

Virginia Conservation Network 2026 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Justice Plan

Objective: To advance racial equity, diversity, and inclusion within the Virginia Conservation Network.

Vision: VCN envisions a united and equitable environmental movement where all voices are valued, uplifted, and represented. Historically, the most impacted voices, including those of poor people/low-income, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, have been excluded from this movement. By fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, we aim to build a movement that reflects the rich demographics of the Commonwealth, ensuring the protection of natural resources for everyone and a sustainable future for all communities.

Overarching Goals:

1. Creating a More Inclusive Organizational Culture
 2. Improving the Diversity of VCN Membership
 3. Diversifying the Organization's Vendor List and Spend
 4. Supporting Professionals of Color in the Conservation Space
-

I. Inclusive Organizational Culture

A. Improve Staff Engagement and Satisfaction

Priority Area A: Staff Engagement

Goals: VCN to improve staff engagement and retention, particularly for staff from underrepresented backgrounds.

Challenges Identified:

- Lack of representation in leadership positions.
- Predominantly white work culture.
- Uncompetitive pay and limited career advancement opportunities.
- Perception of VCN as a stepping stone rather than a long-term career option.

Strategies:

- **Mentorship Program:**
 - **Action:** Increase interaction between board members through mentorship, leveraging the board's diverse demographic.

- **Implementation:** Create a structured mentorship program to pair new and existing board members. Create a clear structure and expectations for meeting and roles.
- **Expectation Management:**
 - **Action:** Foster honest conversations during the interview and onboarding process about career expectations and organizational culture.
 - **Implementation:** Develop a standardized process for expectation-setting & orientation, including pay bands, title/responsibilities, track to promotion, and other orientation resources. Develop a standard list of questions, hiring rubric. Share existing list of core values that represent VCN's organizational culture to share with candidates.
- **Improve Internal Communication:**
 - **Action:** Encourage open conversations about communication challenges and strategies to improve internal communication.
 - **Implementation:** Allocating time during weekly staff meetings; one-on-one meetings; and annual reviews to allow for regular feedback. One training during the year on addressing internal communication practices.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:**
 - **Action:** Establish clear avenues for staff to express dissatisfaction, with mechanisms in place to translate feedback into actionable changes.
 - **Implementation:** Regular opportunities for feedback during existing staff meetings and performance reviews, along with annual anonymous staff survey and 1:1 conversations.

Outcome: A more cohesive organizational culture where communication is transparent, inclusive, and effective.

B. Flexible Attire Guidance

Priority Area B: Establish Flexible Attire Guidance

Goals: Create attire suggestions that respect individual comfort while maintaining professionalism that is equitable and inclusive.

Strategies:

- **Understanding Background & Developing Suggestions:**
 - **Action:** Go through a second training on professionalism and white supremacy culture and then work towards a culture of encouraging staff to wear what makes them feel confident, within the framework of our culture, industry, and equity.
 - **Implementation:** Draft guidelines and circulate them to staff for feedback.

Outcome: A respectful and inclusive attire policy that empowers staff to dress comfortably while adhering to professional standards.

II. Improving Diversity of VCN Membership

Priority Area: Increase VCN Visibility at Diverse Events

Goals: Enhance VCN's presence throughout the Commonwealth and at diverse community (Black, Indigenous, People of Color, rural) events to foster diversity and inclusivity within the organization and its partnerships.

Strategies:

- **Expand Event Participation by Region:**
 - **Action:** Attend events outside of the Richmond and Charlottesville areas to reach a broader audience.
 - **Implementation:** Research and identify key events, especially in regions outside of Richmond. Staff members report back to the full staff on attended events, one-on-one meetings, and annual reviews to track progress.

- **Expand Event Participation by Engaging Diverse Communities:**
 - **Action:** Attend diverse events to reach a broader audience.
 - **Implementation:** Research and identify key events, especially in underserved regions. Staff members report back to the full staff on attended events, one-on-one meetings, and annual reviews to track progress.

Outcome: Increased engagement and visibility across the Commonwealth and in diverse communities, strengthening the network and encouraging reciprocal support among Partners.

III. Develop a Diverse Vendor List and Increase Spend

Priority Area: Diversify Vendor Engagement

Goals: Build a more diverse vendor base to support VCN activities while being intentional and visible about these efforts.

Strategies:

- **Research Diverse Vendors:**
 - **Action:** Identify and engage vendors from diverse backgrounds, particularly in the areas of food, event planning, and consulting. Leverage existing contacts (ex: existing vendor lists, other partners).

- **Implementation:** Building a vendor database in GlueUp and tracking vendor data. (BIPOC-owned, women-owned?) Utilizing the 'Community' portal to share the database with Partners.
- **Establish Partnerships with Diverse Vendors:**
 - **Action:** Implement RFP process for external purchases and contract opportunities
 - **Implementation:** Implement RFP process to follow and train staff on when and how to utilize it. Add potential vendors to the new list and share with staff and establish contracts where applicable.

Outcome: A comprehensive and diverse vendor list and RFP process that aligns with VCNs commitment to racial equity.

IV. Support Professionals of Color in the Conservation Space

Priority Area A: Facilitate Meaningful Conversations

Goals: Engage and support professionals of color within the conservation space.

Strategies:

- **Ensure Fair Compensation:**
 - **Action:** Compensate participants fairly for their time and insights outside of their program descriptions, including providing food and/or financial compensation.
 - **Implementation:** Implement speaker honorarium policy to ensure fair compensation for both VCN and non-VCN speakers and train staff on when and how to implement it.
- **Ensuring Diverse Representation of Speakers**
 - **Action:** Create a complete list of VCN speakers, including previous and potential speakers, that tallies how many events they have been asked to speak at. Pull data from past event records and log as events occur.
 - **Implementation:** Aim to repeat speakers as least often as possible per year and add to speaker list over time.

Outcome: Foster a supportive network for professionals of color, develop stronger community ties, and gain insight on future actions needed.
