

## ***Virginia Conservation Network's 2021 - 2022 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice Work plan***

VCN is committed to build a more equitable and diverse organization and Network. In 2020, VCN released a public equity and justice plan to our Network Partners putting in place key initiatives to build a more just and inclusive movement in 2021 and beyond. The plan, released at our annual meeting, was released publicly to hold VCN accountable for our words while also providing a platform for partners and advocates to give us feedback and to share ideas for partners to implement in their own organizations.

VCN has identified that our role in this work as a Network starts with addressing the culture and capacity of our own organization and our Network Partner's organizations. The plan is intended to be updated annually and reported back on annually. In the future, if we feel appropriate we may increase our scope.

It's important to note that this work is ongoing and changes. While VCN's 2021-2022 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.

### **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:
  - **(Updated)** 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. We've updated this to not only do the survey but ensure 100% participation of both staff and board.
  - **(Continue)** Revisit our annual DEIJ plan as a staff quarterly ahead of each board meeting to discuss our progress to date.
  - **(New!)** Create a slack channel dedicated to sharing food, music, books, podcasts, articles, etc from our own or different cultures that we've recently enjoyed.
- Board Communication:
  - **(Updated)** 100% Participation in the annual anonymous staff/board survey in June (see staff above).
  - **(Continue)** Create space for 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.
  - **(Continue)** VCN staff / board committee will update our DEIJ plan annually based on feedback from the staff and board surveys and submit it annually to the staff and board. Board members give feedback and vote to present the plan to the Network Partners in the Fall board meeting.

- Network Communication:
  - **(Continue)** Share updated DEIJ plan for the next year & Report on the DEIJ plan from last year with VCN Network at the Annual Meeting each year. This will ensure both accountability for the partnership but also create space for the network to discuss what's working / what's not and how we can all improve upon our work in the next year.

#### **Create a pipeline for a more racially diverse group of environmentalists joining our organizations**

- **(Updated)** Organize an Environmental Career Panel in Partnership with BlackOak targeted at students and recent college graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The panels would feature leaders of color in our movement and showcase the type of careers available in the environmental space - organizing, advocacy, legal, foundations, etc. We've changed from in-person campus events to virtual state-wide panel discussions.
- **(New!)** Launch a Virginia-specific paid fellowship program to increase access to the professional environmental community for individuals of all backgrounds. Last year, VCN set out to raise the money for this fellowship. This year we'll launch the fellowship in summer 2022.
- **(New!)** Do a full review of our Network Partner Application process to take out potential biases and to ensure we're not limiting the scope of our partner recruitment efforts, in addition better publicize our dues waiver program for groups who center low-income communities and communities of color in their work.

#### **Offer Resources / Trainings / Education to Partners**

- **(Continue)** Host Monthly VCN discussions/training on core principles of DEIJ through our shared learning cohort which includes time for organizations to share what's working / what's not working within their organizations.
- **(Continue)** Run trainings for smaller community based organizations - particularly groups run by BIPOC individuals based on survey results. Use this as an opportunity to help connect these groups with the funder community.
- **(New!)** Survey to all Network Partners on what training / resources they'd like to have more access to both related to DEIJ as well as organizational capacity for smaller Black, Indigenous and People of Color led groups.

#### **Ensure VCN's internal processes follow the best DEIJ practices**

- **(Continue)** Ensure VCN's Recruitment & retention process reflects best DEIJ practices including - ensure job descriptions list salary and have a line encouraging anyone that fits 75% of the JD to apply. Advertise positions in a variety of places including locations that specifically target individuals of color.
- **(Updated)** Run an internal VCN staff/board DEIJ Committee - this committee meets at least quarterly to draft and continue to check in on VCN's progress on our internal DEIJ work. In 2022, we'll work to have equal board representation based on race and gender in the committee and will share notes with the full board after each meeting.
- **(Updated)** 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. In 2022 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.

- **(Continue)** Every staff person will own at least one action item in the DEIJ Action plan. These plans will be addressed during regular staff check-ins.
- **(New!)** Setup an Annual Review of VCN's staff policies to ensure best practices are reflected including equitable paid time off, health care offerings, grievance policies, etc. VCN will review best practice tools available for reviewing policies and have policies go through the toolkit we choose by end of 2022.
- **(New!)** Standardize a stipend / honorarium policy for VCN speakers for events, panels, etc. and write it into the budget.
- **(New!)** 100% of the board and any VCN new staff will complete or be participating in a racial equity learning series by the end of 2022. Last year, VCN's staff and a portion of the VCN board participated in a shared learning series equity within organizations. Starting next year it will be a requirement that all board members participate in either a VCN-hosted shared learning cohort or a similar series.

#### **Ensure equity principles are embedded in all policies pushed by VCN**

- **(Updated)** 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.
  - Establish co-chairs for this committee to better help establish shared training or process for review and year-round engagement in policy.
  - Highlight members of the committee in the published version and expand our explanation of "how the briefing book is crafted" page to better highlight the work of the committee
- **(Continue)** Develop statewide Environmental Justice policy priorities in Our Common Agenda based on the guidance of the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative.

#### **Definition / Visioning on our Work on Equity**

- **(New!)** Create a visioning document to ensure we're steering our equity & justice work towards a shared vision of equity in VCN.