

Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion

Annual Report Template

Department of Forestry

2024-2025

<p>2024- ACCOMPLISHMENTS</p>	<p>Accomplishments</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) DOF hired our Outreach Coordinator this spring. She will focus on developing relationships with underserved populations predominantly located in Southside and Southwestern areas of the state 2) DOF Partnered with VSU, VT, Mountain Gateway Community College, and the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center to attract students from diverse geographic and underserved areas. 3) Utilized a variety of recruiting methods including targeted websites to attract a diverse applicant pool. 4) Utilized the “Alternative Hiring Process” to attract disabled applicants. 5) Expanded New Hire Orientation and Training to promote cohesive teambuilding and a welcoming environment. 6) Promoted Community Engagement by partnering with numerous minorities and underserved Citizens of the Commonwealth.
<p>2025 AGENCY DOI GOALS</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) This Spring we hired an Outreach Coordinator to work with Underserved Landowners in Southside and Southwestern VA. Continue to: 2) Partner with the Black Family Land Trust and Southside Virginia Community College to develop a two-year Forestry Technician program at the College in hopes of increasing the diversity of qualified job applicants. 3) Partner with underserved communities in Southwestern VA impacted by hurricane Helene. 4) Continue to promote Community Engagement with underserved populations in Southside Virginia.



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
FORESTRY

Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion

Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence

June 30, 2025

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Virginia Department of Forestry Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence

The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) will attract, develop and train agency staff to successfully complete our mission in a safe and professional manner. DOF will recruit an agency workforce that mirrors the population we seek to serve. DOF will provide a welcoming and respectful work environment for natural resource and public safety professionals who are committed to public service. DOF will adopt new strategies to engage with populations that have not historically benefitted from agency programs.

Goal 1 Access and Success – Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

Promote activities that aid in the recruitment and hiring of individuals from a broad range of skills and abilities. Invest in the development of employees, supervisors and leadership. These efforts enhance agency diversity to bring increased creativity and productivity.

Strategies

1. Implement intentional outreach and recruitment strategies to increase applicants and hires from historically underrepresented populations.
2. Use data to identify gaps in representation and create new community partnerships to increase representation from those groups.
3. Report data to staff to promote a culture of transparency and regularly solicit feedback.
4. Review and redesign employee onboarding to incorporate inclusive principles and ideas.
5. Analyze current processes and policies related to promotion to ensure equitable promotion practices.
6. Standardize hiring practices across candidates.

7. Analyze the demographic composition of pools across all stages of the recruitment and hiring process to create an automatic tracking and feedback process for these processes.

Metrics and Indicators

1. Percentage of job descriptions reviewed and revised to broaden the applicant pool.
2. Employee response to survey items about their experience with recruitment and onboarding in relation to equity.
3. Create a recruiting and onboarding survey.
4. Create a survey for candidates who decline offer of employment.

Goal 2 Promote a Welcoming and Respectful Culture

Create and sustain an agency culture that employs inclusive practices throughout daily operations. DOF will create an environment that is culturally affirming, and which integrates differing viewpoints and lived experiences focusing on building and sustaining an inclusive workplace environment and facilitating outstanding customer service and stakeholder relations by promoting accessibility, cultural competency, accountability, education and communication.

Strategies

1. Educate employees and interns about policies that prevent harassment, discrimination and identity-based violence.
2. Utilize employee engagement factors/trends to assess the agency's working environment, identify barriers to maximum engagement and develop targeted actions.
3. Promote Employee Affinity and Resource Networks for underrepresented groups to promote diversity, opportunity and inclusion (DOI) within the workforce and engage with community partners.
4. Remove barriers for employees with disabilities by providing employees the necessary accommodations to be successful in the agency.

Metrics and Indicators

1. Increase resources for non-English speakers and throughout the agency's outreach tools (websites, documents and in-person services).
2. Offer educational and celebratory events that recognize, value and honor diversity and promote inclusion. Evaluate programs for their impact on diversity. Monitor attendance and employee feedback about events.

