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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, OPPORTUNITY, AND INCLUSION (DEOI) REPORT

JUNE 2026

**397 Azalea Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23227**

Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired

Mission Statement

The mission of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) is to provide services and resources to Virginians who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind to confidently reach their goals for work, school, and life.

Vision Statement

DBVI envisions a future where Virginians who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind are included and empowered to reach their goals to make a positive difference in their communities.

Agency Values

Recognize the Abilities of Individuals Who are Blind – *We believe that individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind have many strengths and talents.*

Equal Access – *We believe everyone should be able to learn, work, and live as independently as possible.*

Exemplary Work Habits – *We value honesty, teamwork, and doing the right thing.*

Diversity – *We respect everyone's background and choices.*

Employees – *We value our team members and their dedication.*

Professional Boundaries – *We believe in keeping healthy and respectful relationships with the individuals we serve.*

Introduction

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) remains committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for its employees, customers, and partners. Guided by our mission to support Virginians who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind in achieving their goals for work, school, and life, DBVI continues to integrate Diversity, Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion (DEOI) principles into all aspects of agency operations. Our vision of a world where individuals with sensory disabilities can fully access and contribute to their communities underscores the importance of this work.

In June 2025, DBVI submitted the 2025 Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion (DOI) Annual Report, along with an updated 2026 Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Plan. This 2026 DEOI Report documents the agency's progress, activities, and implementation efforts over the past year as they relate to the goals and objectives set forth in the 2026 DOI Plan. The report highlights continued improvements in workforce access and success, advancements in cultivating a welcoming and respectful culture, and strengthened infrastructure to support DEOI priorities across all divisions.

Through ongoing collaboration, accountability, and agencywide engagement, DBVI continues to strive to build a workplace where all employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives. This report reflects both our achievements and our continued commitment to strengthening employee experience and ensuring equitable access for employees and all those we serve.

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired

2026 Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Plan with Progress and Updates

Goal 1: DBVI Access and Success

Recruit and retain a diverse workforce by increasing access to diverse populations for recruiting.

Objective 1:

DBVI will continue to improve its hiring processes and increase access to potential applicants from diverse populations.

- a. Increase the number of agency staff members who participate in management and professional development training provided by DBVI, the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) by 5%.
- b. Increase the number of recipients who receive DBVI's GOV delivery notices regarding job postings by 5%, including colleges and universities, optometric professional organizations, consumer advocacy groups, job boards, disability services organizations, the Office of Refugee Settlement, and in areas where there is potentially more reach into diverse communities.
- c. Quarterly, in the VR training sessions, the VR Director will discuss increasing the number of recipients receiving employment notifications through Gov Delivery, who also receive services from DBVI or DARS.

Progress and Updates: DBVI continues to meet and exceed targets associated with professional development and outreach. Participation in DHRM-provided management and professional development training increased by more than 100%. Additionally, the Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) team continues to participate in nationally recognized training programs through the National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NSITE.

Other highlights of professional development training include:

- **Executive & Specialized Training:** Advanced agency expertise via the new Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) Director's participation in the NRLI VR Leadership program and The Director of Communication's attendance at the National Association of Government Communicators 49th annual Communications School.
- **Safety & Regulatory Compliance:** Documented full OSHA training compliance for the Facility Services Department staff (completed June 2025). Virginia Industries

for the Blind maintained its annual third-party certification required of all federal contractors under the International Standards Organization (ISO) receiving no findings and two commendations. VIB also successfully completed quality assist visits to ensure compliance with federal AbilityOne program required conducted by National Industries for the Blind. Technical & Security Certifications: Empowered Security Staff to complete rigorous Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) certifications required for carrying weapons, significantly upgrading campus safety protocols.

- Strategic Alignment & Initiative Support: OSI provided structural support for implementing the Climate & Culture Action Plan by coordinating with divisions, aligning committee work with agencywide priorities, and ensuring initiatives remained on track across leadership and operational areas.
- Process Improvement & Organizational Learning: OSI promoted the use of data-informed decision-making, strengthened communication frameworks across departments, and supported managers in using clearer processes that reinforce transparency and staff engagement. One of the two ISO commendations received by VIB was for process improvement – specifically, the implementation of a new enterprise resource planning solution impacting fiscal, procurement, and production operations. Implementing the latest operational technology attracts top talent.

