



# EQUITY COMMITTEE OVERVIEW



CREATING  
WELCOMING  
COMMUNITIES

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Dear VLCT Members, Staff, and Stakeholders:

Thank you for your interest in helping VLCT center justice, equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging in all aspects of local government.

In the autumn of 2020, VLCT's Board of Directors began acting to help our members tackle the complex work of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Like our member municipalities, the Board needed to have many meetings, uncomfortable conversations, and thoughtful exchanges before taking these actions. By the spring of 2021, VLCT adopted a Statement of Equity and Racial Justice, adopted an Equity and Social Justice Plan, and called for volunteers to help us implement these concepts in the spring of 2021. The Equity Committee was charged to "... help create an action plan that outlines concrete ways that will actively promote equity and inclusion, both within the organization and with our members."

VLCT's mission is to serve and strengthen local governments. The Equity Committee helps us meet this mission by considering, evaluating, and recommending how VLCT should provide equity services to our members and how our organization itself can become a more anti-racist model employer and service provider. With the help of a grant from the Vermont Community Foundation, VLCT was able to hire an equity consultant to build a foundation for this work, providing organizational best-practices, subject matter expertise, and recommendations on how to move forward.

VLCT hopes the work the Equity Committee is helping us undertake will create stronger communities, better government, and a more welcoming Vermont. Thank you for joining this endeavor.

Sincerely,



Ted Brady  
Executive Director  
VLCT

## **VLCT's Statement of Equity & Racial Justice**

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) recognizes the historic and continuing impact of systemic racism in Vermont. We, therefore, stand against racism and the systems that have perpetuated racial injustices. We are committed to being more visible, vocal, and supportive in our efforts to ensure equity and racial justice, and to directly address overt and systemic racism and implicit bias.

We are committed to ensuring that VLCT stands on the right side of history through bold and concrete actions moving forward. We know that cultivating a culture of belonging, diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice requires intentional effort and dedication. Therefore, we will work purposely to uplift a culture of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as we work to integrate a climate of belonging and justice for all in the state of Vermont. We will anchor our efforts responsibly and be steadfast to support the dismantling of systemic racism and promote cultural humility across the state of Vermont. To this end, we will take the first of many steps to make impactful and sustained progress in these seven areas:

1. Establish an Equity Committee composed of VLCT municipality members, staff, and partners – tasked with creating a strategic action plan that outlines efforts that will actively promote the principles of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for VLCT and our members.
2. Strengthen partnerships by working closely with the National League of Cities, members, and other organizations to broaden our relationships in ways that amplify our efforts and help to dismantle racism and other forms of oppression.
3. Actively recruit and hire candidates of diverse racial and other backgrounds for staff and board positions.
4. Provide regular professional development, learning, and training opportunities for VLCT board, staff, and municipal members (e.g., cultural humility, implicit bias, racism, recruitment equity, inclusive leadership, and racial justice).
5. Develop and implement a digital toolkit of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging resources and information to support members, partners, and staff efforts.
6. Promote inclusion of diverse voices, perspectives, and imagery in our messaging and publications.
7. Develop accountability structures to support improving justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the state of Vermont (e.g., strategic plans, assessments and review and monitoring of progress).

Adopted by the VLCT Board on Feb. 17, 2022

# Core Values and Charge to the Equity Committee

## Charge

The Equity Committee's charge is to help create an action plan that outlines concrete ways that we will actively promote equity and inclusion, both within the organization and with our members.

## Values

We value diversity, equity, inclusion, and dignity for all.

We strive for civic excellence and recognize that our differences make our communities stronger.

We acknowledge that institutional and systemic racism exist and that we must be intentional in dismantling them.

We promote a culture of respect and recognize that words and actions matter, and the absence of action and words also matter.

Every municipality shares the responsibility of creating equitable and inclusive communities.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion should be embedded in all aspects of local government.

# Equity Committee Roles and Responsibilities

## The Equity Committee:

- is an advisory board to the VLCT Board of Directors;
- currently meets on the third Monday of the month from 1-2:30 p.m. (in person or virtual participation is welcome), but the meeting date may be changed by the committee;
- has no fewer than 15 members, including VLCT staff; and
- is cochaired by two members, including a VLCT Board of Director.

