & Network Partners.

- Staff Communication:
 - Annual anonymous staff survey in June
This survey was updated by the DEIJ committee and completed by 8 out of 8 staff. Results were shared and discussed by the staff at staff meetings and together with the board at the summer board meeting.
 - Monthly staff Shared Learning discussions
Formerly referred to as "safe space" conversations, we updated this discussion space to a shared learning space on race and identity, how it manifests itself within organizations, and what we can do as an organization to address it. The content was co-created by Ebony Walden and a planning committee on VCN's staff. All 8 of VCN's staff are participating in the shared learning space in addition to 6 board members. It started in April and is scheduled to occur monthly through December 2021.
- Board Communication:
 - Annual anonymous board survey in June
This survey was updated by the DEIJ committee and completed by 11/18 board members. Results were discussed by the board at the summer board meeting. While the survey was completed it was only filled out by 11/18 board members so we did not give ourselves a full green check. In the future we should have 100% participation.
 - A portion of each VCN quarterly meeting to be devoted to discussing either progress on our DEIJ plan and/or learning about environmental injustice in Virginia
VCN staff gave an update on the DEIJ plan on the 2020 Q3, Q4 and 2021 Q1, Q2 board meeting agendas.
 - Update our DEIJ plan annually
The updated plan will be released to the VCN board at the Q3 meeting and the Network partners at the Annual Meeting in September.
- Network Communication:

- o Share updated DEI plan with VCN Network at the Annual Meeting Progress Update – done in 2020, will do again in 2021.

2. Create a pipeline for a more racially diverse group of environmentalists joining our organizations

- Organize an Environmental Jobs Panels at Historically Black Colleges and Universities
VCN joined [BlackOak Collective](#) – a new organization of black professionals - with a two-year shared agreement including the following joint workplan. On April 21st, we hosted our first Virginia based jobs panel featuring Ebonie Alexander, Black Family Land Trust; Kim Jemaine, Chesapeake Climate Action Network; Josephus Allmond, Southern Environmental Law Center and Harrison Wallace, Equity Fund. It was co-hosted by our own Narissa Turner. You can read more about our partnership on VCN's blog: <http://www.vcnva.org/blackoak-collective/>.
- Raise money to launch a Virginia-specific paid fellowship program
VCNs first round of proposals were not funded and VCN was unable to launch a fellowship in the summer of 2021. However, we are excited to announce that we have raised the money to support 5 - 6 fellows for the summer of 2022.

3. Offer Resources / Trainings to Partners

- Launch Monthly VCN discussions/training on core principles of DEI
VCN crafted a shared learning discussion series in partnership with Ebony Walden, a Richmond-based consultant on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. We accepted 30 leaders in the VCN network into the program. After careful consideration, we delayed the launch of the VCN shared learning cohort for Network Partners to first do learning series internally as VCN staff and board. We did this to ensure internal work was prioritized. We launched the partner cohort in September and are excited to continue this learning cohort over the next 12 months.
- Run training on fundraising for smaller community-based organizations - particularly groups run by individuals of color
VCN launched a training module program in fall 2020. The 2021 course catalog includes a training module on this fundraising focused on smaller organizations; however, it was rescheduled from the summer to the fall and will not occur until after October 2021. We have secured speakers and the agenda.

4. Ensure VCN's internal processes follow the best DEI practices

- Ensure VCNs Recruitment & retention process reflect best DEI practices
VCN has run 2 recruitment drives in the last year. Our job descriptions have been updated to include the salary and included language such as encouraging anyone that fits 75% of the JD to apply. We increased the number of job boards to cast a wider net for candidates. While we implemented a set of best practices, more work is needed to increase our pool of candidates of color.
- Create an internal VCN staff/board DEI Committee
The committee was created. Committee members include – Wyatt Gordon, Victoria Higgins and Mary Rafferty from the staff team and Chris Miller, Karen Campblin from the board. The committee met in Q4 of 2020 and in Q2 and Q3 of 2021. Given the demanding board schedule of session we did not schedule a meeting in Q1. However, moving forward we will meet at least once a quarter – even during session.

- Continue to strive towards a board that is fully representative of the Commonwealth's racial, gender, and geographic diversity (Mary / Board).
In Quarter 4 of 2020 we brought on new board members from across Virginia who represent new regions and issues w/in our Network and hosted a board orientation for new board members.
- Every staff person will own at least one action item in the DEIJ Action plan.

5. Ensure equity principles are embedded in all policies pushed by VCN

- Equity Review Committee for the briefing book
The equity review team for the briefing book had 14 members this year. 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. There is a lot of interest by staff, board and partners to enhance this committee.
- Develop statewide Environmental Justice policy priorities in Our Common Agenda based on the guidance of the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative
The Environmental Justice Collaborative's policy priorities were highlighted in VCN's 2021 Common Agenda, the General Assembly Preview, Lobby Day and throughout the legislative session. Unfortunately, the main policy priority of the collaborative was ultimately unsuccessful.

Through the 2022 Briefing Book process Narissa worked with the policy team of the EJ collaborative to craft the policy recommendations for the EJ specific policy paper. In addition, she used the Briefing Book process to pull in members of the conservation community who are not part of the collaborative but interested in working more closely with the collaborative on shared policy asks. This year, CBF is listed as an author next to New Virginia Majority and App Voices who are leaders within the EJ Collaborative's policy working group. This coordination should allow us to be more effective in 2022.

In addition, over the last year VCN has kept our eyes and ears on emerging environmental justice issues. VCN worked with Friends of Buckingham to pass a study on gold mining in their region; with Protect Hanover to build public support to stop the construction of the Wegman's facility in a historical Black community; and with Virginia Interfaith Power & Light on a Transit Equity & Modernization Study to estimate the cost of adding transit necessities such as benches and shelters.