

Southern Virginia Higher Education Center
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annual Report
Reporting Year: 2026

Introduction

The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) is committed to fostering a workplace and learning environment where every individual is welcomed, respected, and provided equitable opportunities to succeed. During the 2024–2026 strategic planning period, SVHEC aligned its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives with the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Inclusive Excellence framework and implemented a comprehensive strategy focused on expanding access, strengthening organizational culture, developing employees, and enhancing community partnerships.

The 2026 reporting year marks the successful completion of all objectives and action steps outlined in the agency’s 2024–2026 DEI Strategic Plan. These accomplishments have strengthened SVHEC’s commitment to inclusive excellence while supporting the agency’s mission to advance Southern Virginia’s economic potential through education, innovation, and collaboration.

Goal 6.1: Access & Success

Objective: Recruit and retain a diverse workforce and student body.

Accomplishments

SVHEC launched a community outreach campaign targeting affordable housing communities in the Town of South Boston. Staff visited these housing communities providing information on short-term training opportunities, financial assistance and other resources.

SVHEC completed an internal analysis of SVHEC workforce training credential attainment data to identify achievement gaps among students from underserved and underrepresented populations. Analysis showed no statistically significant achievement gaps in SVHEC hands-on training programs. Staff will continue monitoring and completing periodic analyses to ensure reinforce the agency’s commitment to equitable student success.

SVHEC continued to recognize student achievement through workforce training completion ceremonies that celebrate graduates from diverse backgrounds and highlight the diversity of career pathways.

In 2025, healthcare career exploration opportunities were expanded through summer health careers programming designed to introduce diverse youth to high-demand healthcare

professions and educational pathways. While this camp was not repeated in 2026 due to funding, a community impact/entrepreneurship camp was held June 2026 with diverse middle and high school aged students.

SVHEC expanded its Campus Connect program which provides students and staff with opportunities for community engagement. Campus Connect participants engaged in a host of activities to impact underserved members of the local community including assisting with packing backpacks for school children experiencing food insecurity and providing social engagement with residents of local nursing/rehabilitation centers.

Outcome: All planned initiatives under Goal 6.1 were completed, resulting in improved accessibility, expanded student support services, and enhanced recognition of student achievement.

Goal 6.2: Welcoming & Respectful Culture

Objective: Create and sustain an organizational environment that affirms and respects diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout daily operations.

Accomplishments

Student focus groups representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives were conducted to evaluate the student experience. Feedback was incorporated into agency planning and informed strategic initiatives designed to strengthen belonging and student success. Results informed organizational planning and led to the development of the Leggett Learning Resource Center (LLRC). The LLRC is a modern learning environment designed to support student learning, collaboration, and success. The reimaged space features updated computer workstations, flexible seating arrangements, and small meeting rooms to accommodate a variety of learning styles and needs.

The Center hosted and supported educational, cultural, and community engagement activities that celebrated diversity while creating opportunities for students, employees, and community members to learn from one another and foster meaningful connections.

SVHEC formalized and implemented an Open Door Policy that provides employees with multiple avenues for communicating workplace concerns, encouraging transparency, trust, and respectful dialogue throughout the organization.

Outcome: The agency strengthened its inclusive organizational culture through meaningful engagement, responsive planning, and practices that promote respect, belonging, and open communication.

Goal 6.3: Infrastructure & Training

Objective: Create and sustain an organizational infrastructure that supports accountability and engagement in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Accomplishments

Professional development planning was incorporated into every employee's Employee Work Profile (EWP), ensuring each staff member identified opportunities for continued learning and career growth. T

Agency values emphasizing professionalism, respect, collaboration, and diversity were incorporated into Employee Work Profiles, reinforcing organizational expectations and accountability.

Outcome: SVHEC successfully established organizational systems that promote continuous learning, employee development, equitable employment practices, and accountability for diversity and inclusion.

Goal 6.4: Community Engagement

Objective: Evaluate and expand community engagement and partnerships to create collective impact throughout Southern Virginia.

Accomplishments

SVHEC established and strengthened partnerships with multiple community organizations, educational institutions, workforce organizations, employers, and local governments to improve awareness of educational opportunities and workforce training programs. Strengthened partnerships include organizations who serve under-resourced communities such as the Southside Outreach Group and Halifax County Federal Credit Union.

SVHEC collaborated with Halifax County Public Schools, the Halifax County Chamber of Commerce, business and industry partners, and regional stakeholders to host career and technical education (CTE) awareness events that engaged students, families, educators, and employers. These events increase awareness of diverse career pathways and provide information and resources for early planning and career development.