## Committee member responsibilities include:

- regularly attending Committee meetings and, if appointed, work group meetings;
- devoting the time and engagement necessary to accomplish committee goals;
- committing to ongoing professional development activities to build awareness and knowledge of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles;
- attending and participating in Equity Committee events, activities, and initiatives (failure to attend three consecutive meetings will result in removal from the committee);
- appropriately representing the Equity Committee and the principles of DEI internally and externally;
- using a DEI lens when making all decisions related to the work of the Equity Committee.
- The Committee is responsible for recommending actions and/or activities to the VLCT Executive Director and Board.

The meetings of VLCT's Equity Committee are considered public. All agendas and minutes are posted on the VLCT equity resources webpage, [vlct.org/equityresources](http://vlct.org/equityresources).

# Defining DEI

## DIVERSITY

The full range of human and/or organizational differences and similarities, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, physical and mental attributes, religion, values systems, national origin, political beliefs, parental/family status, and cultures.

## EQUITY

Equity is ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of communities most affected by systemic oppression.

## INCLUSION

Inclusive environments are places in which any individual or group is and feels welcomed, respected, supported, valued, and able to fully participate as their authentic selves. An inclusive and welcoming culture embraces differences, offers respect in words and actions for all people, fosters a diversity of thought, ideas, perspectives, and values, strives to create balance in the face of power differences.

As Adopted by the VLCT Equity Committee 10/18/21

**DEI is much more than an acronym. It is a mindset. It is the sincere belief that we all deserve to be appreciated, heard, and included.**

## Appendix 1

### VLCT Equity and Social Justice Plan

#### Reason for the Plan

The Board of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns believes strongly that its member municipalities must center justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of local government.

As part of its mission "to serve and strengthen Vermont local government," the VLCT Board wishes to develop tools to assist municipalities with this important work.

In its [Statement of Equity and Racial Justice](#), the Board outlined primary elements for this framework/strategy:

- Equity Committee – This advisory committee to the VLCT Board will help create an action plan for VLCT to actively promote equity and inclusion internally as well as with our members.
- Partnerships – VLCT will work with current partners, including state municipal leagues, the National League of Cities and Vermont organizations, to “amplify all of our efforts and help effect real change around these critical issues.”
- Representation – VLCT will encourage diverse candidates to apply for staff and board positions.
- Education – VLCT will invest in raising awareness and training staff and board members about implicit bias, racism and equity issues at the local level. Resources will be shared with members.
- Resources – VLCT will collaborate with experts and affected communities to develop a digital toolkit of resources and information for members, partners and staff.
- Communications – VLCT will promote inclusion of diverse voices, perspectives and imagery in our messaging and publications.

#### VLCT’s Role

VLCT is a membership-based organization that provides services and resources to Vermont's municipalities. Member elected and appointed officials (and staff) avail themselves of these benefits as they choose. VLCT does not tell member municipalities what to do, but rather provides direction on what should be considered when making decisions, and helps identify activities or policies that might be of assistance.

Our members include cities and towns (regular) as well as other “political subdivisions of the state,” including villages, fire districts, regional planning commissions and others (associate). Recipients of our benefits must hold an official office for the municipality.



## Charge

The Equity Committee's charge is to help create an action plan that outlines concrete ways that we will actively promote equity and inclusion, both within the organization and with our members.

## Scope of Work

The Committee's work will assist municipalities (external) as well as VLCT's operations (internal). The action plan will establish tasks and a timeline to accomplish them.

## Member Assistance

The committee will discuss and investigate tools municipalities may need and how to develop them, as well as explore other ways the League can support its members as they seek to establish a culture of equity in their own communities.

In addressing the scope of work, the Committee must be mindful of the following considerations:

- Municipal officials need practical tips and resources to engage in community conversations and requests for action.
- Municipal officials need tools to facilitate leadership on equity matters within their governing boards and their communities.
- In many cases, member municipalities may need help understanding equity and inclusion issues within their own government organizations and their communities and how to identify and prioritize action steps.
- Vermont's towns are mostly small to medium-sized, with an average population of 1,200 and with little to no staff capacity to assist equity efforts. Governing board members may take the lead or formally appoint volunteer committees or individuals to help them.
- Most municipalities don't provide services beyond statutory requirements.
- VLCT's relationship with municipal members, and the League's role to provide assistance and options.