DBVI also strengthened recruitment outreach. While the GovDelivery distribution list decreased slightly from 1,985 subscribers in 2025 to 1,929 in 2026, engagement significantly improved, with a 98% delivery rate, 25% open rate, and 7% click rate—indicating a more accurate and active subscriber base. DBVI expanded outreach to the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) and continues weekly distribution of job notices to disability consumer groups, producing ongoing interest and applications.

Objective 2

DBVI will continue to retain and promote a diverse workforce.

- a) Ensure that all agency employees receive a copy of the DBVI Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion (DOI) Plan by June 30, annually.
- b) Annually, review the DOI Plan in the June Leadership Team Meeting.
- c) Conduct an orientation for new employees to learn about the agency mission, vision, and values including diversity, opportunity, and inclusion at least twice per year.

- d) Conduct an immersive introduction to services at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VDBVI) for agency employees three times per year.
- e) Conduct annual DOI survey for employees.
- f) Annually review languages being used on agency websites.

Progress and Updates: The DOI Plan was reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and distributed agencywide. Leadership also reviewed results from two recent Employee Climate and Belonging Surveys and used that information to develop the Climate & Culture Action Plan, which is now being implemented across divisions.

Between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026, DBVI held quarterly new-employee orientations and VRCBVI conducted four immersive introduction sessions. Leadership is assessing the most effective timing and methodology for the next employee survey as the Climate & Culture Action Plan continues its rollout.

Finally, the Director of Communications performs regular reviews of the language used on DBVI's website to ensure clarity, plain-language accessibility, and cultural responsiveness. There are currently 12 available languages on the DBVI websites. The top three languages for the past twelve months were English (97.8%), Chinese (0.99%) and Spanish (0.5%). During this time, a total of 10 languages were used on the website, and all are languages automatically available.

Goal 2: DBVI Welcoming and Respectful Culture

Create and sustain a culture that welcomes and embraces diverse opinions, independent thinking, and respectful interactions to deliver optimal results for the organization and its customers.

Objective 1

DBVI will persist in creating and maintaining a climate that is supportive and respectful and that values and integrates differing perspectives and experiences.

- a) 100 % of agency employees will complete the DHRM Civility in the Workplace training module annually.
- b) The recognizing, valuing, and honoring diversity and independent thinking will be a topic of discussion in DBVI's divisions staff meetings annually.
- c) Each division will conduct at least two team building activities with agency staff annually.

Progress and Updates: DBVI leadership requires all employees to complete the DHRM Civility in the Workplace training module annually by May 31. Divisions and offices make concerted efforts to complete the training in groups and individually. The response to the training has been positive, with strong efforts demonstrated

across the agency to achieve the plan goal. For the next year's cycle, the system has been reconfigured to send automated reminder notifications approximately four weeks before the annual due date. We anticipate this enhancement will provide sufficient notice to ensure training deadlines are met.

DBVI's largest Service Contract Team within VIB, composed of 32 individuals, completed a one-day group training on Civility in the Workplace led by Human Resources and VIB management.

One of the highlights of team building activities that occurred last year was a lemon tree planting during Public Service Recognition Week.

Additionally, to meet Goal 2 objectives and in response to feedback obtained from 2024 and 2025 Employee Climate and Belonging surveys, DBVI created the Culture & Climate Advisory Committee. The Culture & Climate Advisory Committee plays a central role in advancing the DBVI Climate & Culture Action Plan (September 2025), which identifies agencywide priorities in communication, transparency, recognition, and leadership visibility.

The committee's work directly supports these priorities through structured initiatives that strengthen staff engagement and improve organizational culture.

In 2026, the committee focused on three core areas of the Action Plan:

- **Communication & Transparency:**
Modernized the "You Asked / We Did" process by improving accessibility of messaging, clearly defining the feedback loop, and establishing consistent channels for communicating leadership decisions.
- **Employee Recognition:**
Developed a streamlined agencywide "Spotlight/Shoutout" recognition process, including a simplified submission form, transparent workflow, and monthly acknowledgments through the agency newsletter and Monthly Forum.
- **Leadership Visibility & Trust:**
Launched a new "Leadership Corner" in the agency newsletter to provide regular updates on initiatives, decisions, timelines, and organizational impacts.

Collectively, these initiatives strengthened agency culture, enhanced staff engagement, and increased transparency across divisions.

Objective 2

DBVI will continue to provide an environment where conflicts, concerns, and complaints are aired and addressed expeditiously.

At least quarterly, DBVI will encourage employees to submit suggestions or concerns via the employee suggestion box.