Goal 3 Training and Development

DOF will leverage workforce diversity throughout the organization with relevant employee training, learning and professional development. Engage in learning the concepts of DOI and the importance of these concepts in completing the agency mission.

Strategies

1. Conduct a DOI training needs assessment to determine gaps (e.g., competency, legislative, resource, etc.) and create an ongoing training plan.
2. Establish agency and departmental learning goals and training plans based on gap assessment.

3. Integrate DOI knowledge and awareness into performance appraisals for all employees.
4. Offer educational opportunities that enable employees and leaders to achieve DOI learning goals based on competency gap assessment.
5. Identify and remedy barriers that impede employee professional development.

Metrics and Indicators

1. Employee comprehension and understanding of DOI.
2. Increased number and type of training and increased participation.
3. Employee satisfaction with quality and quantity of educational opportunities.

Goal 4 Infrastructure and Accountability

Create and sustain an agency infrastructure that effectively supports progress and accountability in achieving diversity goals. This includes centering Inclusive Excellence (meaning an organization has adopted a program of cohesive, coherent and collaborative integration of diversity, inclusion and equity into the organizational pursuit of excellence) in planning processes and in adjusting policies and processes as needed.

Ensure sustainability and accountability by:

- ♦ identifying and removing systemic barriers to inclusion
- ♦ embedding DOI in policies and practices
- ♦ equipping leaders with the ability to manage diversity and be accountable for results.

Strategies

1. Incorporate DOI interests into strategic planning and reporting efforts.
2. Conduct barrier analysis and develop action plans to eliminate any identified barrier(s) to performing as an equal employment opportunity organization.
3. Create training for hiring managers on conducting legal interviews, lawful and equitable hiring, and the impact of unconscious bias in the recruitment and selection process.
4. Develop regular reporting processes on progress toward DOI goals.
5. Review and assess internal policies and procedures throughout the agency to identify opportunities to further organizational excellence.
6. Reinforce equitable workplace policies and practices.
7. Ensure agency leadership accountability for achieving specific measurable, actionable and timely DOI objectives.

Metrics and Indicators

1. Complete barrier analysis.
2. Proportion of hiring managers that have completed unconscious bias training.

GOAL 5 Promote Community Engagement – Partnering with Underserved Citizens and Landowners

DOF will establish outreach and engagement programs focused on underserved populations who are considered vulnerable and may face barriers to receiving forestry information, guidance and services. DOF will help landowners maintain productive farm and forestland through raising awareness and enabling participation in a range of land conservation programs. DOF will do so in a professional, fair and impartial way.

Strategies

1. Support and train Native Virginian Tribes on proper tree maintenance, invasive species management and pesticide application for maintaining newly planted trees.
2. Rank projects funded through the Virginia Trees for Clean Water (commonly called VTCW) Program. DOF has a direct bill option for low-income partners to obtain funding for their projects.
3. Award funding through non-matching grants to municipalities and organizations across the Commonwealth.
4. Support efforts across the Commonwealth to mitigate “heat islands” in the most vulnerable communities.
5. Promote the Eastern Shore Regional Jail Horticulture Program. DOF staff will train inmates on proper planting and pruning of orchard trees and shrubs.
6. Our Outreach Coordinator is collaboratively working with the Black Family Land Trust and Southside Virginia Community College to start a two-year Forestry Technician program.
7. In the spring of this year, the Chief HR Officer and a local forester met with students and faculty from Hampton University, a historically black university, to discuss careers at the Department of Forestry and state government.
8. Increased outreach with non-traditional rural communities in Southside and South West Virginia.

Metrics and Indicators

1. We hired an Underserved Landowner Outreach Coordinator in March of this year. Additionally, we will have a VMF Fellow report to the Outreach Coordinator starting in July.
2. Our Underserved Landowner Outreach Coordinator has been working with landowners, community members and partners, to research and develop an outreach plan.