

Vermont Towns Engaging Racial Equity Work - Working research document
created by members of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force, March 2021

- For examples of Equity and Diversity mission statements and action plans, below please find a list of towns that:

A. Listed their Racial Equity work online;

B. Are listed with *Vermont League of Cities and Towns Equity Resources*

- Included are excerpts that might be useful at a quick glance for some of the towns.

A. Towns listed online:

<https://www.vlct.org/classified/race-equity-assessment>

1/ Vergennes

RFP

<https://www.vlct.org/sites/default/files/RFP%20-%20Race%20Equity%20Assessment.pdf>

- Purpose

The City of Vergennes is emphasizing with urgency the need for assistance in departmental efforts in response to the George Floyd killing. The City of Vergennes is responding to statewide/community requests for transformation within state and agency organizations.

The City of Vergennes created a Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee that worked for two months to research the idea of a police oversight board. The committee recommended a professional survey take place and answered questions related to the charge of the committee.

This RFP is intended build on the committee's work by soliciting proposals for an expert assessment of racial equity in the City of Vergennes government and overall community. The assessment shall diagnose specific issues and make recommendations for the next steps for the City to take.

- See p. 10-11 for overview of Activities proposed:

1. Community Survey

Gather and theme input from the community about preferred format and

venue for community listening sessions and action planning.

2. Preliminary equity assessment

Field survey to gather input from Vergennes Police, municipal employees and community members about equity knowledge, goals and topics they want to learn about.

3. Learning Sessions

Facilitate two series of learning experiences (one series for Vergennes Police Department, and the other for municipal leaders/staff) to build shared understanding about equity issues (for example, learn how implicit bias, the legacy of racism, and dominant white culture impact current systems).

4. Listening Sessions

Gather feedback about experiences and concerns related to Vergennes Police Department practices, policies and culture.

5. Recommendation

Create a recommendation for next steps for the City Manager, City Council, and Community

2/ Pittsford

February 1, 2021. Last November, the Town of Pittsford adopted a “Declaration of Inclusion,” which clearly establishes the intention of the community as it undertakes some very hard work. The document can serve as a model to other towns around the state that are likewise hosting equity and inclusion committees or hiring directors of equity.

“The Town of Pittsford condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age, or disability, and will protect these classes to the fullest extent of the law.

“As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all of its forms and commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community.

“The Town of Pittsford has been and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.”

B. Towns listed: Vermont League of Cities and Towns Equity Resources / Town Examples <https://www.vlct.org/equityresources>

(This site is a treasure trove of resources, including equity work in cities at the national level)

1/ - Town of Putney:

The purpose of the Equity and Inclusion Committee is to identify and advise the Selectboard on addressing inequities and encouraging inclusive practices in Town services, programs, human resource practices, and decision-making processes. The goal is to ensure that all residents, town employees and visitors receive equal treatment and opportunity regardless of but not limited to, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, income, wealth, veteran status, sexual orientation, age, marital status, familial status, disability, gender identity, and gender expression.

- Selectboard EIC Statement

[https://www.putneyvt.org/vertical/sites/%7BAFAACF45-D9AA-42F6-BFAF-8BC25D547B48%7D/uploads/EIC_short_statement_DRAFT_4\(1\).pdf](https://www.putneyvt.org/vertical/sites/%7BAFAACF45-D9AA-42F6-BFAF-8BC25D547B48%7D/uploads/EIC_short_statement_DRAFT_4(1).pdf)

2/ - Town of Brattleboro

- Diversity, Compassion, and Social Justice

<https://www.brattleborochamber.org/inclusionandequityinourcommunity/>

Community Safety Review Committee

Article that showed up 3/14 in VTDigger:

<https://vtdigger.org/2021/03/14/brattleboro-leaders-confirm-public-safety-problems-as-they-plan-reforms/?u=16ab52a60c>

