VPR + Vermont Partnership for Fairness & Diversity
Audit Report Summary: June 2021

In Fall 2020, VPR began working with the Vermont Partnership for Fairness & Diversity to conduct a comprehensive audit of VPR’s hiring practices and internal culture. They conducted interviews and focus groups with existing and former staff, and compiled a detailed report outlining the status of DEI at VPR, with recommendations for creating a welcoming and inclusive environment.

The report was presented to VPR’s Board of Directors in December, and to staff in February. Working hard to implement recommendations. Below is a summary of the report’s key findings and recommendations.

Key Findings

1. Staff attitudes towards DEI efforts have negative implications for people of color in the workplace, as well as creation of inclusive content.
2. There are significant challenges to meaningful DEI work associated with staff not valuing diverse perspectives or recognizing their own privilege.
3. Some staff members deem themselves more aware of race issues than they actually are, which can create challenges to authentic learning experiences.
4. Staff members with greater awareness don’t feel supported by leadership and therefore don’t speak up or are dismissed.
5. Covert racism exists within the staff, including white silence, unawareness of privilege, exceptionalism, color blindness, tone policing, and a belief that diversity can serve as hindrance to perfection.
6. The homogeneity of the staff results in an outsider experience for people of color.
7. There is widespread disbelief that DEI work will be effective, based on past experience at VPR.
8. There is fear among some staff that sharing diverse voices and pursuing inclusive stories would result in waning support from donors.
9. VPR has a reputation for perfection, which discourages content managers from approving diverse and inclusive stories and content, and may contribute to a limited number of subject matter experts of color interviewed or invited to contribute to content.
Recommendations
The task of transforming organizational culture to be not only diverse but inclusive requires an ongoing commitment to discomfort and introspection, to listening to people of color on staff, and to acknowledging and repairing harm from staff at all levels. VPR’s commitment to excellence needs to be applied to DEI work in order to shift organizational culture.

1. Launch a comprehensive anti-racism training for all staff following VPR’s merger with Vermont PBS on July 1, and for all new hires going forward.
2. Create a full-day training for executive leadership and newsroom staff that addresses racial identity as it relates to their role in the organization.
3. Hold two full-day trainings for content managers that explore the historical and current relationship between media and race.
4. Topics of study for all trainings should include: unpacking whiteness, microaggressions, diversity vs. inclusion, interrupting racism, critical conversations, relationship between journalism and race, restorative discussions after offense has occurred
5. Design criteria around accepting or rejecting inclusive pitches.
6. Develop meaningful partnerships with historically Black colleges or universities, or journalism associations for people of color in order to broaden the applicant pool when recruiting.
7. Establish DEI-specific SMART goals and success criteria for recruitment, retention, training, invited guests, population of listeners and inclusive news coverage.
8. Create space and opportunities for employees to discuss difficult moments or other concerns through one-on-one meetings or similar.
9. Develop plans to foster growth and development for all staff.
10. Provide support and education for diversity committee members that includes how to facilitate difficult conversations and how to build and maintain momentum.

Conclusion
Organizational change is an ongoing process, and this report marks the beginning - not the end - of this important work. As we prepare to merge with Vermont PBS on July 1, there is a strong desire for our new, unified public media organization to be more inclusive, serve ALL people, and to be a place where everyone belongs.