



DECLARATION OF INCLUSION

**A VERMONT DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
INITIATIVE**

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

**PREPARED FOR
GOVERNMENT LEADERS**

Vermont's Declaration of Inclusion is a grassroots effort working with community leaders to reinforce the message that Vermont is a welcoming and safe place for all.

Our Partners

- Vermont Chamber of Commerce
- Vermont Interfaith Action
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Vermont Social Equity Caucus
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - Vermont

Visit Our Website

vtdeclarationofinclusion.org

INTRODUCTION

It is our vision that Vermont will become known as the most inclusive state in our nation for all people, regardless of how they identify.

With that vision in mind, a small group of Vermont citizens organized in January of 2021 to develop strategies to assist the state, cities, and towns in the planning, adoption, and implementation of a Declaration of Inclusion.

Bob Harnish, Pittsford

Al Wakefield, Mendon

Norman Cohen, Rutland City

The following information is intended for use by cities and towns in Vermont for taking steps toward implementation of your Declaration of Inclusion.

QUICK & EASY

Immediately inform your residents of the wording of the DOI and the reasons behind adopting it:

- Add the Declaration to the town website or hang a framed copy in the Town Clerks office, library, fire station, and recreation facilities.
- Print the Declaration in the Town Newsletter and include reasons why the Select Board believes this is an important step forward for the town. Perhaps this is the first of a series of articles.
- Include it in the Town's Annual Report along with a discussion of the broader role that Inclusion, Diversity and Equity are playing throughout Vermont and the far-reaching implications of the 2020 Census which show that Vermont has a dwindling and aging population.

IN-DEPTH IMPLEMENTATION

Steps requiring more thought and time:

- Form a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee, perhaps including a high school student, with a mandate to guide the town in its effort to become more diverse and inclusive and to report back to the Select Board. An important early objective of the committee will be to review the town's official policies, programs, ordinances and procedures to be sure they are free of implicit or institutional bias.
- Task the committee with researching, gathering and overseeing the most effective ideas for creating a more welcoming community and to issue periodic reports to the Select Board and the town.
- Review economic development, recruitment and employment policies to ensure they are welcoming, supportive and reaffirming of commitment to inclusion.
- Assess the need for “implicit bias” training for city or town staff, police and fire departments.
- Brainstorm with other adopting towns for creative ways to reach out to marginalized groups, individuals and new arrivals to give them a sense of belonging and value within the community.
- Assess current work environment for town employees; do they feel safe, welcome and appreciated? Update policies to clarify how workers can have grievances heard and reviewed in a timely, fair and comfortable manner.
- Urge local schools, non-profits, corporations, etc. to adopt a statement of inclusion and offer bias training.

ON - GOING IMPLEMENTATION

Steps for engaging partners now and in the future:

- Work with school administration to bring inclusion and diversity into the classroom in art, poetry, drama, debate club, etc.
- Work with faith leaders in the community to guide their congregations to embrace diversity as the human and humane way to treat our fellow citizens of this planet.
- Engage the town's library director to arrange a speakers series, discussion groups, reading groups, film series etc. and include students in these programs and their planning.
- Create a "concierge service" to assist new people in town or those considering a move to the town, with housing options, and the many other questions that a new arrival might have.

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

For more specific information, guidelines, and assistance on implementation, the following are excellent resources:

State of Vermont, Office of Racial Justice

The Vermont IDEAL Program. IDEAL stands for inclusion, diversity, equity, action, and leadership. IDEAL is a coalition of Vermont municipalities dedicated to advancing racial and other forms of equity across the state through shared learning and tangible action.

For further information contact:

Xusana Davis, Executive Director of Racial Equity for the State of Vermont
xusana.davis@vermont.gov, 802-828-3322

Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Equity Resources for Vermont Municipalities

The VLCT has two initiatives designed to help cities, towns, and village leaders create and maintain welcoming communities. These are:

- The Municipal Equity Toolkit, an online ten-part resource that covers everything from creating a municipal equity committee to building a framework and action plan to listing equity-related books, podcasts, and videos.
- VLCT Welcoming and Engaging Communities Cohort, a partnership with the Abundant Sun consultancy that offers municipal leaders' participation in the firm's Ethical Performance Improvement Campaign. This is a 6-month, 8-two-hour virtual workshop on topics that include equality, equity, diversity and inclusion.

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES CONT.

Vermont Community Foundation Grants - Equitable and Inclusive Communities

The Vermont Community Foundation awards grants of up to \$10,000/municipality from a fund of \$200,000 to support Vermont villages, towns, and cities engaged in local efforts to foster inclusion and belonging for people of all races and backgrounds.

Contact the grants and community impact team at grants@vermontcf.org or 802-388-3355 opt.6 with questions.

FAQ

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

Discussion by citizens of each town is important and each town should decide on what form implementation should take. Each town can craft a statement of Declaration, within our guidelines, to reflect the wishes of town leadership and citizens.

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."

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.

FAQ CONT.

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.

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.

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.

FAQ CONT.

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.

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.

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 of \$200,000 for which towns can apply for up to \$10,000. Some towns have engaged consultants to administer implicit bias training and to examine ordinances for implicit bias.

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