- Here is a link to the **Community Safety Review Committee** on the **Brattleboro website**

https://www.brattleboro.org/index.asp?SEC=693CDD32-EA5A-4D80-8EC8-52AAFFEEA194&DE=099BAFFC-E917-4E15-AA2E-EAD0982FC246&Type=B_BASIC

Community Safety Review Committee charter

The Brattleboro Selectboard established a Community Safety Review Committee to begin a focused examination of how Town resources were currently utilized and how they could be best utilized to ensure equitable community health, wellness, and safety. On September 15, 2020, the Selectboard hired facilitators to design and facilitate a community-focused process for this work. On September 22, 2020, the Board appointed the 9 members of the committee. The committee and facilitators provided the Board with their recommendations on December 31, 2020. The report and recommendations are posted on the Town's website. The facilitators presented and discussed the final report in detail at the Selectboard meeting on January 2, 2021. The matter continues to be discussed and recommendations are being considered.

Former Members of the Committee:

Darlene Derby

Lana Dever

Kaz Dewolfe

Annaliese Griffin

Drift Mavyn

Robert Oeser

Kelsey Rice

Maya Shulman-Ment

Laura Stamas

Facilitators: Emily Megas-Russell and Shea Witzberger (CSRT@protonmail.com)

Staff Contact: Town Manager's Office, (802) 251-8151, townmanager@brattleboro.org

- **Here is the original article from last year announcing this work and an excerpt:**

<https://vtdigger.org/2020/09/16/brattleboro-approves-40000-price-tag-for-three-month-study-of-town-police-force/>

BRATTLEBORO — The town government will spend up to \$40,000 to pay two facilitators and a nine-member citizens committee for a three-month study of municipal law enforcement in the era of Black Lives Matter.

The selectboard voted Tuesday to hire Brattleboro social worker Emily Megas-Russell and educator Shea Witzberger from nearby Dummerston to head a review of the use of town resources for police and social services “to ensure equitable and optimal community health, wellness and safety.”

“When we’re talking about bringing people into conversation in our community, it’s super important that the people holding that space are local,” Selectwoman Brandie Starr said of the two area facilitators chosen over two out-of-state firms.

This southeastern Vermont hub spent all summer debating ways to review its police department that are fair to both people who believe it should be defunded and others who want protection in a town that has [the most opioid-overdose deaths in the state](#) and where racial justice events have drawn verbally abusive opponents charged with hate-motivated disorderly conduct.

Local leaders received four bids from potential facilitators to help the new Community Safety Review Committee this fall.

StoneTurn, a global advisory firm with offices in Boston, New York and Washington, D.C., submitted a \$175,000 bid.

Training 4 Transformation, an Oregon firm co-founded by a Black man and Asian woman who graduated from Brattleboro’s School for International Training, submitted a \$116,500 bid.

Rikki Risatti, a Brattleboro resident without specific facilitation education or experience, submitted a \$6,600 bid with the statement, “I regret this hierarchical hiring process.”

Megas-Russell and Witzberger submitted a \$15,000 bid that, with other committee and consultant expenses, may cost up to \$40,000.

“Our priority in collaboration is with people of color, queer and trans folks, folks who are psychiatrically labeled, and folks who otherwise have a lot of experience to share with us around the Brattleboro police,” said Megas-Russell, part of what she described as a team of “white people committed to anti-racism.”

“The purpose of this process is are we listening to people who are under-heard in this world,” Witzberger said, “and hand that information over to you, the police department and other groups to enact systems change.”

The selectboard will meet Sept. 22 to select nine committee members from 26 applicants. To encourage participation by marginalized people who often can’t afford to volunteer, the town will pay each member up to a \$750 stipend, giving priority to those

who are indigenous, of color, LGBTQ, facing addiction, with physical or psychiatric challenges, poor or homeless, or survivors of domestic assault.

