

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired

Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion 2023 Annual Report

March 25, 2024

Introduction

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) submitted the agency One Virginia Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan on August 16, 2021. Following review of the report by Janice Underwood, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer under the Northam Administration, DBVI received feedback regarding the plan along with proposed next steps for the agency to continue implementation of the plan:

1. Regarding Language Access and Equity – enhance the plan to include language access as part of the priorities.
2. Regarding Goal Development - ensure that goals responded to the root causes of systemic barriers in the mission of the Commonwealth and within the culture of DBVI's workforce.
3. Regarding Indicators of Success - embed measurable indicators of success tactic or objective completion into the agency plan.
4. Regarding a Timeline - establish deadlines for indicators of success or objective need that would encompass a four-to-five-year period; and,
5. Regarding Goal and Objective Compatibility - distinctly define objectives or strategies and that the plan be organized to consider these elements.

DBVI was asked to adapt the narrative plan into the metric dashboard included in the One Virginia Tool Kit as an addendum to the agency DEI plan and to resubmit the narrative with the matrix as one new document by December 21, 2021. Due to unforeseen circumstances including the residuals of the COVID 19 pandemic, changes in state level administration, and changes in agency leadership, the DBVI DEI Strategic Plan was not edited and resubmitted as advised.

DBVI's Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Annual Report 2023 report includes strategic goals and DBVI DEAI strategies from the August 16, 2021, DBVI plan using the 2023 required annual report template format to report on progress made and activities relevant to the spirit of the new 2024 Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Plan for the State Workforce under Governor Youngkin.

Report of Progress

Plan Goal 1: Access and Success

- Objective 1: Identify actions and initiatives that will assist DBVI to accomplish DEAI goals and objectives.
 - Strategy: Establish Advisory Group consisting of a diverse cross-section of agency employees.
 - **Status** – not accomplished.
 - Strategy: Develop, implement, track, and maintain DBVI's DEAI Plan.

- **Status** – Related to a DEAI Plan is the development of the HHR Language and Disability Access Plan in 2022 and the updates to the Plan in 2023. Ongoing efforts continue to ensure individuals requiring language or disability access to agency resources and services is outlined in this plan and will be similarly reflected in the development of a 2024 DOI Plan.
- Objective 2: Operationalize and manage the DBVI DEAI Plan.
 - Strategy: By March 2022, hire DEAI Coordinator to provide and coordinate training, arrange for periodic assessments of the cultural competency of the agency staff, and engage stakeholders.
 - **Status** – Efforts to reconsider the organizational structure of the key roles and positions in the Services and Administration Divisions continue with DOI objectives as a focus. New objectives will be reflected in the agency 2024 DOI Plan.

Plan Goal 2: Welcoming and Respectful Culture

- Objective 1: Create and sustain an agency culture that affirms and respects diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout daily operations.
 - Measure: By 2021, assess cultural competencies.
 - **Status** – Related to this measure is the creation and dissemination of an employee suggestion box, available to all staff, to be reviewed by agency leadership on an ongoing basis.
 - Measure: By November 2021, conduct a survey of all employees to assess the current culture.
 - **Status** – DBVI conducted an Employee Climate Survey in early 2022 facilitated by VCU Performance Management Group (PMG). Several recommendations were provided as a result of the survey and will be included in DBVI's 2024 DOI Plan.
 - Strategy: By 2021 DBVI will begin an extensive review of all agency and programmatic policies with a renewed emphasis and focus on equity and potential biases.
 - **Status:** Unrelated but relevant to the spirit of this plan are activities associated with the HHR Language and Disability Access Project in 2022. In 2022, the DBVI Senior Policy Analyst in the Administrative Division completed a review of agency program manuals for Vocational Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living, Education Services, Orientation and Mobility, and the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired. Each program manual was found to include clarification that accommodations required by an individual with a disability and translators required by non-English speaking individuals will be provided to facilitate the individual's access to and receipt of agency services.
- Objective 2: Focus community engagement on those that provide measurable, direct, equitable, and sustained benefit to all of Virginia's diverse communities.
 - **Status:** Measures are unavailable at this time.
- Objective 3: Recruit and Retain a Diverse Workforce
 - **Status:** DBVI's standard practice is to ensure diverse interview panels that include, at a minimum, individuals with disabilities, people of color, and other individuals who are representative of the population of individuals applying for positions within the agency.
 - **Status:** DBVI complies with Virginia's commitment to equal employment opportunities for all, including persons with a disability as described in the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management Policy Manual <https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/hrpolicies>

and the Code of Virginia 2.2-203.2:3

<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title2.2/chapter2/section2.2-203.2:3/> . Additionally, DBVI complies with Code of Virginia 2.2-1213 regarding that Alternative Hiring Process <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/2.2-1213/> .

- DBVI reports 40% of employees having a disability and 7% of employees as veterans. DBVI is proud of the contribution these employees make in maintaining a diverse workforce and is committed to maintaining diversity as a priority in its recruitment and retention efforts.

Plan Goal 3: State Agency DOI Infrastructure and Training

- Objective 1: Create and sustain an organizational infrastructure to support accountability in achieving equity goals within the agency and the Commonwealth.
 - **Status** – Efforts to reconsider the organizational structure and the key roles and positions in the Services and Administration Divisions continued with DOI objectives as a focus. New objectives will be reflected in the agency 2024 DOI Plan.
- Objective 2: Engage the workforce in learning the concepts of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the importance of these concepts to achieving their agency mission.
 - Measure: By February 2022, conduct DEAI training for all employees who have not previously attended a DEAI agency training.
 - **Status** – DBVI did not develop or implement specific DEAI Training during this reporting period. However, agency staff did participate in training opportunities that addressed disability access. The following list is comprised of training opportunities in addition to those in the Commonwealth of Virginia Learning Center included requirements for new and current employees (please note that figures do not represent an unduplicated count of employees):
 - The DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Program conducted two specific training opportunities for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors including Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC); each training provided credits for individuals maintaining their CRC credential:
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training was conducted in 2022 for 25 employees.
 - In 2023, the disAbility Law Center of Virginia conducted a Cultural Competency and Disability Inclusion training that also provided Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credits to 25 employees.
 - Eleven individuals completed the DARS – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training module.
 - Fifty-seven individuals completed the Diversity in the Workplace Overview entitled, COV – Working Together for Virginia.
 - Two individuals completed the ADA Accommodations for Employees.

2024 DBVI Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Goals

Goal 1: DBVI Access and Success

- Objective 1: Identify actions and initiatives that will assist DBVI to accomplish DOI goals and objectives.
- Objective 2: Operationalize and manage the DBVI DOI Plan.

Goal 2: DBVI Welcoming and Respectful Culture

- Objective 1: Create and sustain an agency culture that affirms and respects diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout daily operations.
- Objective 2: Recruit and Retain a Diverse Workforce

Goal 3: DBVI DOI Infrastructure and Training

- Objective 1: Create and sustain an organizational infrastructure to support accountability in achieving equity goals within the agency and the Commonwealth.
- Objective 2: Engage the workforce in learning the concepts of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the importance of these concepts to achieving their agency mission.