

# Vermont Council on Rural Development

## Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Commitment Statement

At the Vermont Council on Rural Development, our mission has always been to bring together all Vermonters to build a prosperous and resilient future. In order to carry out this work effectively, we continuously evaluate our internal biases and adjust our practices, systems, and strategies to best serve all Vermonters regardless of how they identify themselves.

Fundamental to this is our commitment to dismantle barriers to universal participation, engagement, and leadership in our communities. Democratic decision-making and civic engagement are only as strong as the depth and equity of the participation they are built upon. Collective commitment to deep engagement, equitable access, countering internal bias and developing inclusive processes and systems is key to the future strength and vitality of our communities and our state.

We commit ourselves to the principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. These values are central to our mission, culture, and vision internally, in our work with communities, and across the full breadth of our programs. We acknowledge that Black people, Indigenous people and People of Color (BIPOC) have long faced and continue to face historic and systemic barriers of racism which impede or exclude them from civic participation, decision-making, and equal and fair educational and economic opportunity. Additionally, we recognize that Vermont and Vermonters have much work to do to evaluate our individual attitudes and privilege; to work together now and in an ongoing way to dismantle systemic racism; and to re-invent and expand our collective identity.

### **Core Operating Principles:**

- We recognize the validity and importance of the lived experience of all Vermonters. We recognize, respect, and value all voices as equal contributors to the future.
- We envision a future Vermont that is a safe and welcoming home for all people, where multiple cultures can co-exist and be celebrated, where our collective diversity fosters creativity and innovation, and where equitable social and economic opportunities exist for all Vermonters.
- We join forces with all who work to dismantle white supremacy and systemic racism and dedicate ourselves to work for an inclusive, equitable, and ultimately stronger future.
- We appreciate that Vermont is a more vibrant, healthy, and prosperous place when we acknowledge and welcome Black people, Indigenous people and People of Color as fully engaged members and leaders of our communities.

**The Vermont Council on Rural Development commits to:**

- **Diversifying our Staff, Board, and Partnerships:** Continually assessing the composition of our staff, Board membership, and network of partners to ensure they are reflective of our commitment to justice, equity, inclusion and diversity.
- **Addressing Statewide Barriers:** Working with local, regional, and state partners to support and advance policies and systemic changes that break down barriers and systemic disadvantages to opportunities, resources, and participation.
- **Improving our Community and Program Outreach:** Dedicating time, energy, and resources to targeted outreach, invitation, and support to build inclusive and equitable community processes that actively engage historically excluded populations in deliberation, decision-making and leadership.
- **Advancing Inclusion and Equity in our Internal Systems and Structures:** Evaluating our internal systems and practices to ensure that they are inclusive and equitable, and that all staff and Board members feel included, engaged, and connected to our work.
- **Supporting Vermont Communities:** Identifying and developing resources and support for communities and leaders working to develop systems and structures to improve inclusive and equitable engagement and decision-making.
- **Listening and Learning:** Listening carefully and openly to our BIPOC neighbors, partners, and community members to deepen our understanding of the range of BIPOC experiences across Vermont. Constantly reevaluating and making adjustments to our programs, services, partnerships, and operations to ensure we are integrating these needs and experiences into all of our decision-making, planning, budgeting and practices.