

# Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion

## Annual Report Template

### Department of Forestry

#### 2025-2026

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2025- ACCOMPLISHMENTS</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) DOF continues to provide financial assistance to Virginians impacted by Hurricane Helene. Working in conjunction with VDACS, the DOF has provided over \$6.4 million in timber claims relief.</li> <li>2) Engaged numerous underserved and non-traditional landowners in navigating forest management by providing resources and information on management recommendations, which included, coordinating four landowner site visits with local DOF staff accompanying DOF Foresters to assist in underserved landowner engagement.</li> <li>3) Partnered with Black Family Land Trust to host a forest landowner workshop series. This series exposed 15 landowners in Chesterfield County and 11 landowners in the Eastern Shore to DOF’s services and programs, the concepts of forest management and strategies for identifying goals and objectives. This workshop also included space for discussing barriers among landowners in practicing active forest management.</li> <li>4) Created an outreach communication initiative called the <i>Partner Spotlight</i> to quarterly showcase DOF partnerships with agencies and organizations in engaging landowners in forest management and stewardship. This content has been included in the <i>Understory</i>, DOF’s landowner newsletter with longer format exposes published via social media avenues (i.e., Facebook and LinkedIn).</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2026 AGENCY DOI GOALS</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Increase outreach and engagement with non-traditional rural communities in Eastern and South-Central regions, primarily Southside and Southeastern Virginia.</li> <li>2) Increase outreach communication materials through DOF social media to reach diverse audiences in increasing awareness on forest management and stewardship.</li> <li>3) Collaborate with the Black Family Land Trust and Southside Virginia Community College to start a two-year Forestry Technician program.</li> <li>4) Continue to utilize a variety of recruiting methods including targeted websites to attract a diverse applicant pool.</li> <li>5) Continue to utilize the “Alternative Hiring Process” to attract disabled applicants.</li> </ol>



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF  
**FORESTRY**

# **Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion**

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Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence

June 30, 2026

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## Table of Contents

<b>Virginia Department of Forestry Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence</b>	<b>2</b>
Goal 1 Access and Success – Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce .....	2
Strategies.....	2
Metrics and Indicators.....	2
Goal 2 Promote a Welcoming and Respectful Culture .....	3
Strategies.....	3
Metrics and Indicators.....	3
Goal 3 Training and Development.....	3
Strategies.....	4
Metrics and Indicators.....	4
Goal 4 Infrastructure and Accountability .....	4
Strategies.....	4
Metrics and Indicators.....	5
GOAL 5 Promote Community Engagement – Partnering with Underserved Citizens and Landowners.....	5
Strategies.....	5
Metrics and Indicators.....	5-6

## 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 with 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. Analyze current processes and policies related to promotion to ensure equitable promotion practices.
5. Standardize hiring practices across candidates.
6. Analyze the demographic composition of recruitment pools across all stages of the 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

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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 competence, 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 with the necessary accommodation 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

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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 Career Paths 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

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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

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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 farms and forestlands 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 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. Collaborate with the Black Family Land Trust and Southside Virginia Community College to start a two-year Forestry Technician program.
6. Continue to provide financial assistance to Virginians impacted by Hurricane Helene. Working in conjunction with VDACS.

## Metrics and Indicators

1. Received council from the Forest Landowner Steering Committee and DOF Forest Management, as well as being connected with landowners, community members and partners towards developing an outreach plan (*DOF Landowner Outreach Implementation Plan*).
2. Supervised a Virginia Management Fellow (July – February) in completing activities and projects to include creating a workshop flyer and social media post, drafting short stories and articles for DOF’s internal and external newsletters, producing a About DOF Info Sheet, proposing an outreach video campaign, and submitting a white paper on DOF’s opportunities for increasing landowner engagement.
3. Engaged numerous underserved and non-traditional landowners in navigating forest management by providing resources and information on management recommendations, which included conducting landowner site visits, accompanying DOF Foresters to assist in underserved landowner engagement and considering non-traditional forest management recommendations with new landowners and tribes.
4. Sponsored two landowners in participating in the upcoming Virginia Forest Landowners Education Program’s Online Woodland Course.
5. Partnered with the Black Family Land Trust to host a forest landowner workshop series. This series exposed landowners to DOF’s services and programs, the concepts of forest management and strategies for identifying goals and objectives. This workshop also included space for discussing barriers among landowners in practicing active forest management.
6. Hosted a silvopasture workshop for Virginia State University Small Farm Program at Randolph Farm with a Virginia Cooperative Extension Forestry Agent and Natural Resources Conservation Service State Forester. This workshop introduced attendees to silvopasture, exploring the practice benefits, opportunities for financial and technical assistance, and presenting examples of established silvopasture systems.
7. Collaborated with Appalachian Sustainable Development to co-present an agroforestry presentation focusing on silvopasture at the Rappahannock River Symposium.
8. Delivered a keynote presentation at the joint Virginia State University and Minority Landowner Magazine 2025 Small Farms Annual Conference. This involved speaking to approximately 300 small rural and urban agricultural producers about DOF and blending agricultural activities and forestry management.
9. DOF conducted a scavenger hunt with our Conservation Education Coordinator, VMF Fellow, and DOF Summer Interns to introduce students from the University of Virginia Starhill Pathways Program to forest food products and natural resource career pathways. This was integrated into the

Highland Youth Summer Pilot Program with William & Mary at James Monroe Ashlawn Highland Plantation.

10. Piloted a partnership with the Center for Environmental Studies and Sustainability at Varina High School to engage students in natural resources and forestry with our eastern regional foresters and a DOF specialist. This included advising the senior capstone project in planning a campus food forest and organizing an invasive species removal learning project for approximately 80 students from Varina and Virginia Randolph Advanced Career Education.
11. DOF created an outreach communication initiative called the *Partner Spotlight* to quarterly showcase DOF partnerships with agencies and organizations in engaging landowners in forest management and stewardship. This content has been included in the *Understory*, DOF's landowner newsletter with longer format exposes published via social media avenues (i.e., Facebook and LinkedIn).
12. DOF is partnering with the Friends of the Rappahannock and Appalachian Sustainable Development program to host a four-day silvopasture training series in June, offering training on foundational concepts and design application for natural resource professionals and conservation partners and awareness to producers and landowners. This serves to increase the capacity for natural resource professionals and conservation partners to assist producers and landowners interested in agroforestry practices such as silvopasture.
13. DOF finished phase 3 of the Mattanock Town Tribe forest management plan to rid the property of invasive plants, established a safe walking path for the public and paid tribute to the land of the Nansemond Tribe. A local contractor removed hundreds of invasive, dead Tree of Heaven and replaced them with native species. DOF led a volunteer day with the tribe to plant Southern Sugar Maple trees that were harvested from the property and grown out to larger specimens.
14. DOF established an orchard at the Eastern Shore Regional Jail for inmates to engage in proper tree care and orchard management. The orchard is enhancing their workforce development program.
15. DOF established an orchard at the Eastern Shore Regional Jail for inmates to engage in proper tree care and orchard management. The orchard is enhancing their workforce development program.
16. Increase outreach and engagement with non-traditional rural communities in Southside and Southeastern Virginia.
17. Participate in partner hosted events, activities and programs to strengthen existing partnerships and seek opportunities to establish new relationships for increasing outreach efforts.
18. Increase outreach communication materials through DOF social media to reach diverse audiences in increasing awareness on forest management and stewardship.