“I’ve been getting a lot of feedback from community members about are you going to start paying all committees and is this something that taxpayers have to be prepared for?” selectboard Chair Tim Wessel said. “I’m very concerned about the precedent-setting nature of it, but I do acknowledge that (a community safety review) is a very big ask and it’s a quick timeline, so that certainly is a good argument for a stipend.”

The committee will develop initial recommendations by Dec. 31 for consideration as the town drafts a municipal budget for the next fiscal year.

3/ - Essex

- Racial Justice in Essex

<https://www.essexvt.org/781/RACIAL-JUSTICE-IN-ESSEX>

4/ - Franklin

“The Town of Franklin condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age, or disability, and will protect these classes to the fullest extent of the law”

“As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all of its forms and commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community”

“The Town of Franklin has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.”

Approved and Accepted by the Selectboard on September 16, 2020

5/ Montpelier

<https://www.montpelier-vt.org/1037/Social-and-Economic-Justice-Advisory-Com>

Social and Economic Justice Advisory Committee

The Social and Economic Justice Advisory Committee (SEJAC) was established in 2018 to assist City Council in addressing and reshaping the systems, policies, and practices that perpetuate barriers to racial, social, and economic justice in our community.

Current Work: An Equity Assessment of Montpelier

The City of Montpelier has a contract signed with [Creative Discourse](#), a consulting group based in Burlington, for a two-year process that culminates in the drafting of an equity plan, which is informed by community dialogue, understanding of best practices, and engagement. We will be starting with the first step of an equity assessment this fall

to build the relationships and insights needed to create a strong foundation for future work.

This equity assessment will start with focus groups and interviews with city officials, community organizations, and community leaders, to gather key issues and areas of focus for our community survey and our work. We want to gather insights about the experiences of a diverse group of people who live in Montpelier and the impacts of local government, especially with regards to underrepresented or marginalized community members. An initial summary of this work is expected to be presented in June 2021.

Committee Charge

The Montpelier City Council recognizes that historical and ongoing systems and structures in our nation, state, and community perpetuate racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, and other forms of injustice and oppression. In 2018, the City Council established the Montpelier Social and Economic Justice Advisory Committee to assist them in addressing and reshaping the systems, policies and practices that perpetuate these barriers to social and economic justice in our community.

6/ Waterbury - Waterbury Area Anti-Racist Coalition

ABOUT WAARC: The Waterbury Area Anti-Racist Coalition (WAARC) grew out of a multi-racial, multi-generational group of community members who gathered to organize a Rally Against Racism on June 14, 2020 in Waterbury, Vermont. This rally was in response to a rally in Montpelier a week prior where local 8th grade student Damien Garcia spoke powerfully of the racism he has experienced in our community.

WAARC seeks to build on the energy and insights of that first rally by working to create a community where every person can fully experience freedom, belonging, and love on a daily basis. We are committed to challenging racism at all levels, including interpersonal racism (both conscious and unconscious acts) and systemic racism (our local institutions and policies). We will work toward a better future through education, advocacy, and activism.

Principles Prioritizing voices and leadership of members of color - We acknowledge that members who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color have acute insight into the mechanisms of racism in terms of both its impacts and strategies for making our community more antiracist. Empowering students and families of color - We want to include all members of our community and beyond, but we will intentionally center and serve community members of color.

Continuous learning and growth - In addition to listening to and learning from members of color during our meetings, we are committed to ongoing collaborative and individual study of racism, its impacts, and antiracist concepts and strategies.

Focus on impact - We seek to help make substantial change in our community and to operate organizationally in a way that minimizes the reproduction of racist structures and relationships. Our processes for working together will assume that the dynamics of white dominant culture are likely to cause harm to our members of color, and we will seek to minimize this harm and to repair it when it happens.

Transparent advocacy - As strategies emerge and organizational stances are clarified, we will publicly articulate them in a way that is clearly linked to WAARC on our website.

Confidentiality of particulars - Conversations within meetings should remain broadly confidential. Participants can discuss ideas or general topics outside of meetings, but we will refrain from naming names or sharing specific stories.