



DECLARATION OF INCLUSION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. If the Governor has issued a Proclamation for the State, why does each town have to do it?

The Governor's Proclamation sets the tone for State Government, its elected and appointed officers, its departments, agencies, boards, commissions, etc., and their employees. It is a framework for towns and cities to follow but otherwise has little impact on them. By adopting its own Declaration of Inclusion, a municipality signals its agreement with the spirit of the Governor's Proclamation and that it will work to further the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Each town can create a statement or Declaration, within our guidelines, to best reflect the wishes of town leadership and citizens.

2. We're not racists. Why do we need this Declaration?

We are not suggesting that you are racists. Quite the contrary. The Declaration merely states publicly that everyone is welcome to visit and to live in your town and that you are committed to preserving that safe, positive environment. The intent is to raise consciousness about the importance of diversity and the positive effect that it can have on Vermont's economy. Please recall that Governor Scott recently said: "The fact is if we want stronger, more economically secure communities, we need more people and more diversity in Vermont."

3. If we like our town the way it is, why should we want to adopt this statement?

To make Vermont a popular and desirable destination, every town should be respectful and welcoming to all residents. Ideally every resident should feel a sense of belonging. Most towns are struggling to maintain population and therefore to maintain their tax base; new residents bring vitality.

4. I have never seen any racism in our town so why would we want to adopt this statement?

Racism is rarely seen or felt by those who are not the target of it. We want to create a statewide culture of tolerance and welcoming for moral reasons and for economic reasons. Vermont needs people, it needs younger people, and it needs diversity.

5. Why do we need such a Declaration when this is covered in the U.S. Constitution?

The post-Civil War 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution abolished slavery, gave citizenship to all people born in the U.S., and gave Black citizens the right to vote. The Declaration of Inclusion is intended to reaffirm those basic rights, making current our state and your town's ongoing

commitment to them, and emphasizing that your town sincerely welcomes and ensures the safety of all people, especially those historically marginalized.

6. Why can't we just say "ALL" people? Isn't identifying those individual groups of people further increasing separation?

We have thought long and hard about that question and have concluded: Many communities have promotional statements designed to welcome and invite visitors. The Declaration of inclusion is not a public relations or promotional piece. It tells the world that Vermont has seriously thought about its history and the present status of discrimination and racism in the U.S. And it wants everyone, all people, specifically those identified as historically marginalized to know that Vermonters, town by town, community by community, resident by resident, are attempting to live up to both the spirit and intent of a living Constitution.

7. Does adopting this statement open the town to increased liability?

The legal team at Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) has looked at our recommended statement and determined that towns do not increase their liability in any way by adopting.

8. If our towns adopt a declaration, is some form of implementation expected?

Yes, we have a Guide to Implementation on our website: vtdeclarationofinclusion.org. In addition, VLCT has created the Justice, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging toolkit and the Vermont Office of Racial Equity has established the IDEAL (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action, Leadership) program to help local leaders advance equity in their communities: <https://racialequity.vermont.gov/ideal-vermont>. We believe making citizens aware of the Declaration is critical to a town's success in implementing its goals.

9. Will implementation be an additional expense?

Implementation is important and most steps can be done at little or no cost. The Vermont Community Foundation has established a fund for which towns can apply for grants for up to \$10,000. Funds are focused on supporting communities participating in the IDEAL (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action, and Leadership) Vermont program. However, limited number of grants continue to be available for communities not participating in the IDEAL program. In addition, some towns have engaged consultants to administer implicit bias training and to examine ordinances for implicit bias.

10. Who is the Declaration of Inclusion Team?

Following the adoption of a Declaration of Inclusion by the Select Board of Franklin in 2020, the first such statement in the State, a team of citizens began presenting the idea to other Vermont towns. The team now includes five full-time residents of Rutland County. This group of volunteers shares a vision of Vermont being the most welcoming, safe, and secure state in the country for everyone, especially those who have been historically marginalized. Adoption and implementation of a Declaration of Inclusion by all 247 Vermont cities and towns is the group's collective goal.