Working alongside higher education and community partners, SVHEC hosted and supported resource fairs that increased awareness of available financial & community resources. SVHEC continues to house one of the TRiO Educational Opportunity Centers which provides individualized assistance with financial aid and scholarship applications and college searches.

Outcome: Strategic partnerships expanded community engagement, increased awareness of

educational opportunities, and strengthened collaborative efforts supporting workforce and economic development throughout the region.

Overall Results

During the 2024–2026 strategic plan cycle, the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center successfully completed every objective and action item outlined in its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan.

Collectively, these efforts resulted in:

- Expanded equitable access to workforce education and student support services.
- Improved accessibility and inclusive program delivery.
- Stronger organizational culture grounded in respect, collaboration, and accountability.
- Increased employee development and leadership capacity.
- Enhanced community partnerships that broaden educational outreach and workforce engagement.
- Continued alignment with the Commonwealth goals for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

SVHEC remains committed to sustaining these accomplishments while continuing to foster an inclusive environment where employees, students, and community partners have the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

Looking Ahead

As the current strategic planning cycle concludes, SVHEC will build upon the progress achieved through the 2024–2026 DEI Strategic Plan by incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into future strategic initiatives, organizational planning, workforce development programs, and community partnerships. The agency remains dedicated to continuous improvement and to advancing an inclusive culture that reflects the needs and strengths of the communities it serves.

SVHEC DEI Plan 2024-2026

The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center developed four goals to target Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in alignment with the Commonwealth of Virginia's Inclusive Excellence/DEI plans.

Objective 6.1

Access & Success:

Recruit and retain a diverse workforce and student body.

Action Steps 6.1.1

By December 2024 use existing data to determine if achievement gaps exist (as determined by 3rd party credential testing for skills certification) for workforce training students from underrepresented and underserved groups.

Action Steps 6.1.2

Hold completion ceremonies celebrating the success and recognizing the achievements of our diverse workforce training students and employer partners.

Action Steps 6.1.3

Hold a summer health careers camp to expose diverse attendees to opportunities in healthcare.

Action Steps 6.1.4

Support student success by providing access to free mental health services to adult workforce training students through the TimelyCare virtual platform (on-demand 24/7 support).

Objective 6.2

Welcoming & Respectful Culture

Create and sustain an organizational environment that affirms and respects diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout its daily operations.

Action Steps 6.2.1

Use surveys and focus groups to periodically assess student, staff, partners, and other stakeholders feedback related to campus climate, barriers to academic progress & success, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Action Steps 6.2.2

Offer and support educational and celebratory events and activities on campus and in the community that recognize, value, and honor diversity and promote inclusion; provide opportunities for students, staff, and the community to participate in events and activities.

Action Steps 6.2.3

Conduct focus groups with diverse students representing different races, genders, points of view, and experiences to gauge student sentiments about campus atmosphere and include actionable outcomes for the agency's strategic plan.

Action Steps 6.2.4

Institute an Open Door Policy for staff that provides multiple access points to address work-related concerns.

**Objective 6.3
Infrastructure & Training**

Create and sustain an organizational infrastructure that effectively supports progress and accountability in achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion and engaging all stakeholders in learning the concepts of DEI.

Action Steps 6.3.1

By July 2024, complete the training-related recommendation from the FORVIS Assessment of Internal Communication and Collaboration that all SVHEC management attend focused training to hone leadership skills to foster communication, respect, professionalism, trust, and teamwork.

Action Steps 6.3.2

By July 2025, complete the teambuilding-related recommendation from the FORVIS Assessment of Internal Communication and Collaboration to offer more teambuilding events so that employees have an opportunity to socialize and build rapport and trust with one another.

Action Steps 6.3.3

Ensure each staff EWP includes a development plan and identified opportunities for professional growth & development.

Action Steps 6.3.4

Ensure 100% of staff members participate in at least one professional development opportunity during fiscal year.

Action Steps 6.3.5

Develop and incorporate agency values, including respect for diversity in staff EWPs.

**Objective 6.4
Community Engagement**

Evaluate and expand community engagement and partnerships to create collective impact with other community organizations.

Action Steps 6.4.1.

Identify, build, and/ or strengthen partnerships with at least three community organizations.

Action Steps 6.4.2

Collaborate with Halifax County Public Schools, Halifax County Chamber of Commerce, and business & industry partners to engage K-12 students, parents, and community stakeholders in a community-wide showcase of the educational opportunities available through career & technical education (CTE).

Action Steps 6.4.3

Collaborate with educational partners to host a weekend (or evening) financial aid event to increase awareness of available financial aid resources and to provide assistance with completing the corresponding applications and paperwork.