Within the scope of work are several core issues the Board believes must be considered:

- Operational issues/best practices/ standards
- Municipal communications (municipal websites, public notices, forms, advertising, information sharing)
- Municipal recruitment, hiring, and human resources practices, including recruitment for volunteer positions on boards and commissions
- Equitable budget processes
- Effective citizen engagement
- Community development – planning, housing, businesses
- Data collection and data driven decision making

Other considerations for municipalities may include:

- Law enforcement policies in accordance with the town's voted governance structure
- Human services provision
- Overall service delivery and accessibility
- Facilities accessibility

Potential tools and resources the Committee may recommend developing can include but are not limited to:

- Equity Impact Assessment for municipalities
- Best practices by area or topic
- Templates for policies, resolutions, and other municipal documents
- Communications and facilitation tools to help with difficult conversations
- Operational guidance for various resident requests such as flying flags, painting streets, forming committees, or developing statements of support

The Committee must ensure that the tools recommended or developed address justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in a broad sense that includes meeting the needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), those covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the elderly and the young, members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) community, faith-based communities, and those who are low income, as well as any other segments of the community who are considered marginalized or vulnerable.

The VLCT Board recognizes the enormous breadth and depth of the work to be accomplished and acknowledges that it, in fact, will never be finished. The Board recognizes that every Vermonter must take part in the ongoing effort to ensure that justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are a part of the everyday fabric of life not just in Vermont, but everywhere. In recognizing this, the VLCT Board acknowledges that the charge and scope of the Equity Committee may expand into new areas not previously considered as they pursue their work. The Board will work with the Committee to address additional areas of exploration and scope as they arise.

## **Appendix 2**

# **Equity Committee Charter for Vermont League of Cities and Towns**

### **Purpose**

As part of its mission “to serve and strengthen Vermont local government,” the VLCT Board has established an Equity Committee with the purpose of aiding Vermont municipalities on matters of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (JDEIB).

### **Charge**

The Equity Committee's charge is to help create a justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging strategic plan that outlines concrete ways that VLCT can actively promote justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, both within the organization and with VLCT members.

### **Mission**

The committee will investigate tools that municipalities may need and how to develop them, as well as explore other ways that VLCT can support its members as they seek to establish a culture of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their own communities.

### **Scope of Work**

As directed by the VLCT Board, the Committee's work will be to assist VLCT in evaluating its operations for inequities and areas in need of a diversity lens. The Committee will serve as a liaison to municipalities seeking advice and support on diversity, equity, and inclusion matters.

### **Core Values**

- We value justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, and dignity for all.
- We strive for civic excellence and recognize that our differences make our communities stronger.
- We acknowledge that institutional and systemic racism exist and that we must be intentional in dismantling them.
- We promote a culture of respect and recognize that words and actions matter, and the absence of action and words also matter.
- Every municipality shares the responsibility of creating equitable and inclusive communities.
- Justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging should be embedded in all aspects of local government.

## Guiding Principles

In alignment with the VLCT Board's direction, the Equity Committee will be guided by the following considerations:

1. Municipal officials need practical tips and resources to engage in community conversations and requests for action.
2. Municipal officials need tools to facilitate leadership on equity matters within their governing boards and their communities.
3. In many cases, member municipalities may need help understanding justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging issues within their own government organizations and their communities and how to identify and prioritize action steps.
4. Vermont's towns are mostly small to medium-sized, with an average population of 1200 and with little to no staff capacity to assist equity efforts.
5. Governing board members may take the lead or formally appoint volunteer committees or individuals to help them.
6. Most municipalities don't provide services beyond statutory requirements.
7. VLCT's relationship with municipal members, and the League's role to provide assistance and options.

## Membership

1. The Equity Committee is a temporary committee of the VLCT Board of Directors.
2. The VLCT Board of Directors shall appoint all members to the Equity Committee in accordance with VLCT Bylaws.
3. The Executive Director shall conduct a search for volunteers from the VLCT membership in accordance with VLCT Board policy. The Equity Committee may appoint up to three members to a nominating committee who may recruit and recommend members to the Board. All those charged with building the committee shall seek a mix of volunteers with the following characteristics:
  - o Municipal experience
  - o Varied types of experience and municipal positions
  - o Diversity with relation to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability
  - o Represent varied types of cities and towns (rural and urban)
  - o Represent varied geographies
  - o Committed to justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging work and who will actively participate in the mission and objectives of the Committee
4. The Equity Committee shall have no fewer than fifteen (15) members, including any ex-officio members, and shall include a member of the VLCT Board. The VLCT Executive Director, the VLCT Director of Advocacy, the VLCT Director of the Municipal Assistance Center, and the VLCT Director of Operations shall serve as ex-officio members without voting rights. VLCT staff may serve irrespective of term limits.
5. Members will serve a two-year term on the Committee commencing after the annual meeting and terminating at the next annual meeting, except that half of the

members appointed in November of 2023 shall serve one-year in lieu of two-year terms as recommended by the Equity Committee. Members who have already served a term may request to serve for up to two additional terms.

6. The committee shall have two co-chairs. The member from the VLCT Board shall be one of the two co-chairs. The second co-chair may not be a current Board member or staff member of VLCT.

## **Administration**

1. The Committee shall meet January, March, May, July, September, and November and may choose to meet more frequently as deemed necessary to accomplish its responsibilities in appropriate time frames.
2. The co-chairs will be selected by the committee at the first business meeting of the year following the annual VLCT meeting. A member of VLCT's Board shall be a cochair.
3. The chair and/or co-chairs in collaboration with the VLCT Executive Director will be responsible for scheduling meetings, setting agendas, meeting facilitation, follow-up on action items, communications, and liaising with JDEIB consultants.
4. A quorum is defined as a simple majority of voting members (whether virtual or in person).
5. Committee consensus is reached when, after discussion, the majority of the members present agree that an action should or should not be recommended.
6. The committee will appoint a secretary to take minutes and distribute the minutes.
7. The Committee may form and delegate authority to one or more workgroups as it deems appropriate from time to time.
8. At least annually, the Committee will review and reassess the adequacy of this Charter and make changes to ensure efficient and effective progress towards the goals and objectives of the VLCT Strategic Plan.

## **Committee Member Responsibilities**

1. Regularly attend Committee meetings and, if appointed, work group meetings.
2. Devote the time and engagement necessary to accomplish committee goals.
3. Commit to on-going professional development activities to build awareness and knowledge of justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging principles.
4. Attend and participate in Equity Committee events, activities, and initiatives. Any member with two or more consecutive absences shall be contacted by the Chair/Staff to ascertain their interest in continuing on the committee. Members missing three meetings in a year may be removed from the committee.
5. Appropriately represent the Equity Committee and the principles of JDEIB internally and externally.
6. Use a JDEIB lens when making all decisions related to the work of the Equity Committee.

7. The Committee is responsible for recommending actions and/or activities to the VLCT Executive Director and Board.

## Meeting Norms

1. Listen actively -- respect others when they are talking.
2. Speak from your own experience.
3. Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions but refrain from personal attacks -- focus on ideas.
4. Participate to the fullest of your ability -- growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
5. The goal is not to agree -- it is to gain a deeper understanding.
6. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses -- they can be as disrespectful as words.
7. Ask questions for clarification to help avoid making assumptions.
8. Make sure everyone's voice is heard.
9. Balance your participation - speak and listen.
10. Listen actively to teammates without interrupting others.
11. Clarify when you are advocating vs offering an idea.
12. Say it now, in the room. Avoid waiting till later to raise an issue.
13. All voices count. All opinions are valid but offer reasoning behind your thinking.
14. Ask for help: It's okay not to know.

Adopted by the VLCT Equity Committee 11/15/21  
Amended and adopted by the VLCT Board on 12/16/21  
Amended by the VLCT Equity Committee 10/23/23  
Adopted by the VLCT Board of Directors on 11/9/23

## Appendix 3

# Common DEI Language and Terms

**Ally:** Advocates for people from underrepresented or marginalized groups. An ally takes action to support people outside of their own group.

**Belonging:** The experience of being treated and feeling like thriving and full member of a larger community where one is accepted as their true selves.

**Bias:** An inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned. A bias is an unreasonably negative feeling, preference, or opinion about a social group. It is grounded in stereotypes and prejudices.

**BIPOC:** An acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color.

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Often abbreviated to cis.

**Color Blind:** The belief that everyone should be treated "equally" without respect to societal, economic, historical, racial or other difference. No differences are seen or acknowledged; everyone is the same.

**Cultural Competency:** A process of embracing diversity and learning about people from other cultural backgrounds. The key element to becoming more culturally competent is respect for the ways that others live in and organize the world and an openness to learn from them.