Progress and Updates: DBVI continues working to provide an environment where employees can share concerns and have them addressed quickly. Each edition of the DBVI Staff Newsletter includes an invitation for employees to share ideas and feedback through the DBVI Electronic Suggestion Box. Staff members are also encouraged to submit input at any time using the link provided. Over the past year, the Employee Suggestion Box has received 12 submissions from staff across the state and from each division. Leadership reviewed every suggestion, and employees who included their names received a direct response. Most suggestions were put into action, and leadership was able to make several meaningful improvements based on the feedback received.

Additionally, the three DBVI Deputy Commissioners will participate in training to become certified Equal Employment Opportunity Investigators to support in-house investigations when assigned by the Commissioner.

A recent surprise inspection of a VIB production facility in Richmond and a separate, but related, whistleblower complaint to Virginia Occupational Safety and Health (VOSH) were responded to quickly by management with verbal confirmation that VIB's operations are safe and compliant – earning acknowledgment by one investigator for going above and beyond what is required for sanitizing after body fluid spills. DBVI awaits final written reports.

Goal 3. DBVI State Agency DOI Infrastructure & Training

Maintain a plan and infrastructure that continues to provide individualized skills training and career development for state employees. Agencies report annually on DOI goals and accomplishments.

Objective 1

DBVI will continue to create structures and processes of accountability to increase organizational effectiveness in collaboration with the Department of Human Resource Management.

Assess the DOI Plan and performance semiannually and make corrective actions to achieve the objectives.

Objective 2

DBVI will continue to provide training and educational workshops available to all employees.

Managers and supervisors conduct at least eight snapshot learning opportunities annually in areas including but not limited to:

- a) Use of reasonable accommodations for individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind;
- b) Development of accessible materials;
- c) Disability etiquette;
- d) How to serve as a Human Guide for individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind; and,
- e) Conflict Resolution.

Progress and Updates: DBVI Leadership regularly incorporates DEOI topics in all discussions related to short and long-term strategic planning. DBVI regularly provides updates and feedback to its employees on its efforts to advance and incorporate DEOI in its newsletters and monthly Agency Forums. Employees are consistently encouraged to provide feedback and to submit ideas to improve DEOI efforts. Also, as noted in its annual Employment Opportunities Plan, DBVI reported an increase in the number of individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind recruited or hired by the agency.

Additionally, DBVI leadership is in ongoing review and discussion of the DEOI plan as part of ongoing continuous improvement. Updates, revisions, and improvement actions will be incorporated into the 2027 DEOI Plan. Microlearning and snapshot training opportunities are integrated into daily operations at DBVI, allowing staff to engage in workshops, seminars, and other relevant job training activities on an ongoing basis.

Other examples to support a diverse infrastructure and continued training include:

Micro Learning Opportunities

- Using Mail Merge to Create Accessible Board Reports from Microsoft Forms
- Disability Etiquette (Orientation to DBVI - Quarterly for New Employees)

Accessible AWARE Training Resources (2026)

As part of DBVI's AWARE system refactoring, OSI collaborated with the Services

Division to ensure all training materials were fully accessible to screen-reader and voice-recognition users. This included producing JAWS-friendly quick-reference guides and ensuring compatibility with Dragon NaturallySpeaking for staff who rely on speech input. Materials were structured with clear navigation order, tabbable elements, and consistent heading levels to support efficient use with assistive technology. Example materials, such as the AWARE Dashlets — Quick Reference (JAWS Users) guide, provide step-by-step instructions designed specifically for screen reader interaction.

One of the primary objectives of the Odoo ERP implementation for VIB was to improve accessibility for all employees. DBVI worked with the Department of General Services (DGS) to identify and collaborate on resolving accessibility challenges inherent in eVA while integrating the two systems. Detailed training was held with impacted staff while DGS continues the foundational evolution of eVA that will pay dividends for both vendors and customers in 2027. VIB employees who are blind used to require the assistance of sighted staff to complete eVA work that was inaccessible. Within one week of implementing Odoo, that same staff can complete all aspects of their jobs unimpeded. This thoughtful investment in accessible technology allows current and future employees who are blind to climb the “career climbing wall” without constraint.

Enhancing Communication Infrastructure

The introduction of the Leadership Corner and modernization of the staff feedback process strengthened DBVI’s communication infrastructure, supporting consistent updates, clearer messaging, and improved staff access to organizational information.



Dr. Rick Mitchell

Date: 6/25/2026

Commissioner, Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired