



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES DIVERSITY, OPPORTUNITY, AND INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT

2025 GOALS

Goal 1: Access and Success

- Work collaboratively across the social services system (i.e., state and local staff, the Virginia Board of Social Services, the Virginia League of Social Services Executives, community partners, advisory committees, as well as community members representing diverse constituencies) to identify and reform service-delivery policies, practices, norms and structures that perpetuate inequities for VDSS customers and/or contain barriers to success, access and/or opportunity.
- Identify and reform policies, practices, norms, and structures that perpetuate inequities for VDSS employees and/or contain barriers to employee success, access and/or opportunity.
- Increase opportunities for those with lived experience in DSS programs (SNAP, TANF, child welfare, child support, foster care) to have a formal voice, inform decisions and help shape DSS policies and practices.
- Institutionalize initiatives that improve accessibility of VDSS customers with limited English proficiency and/or disabilities.
- Enhance community engagement initiatives to gather diverse client feedback and insights and utilize them to improve clients' access and outcomes.

Goal 2: Welcoming and Respectful Culture

- Foster a values-based organizational culture that promotes wellness and belonging through engagement opportunities, leadership development, open communication channels, enhanced recognition, employee resources groups and supportive mentorship programs.
- Provide clear, consistent, and regular internal communication of agency commitments to diversity and inclusion and the actions we are taking to achieve desired outcomes.
- Develop initiatives and resources to promote fairness and equal opportunity in hiring and career advancement.
- Recognize and celebrate staffs who, by their deeds and/or initiatives, show a dedication towards fostering a friendly and courteous culture.

- Engage with external organizations (Nonprofit Organizations, Faith based organizations, Professional Associations, State Agencies, Advocacy Groups, Educational Institutions, and Community-Based Organizations, etc.) to collaborate on DOI initiatives, share best practices, and amplify efforts aimed at promoting DOI within and beyond VDSS.

Goal 3: Infrastructure and Training

- Utilize new and existing data to conduct comprehensive assessments across critical DOI domains, such as pay and funding, language access, training and communications, recruitment and retention, program enrollment, SWaM partnership, and infrastructural investments. Develop data-informed strategies, establish key performance measures, and implement accountability models to benchmark and baseline current efforts.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive learning plan for VDSS employees to include workforce diversity, inclusive excellence, cultural intelligence and humility, implicit and explicit bias, understanding disparities and disproportionalities as well as the moral and business case for diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Develop and implement strategies such as focused hiring initiatives for underrepresented areas and academic institutions to attract and retain a diverse workforce with unique backgrounds, perspectives, and problem-solving skills.

2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Plan Goal 1: Access & Success

Objective 1: Continue to improve hiring processes and increase access to potential applicants from diverse populations.

- Talent Acquisition has continued to work with the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DARS) with strategies to attract differently abled persons and to train Hiring Managers on managing and working with differently abled person(s).
- VDSS is V3 certified in the Virginia Values Veteran's Program. As a V3- Certified agency, VDSS continues to work with the Department of Veterans Services and other strategic partners to support Virginia's Veterans.

Objective 2: Continue to retain and promote a diverse workforce.

- Leveraged LinkedIn profile to include features, articles, and sharing of information and staff stories to share the award-winning work, conference participation, and speaking engagements of our diverse workforce.
- Incorporated diversity and inclusion language into job postings and recruitment materials to underscore that diversity and inclusion is central to our mission, embedded in our core values and critical to the well-being of our staff and the communities we serve.

Plan Goal 2: Welcoming & Respectful Culture

Objective 1: Persist in creating and maintaining a climate that is supportive and respectful and that values and integrates differing perspectives and experiences.

- Created comprehensive cohort programs focusing on easing new employees into our agency culture and workflow, which has greatly increased the rate of acclimation for new hires.
- Included new hires in formal and informal feedback sessions to provide insights and leveraged onboarding surveys to deepen understanding of new employees' needs.

Objective 2: Continue to provide an environment where conflicts, concerns, and complaints are aired and addressed expeditiously.

- Leveraged mediation, strategic performance management and conflict resolution with leaders to bolster regular check-ins, team meetings, skip level discussions, as well as open door policies and regular two-way communication. Saw tremendous reduction in grievance and disciplinary actions as a result.

Plan Goal 3: State Agency DOI Infrastructure & Training

Objective 1: Continue to amplify opportunities to advance the goals outlined in this framework.

- Created a resource on Trauma-Informed and Hope-Centered language Guide and a corresponding checklist which includes guidance on stigma, bias, and person-centered language.

Objective 2: Continue to provide training and educational workshops available to all employees.

- Break the Norm Leadership was contracted to design and facilitate 3 virtual workshops designed to provide real world examples of inclusivity in leadership, teams and through communication strategies. Rooted in the research-validated 7 drivers for team effectiveness, these workshops provided attendees with overarching approaches as well as observable and replicable behaviors to move their workplace teams towards being high-performing and inclusive.
- **Cultivating Inclusive Workplace Teams** training focused on the foundational elements necessary for team formation and performance, such as having the right mix of skills (Capability), fostering a supportive team culture (Cooperation), and ensuring effective team behaviors (Coordination) in a team-supportive environment (Conditions).
- **Leadership Skills for Inclusive Teams** emphasized the importance of leadership skills—exercised by both positional leaders and followers—in maintaining high performance, through aligning team cognition (shared understanding of goals, roles, and procedures), demonstrating the skills needed for effective teamwork (Capability), and exhibiting effective leadership behaviors (Coaching).

- **Communication Strategies for Inclusive Teams** concentrated on ensuring efficient and effective information exchange among team members and with external stakeholders (Communication) as effective communication reduces the friction in high-performing human systems.
- Each program was offered twice and was recorded and added to the VLC for future access for all VDSS employees.