**Cultural Humility:** A conscious, lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique that allows one to learn about others' cultures, beginning with an examination of our own beliefs and cultural identities.

**Cultural Appropriation:** The non-consensual/misappropriate use of cultural elements for commodification or profit purposes – including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. – often without understanding, acknowledgment, or respect for its value in the context of its original culture.

**Culture:** The values, beliefs, traditions, behavioral norms, linguistic expression, knowledge, memories, and collective identities that are shared by a group of people and give meaning to their social environment.

**DEI:** An acronym for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

**Disability:** A physical or mental impairment that affects a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

**Discrimination:** The unequal treatment of members of various groups, based on conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favors one group over others on differences of race, gender, economic class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, language, age, national identity, religion and other categories.

**Equality:** Treating everyone the same way, often while assuming that everyone also starts out on equal footing or with the same opportunities.

**Equity:** Ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of communities most affected by systemic oppression.

**Ethnicity:** A category of people who identify as a social group on the basis of a shared culture, origin, social background, and traditions that are distinctive, maintained between generations, and lead to a sense of identity, common language or religious traditions.

**Gender Identity:** Distinct from the term "sexual orientation," refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

**Gender Non-conforming:** An individual whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.

**Harassment:** The use of comments or actions that can be perceived as offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning or unwelcome.

**Implicit Bias:** A negative association expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold and that that affects our understanding, actions and decisions; also known as unconscious or hidden bias.

**Intersectionality:** The intertwining of social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity, which can result in unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers.

**Justice:** The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all.

**LGBTQIA:** An inclusive term for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual.

**Marginalized/Marginalization:** The process by which minority groups/cultures are excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/ community. A tactic used to devalue those that vary from the norm of the mainstream, sometimes to the point of denigrating them as deviant and regressive. Marginalized (groups) have restricted access to resources like education and healthcare for achieving their aims.

**Microaggression:** The verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs, insults or actions, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based solely upon discriminatory belief systems.

**Neurodiversity:** The concept that there is great diversity in how people's brains are wired and work, and that neurological differences should be valued in the same way we value any other human variation.

**Non-Binary (also known as Genderqueer):** A category for a fluid constellation of gender identities beyond the woman/man gender binary.



**Prejudice:** A preconceived judgment or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment and can be rooted in stereotypes, that denies the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized.

**Privilege:** Exclusive access or access to material and immaterial resources based on the membership to a dominant social group.

**Queer:** An umbrella term that can refer to anyone who transgresses society's view of gender or sexuality. The definitional indeterminacy of the word Queer, its elasticity, is one of its characteristics: "A zone of possibilities."

**Race:** A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly race), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, and ethnicity.

**Safe Space:** An environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule or denial of experience.

**Social Justice:** Active engagement toward equity and inclusion that addresses issues of institutional, structural, and environmental inequity, power, and privilege.

**Stereotype:** A form of generalization rooted in blanket beliefs and false assumptions, a product of processes of categorization that can result in a prejudiced attitude, critical judgment and intentional or unintentional discrimination. A stereotype is typically negative, based on little information, and does not recognize individualism and personal agency.

**Structural inequality:** Systemic disadvantage(s) of one social group compared to other groups, rooted, and perpetuated through discriminatory practices (conscious or unconscious) that are reinforced through institutions, ideologies, representations, policies/laws and practices. When this kind of inequality is related to racial/ethnic discrimination, it is referred to as systemic or structural racism.

**System of Oppression:** Conscious and unconscious, non-random and organized harassment, discrimination, exploitation, discrimination, prejudice and other forms of unequal treatment that impact different groups. It sometimes is used to refer to systemic racism.

**Systemic Racism** (a.k.a. structural racism or institutional racism) A system and structure that have procedures or processes that disadvantage African Americans, Indigenous people, Latinx people, and people of color.

**Tokenism:** Performative presence without meaningful participation. For example, a superficial invitation for the participation of members of a certain socially oppressed group who are expected to speak for the whole group without giving the person a real opportunity to speak for her/himself.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their assigned sex at birth (i.e., the sex listed on their birth certificates). Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies through the use of hormones and/or gender affirmation surgery, or after transition. (Use "transgender," not "transgendered.")

**White Supremacy:** A power system structured and maintained by persons who classify themselves as White, whether consciously or subconsciously determined; and who feel superior to those of other racial/ethnic identities.