



# VAAFM ***RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN***

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## Introduction

This Vermont Agency of Agriculture & Food Markets (VAAFAM) Racial Equity Action Plan was developed based on findings from an extensive agency-wide Racial Equity and Belonging Audit, followed by 10 co-design sessions with participants from across the entire agency. These sessions employed a framework developed by MMG EARTH called Collaborative Decision-Making (CDM). CDM is a term used to describe an iterative process that seeks to disrupt common top-down decision-making within organizations and government agencies.

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The CDM process takes on a focus group model in which participants are invited, through a series of questions, to share their feedback and reflections on an organizational decision currently being considered or discussed by senior leaders. CDM is not defined or informed by consensus. This is because in a white, cisgender, heterosexual, non-disabled, wealthy, and Western dominant community, consensus would simply mean centering and prioritizing the voices and viewpoints of those holding dominant privilege within a working or governing community. When we engage in decision-making processes guided by principles of equity, organizational justice, and belonging, we realize that consensus can often push us farther away from equitable outcomes.

Instead, this process is similar to a qualitative research activity in which researchers look for shared perspectives across different staff and leaders. Instead of only following the loudest voices, the process identifies connecting patterns which point to a specific interest in a theme or decision. For example, during our planning sessions, a number of VAAFAM staff expressed wanting to focus first on internal commitment to racial equity like learning and unlearning, developing a shared language, and understanding how this work can improve the working conditions and environment for VAAFAM staff, providers, and administrators. The expected outcomes from a single action or series of actions vary from person to person. This action plan is just a beginning. It does not describe what VAAFAM's commitment and actions to racial equity and belonging will look like 5 or 10 years from now, but it is a first step. Anyone will tell you that before you can run, walk, or wheelchair race a marathon, you need a plan. Advance preparation is what gets you to the marathon. Racial equity work is similar. Before VAAFAM can begin its marathon, staff and leaders need to prepare. This action plan represents that preparation.

## **How This Process Was Structured**

MMG EARTH is the first Black and nonbinary-led research and change management firm in the United States. Through our work, we center the principles of social and racial justice in all that we do. We understand the ways that the experience of inequity is shifted and changed at various intersections of identity. We center intersectionality (the concept originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw) as a critical pillar in our change management and organizational transformation practice. As a starting point, we conducted co-design sessions to gather reflections and first responses to the REBA recommendations:

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### **Phase 1**

We led an extensive Racial Equity and Belonging Audit (REBA)

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### **Phase 2**

We invited VAAFMs staff to join us for 60-minute co-design sessions to share which recommendations they wanted to see prioritized within VAAFMs racial equity and belonging work.

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### **Phase 3**

The IDEA Working Group applied the knowledge they gained during the REBA process to lead an action planning session with various members of VAAFMs staff and leadership.

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### **Phase 4**

MMG EARTH led a follow-up action planning process to gather all the reflections shared during the initial meeting with the IDEA Working Group. From there, MMG EARTH drafted this action plan focused on compiling all the learning from the entire process into a detailed, yet to the point, Racial Equity Action Plan for the Agency.



# Gare’s Theory Of Change

When you review this action plan for the first time, it might feel daunting. The good news is that you have resources. Countless frameworks and resources now exist for government workers and elected officials looking to engage in equity and belonging work.

The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) is a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. During our co-design sessions, we presented participants with GARE’s theory of change (outlined below) for racial equity work in government.

In their manual, [Racial Equity Action Plans: A How-to-Manual](#), GARE writes, *“The ultimate goal of a jurisdiction’s racial equity work should be to eliminate racial inequities and improve outcomes for all racial groups.”* Government plays a primary role in the creation of racial inequities through various laws, policies, and practices. Our ideas of “equality and justice” have shifted over time, and we now have collective values for a more inclusive democracy. To achieve our aspirations and to achieve different outcomes, we need to fundamentally transform government. This requires high level leadership, committed action teams, supportive community leaders, and effective structures and practices. But what guides this change? A new theory of change to achieve racial equity should guide your jurisdiction and its plan to make transformative change.

## **GARE’s recommended theory of change does the following:**



### **Normalize**

Establish racial equity as a key value by developing a shared understanding of key concepts across the entire jurisdiction and promote a sense of urgency to make changes.



### **Organize**

Build staff and organizational capacity, skills, and competencies through training while also building infrastructure to support the work, like internal organizational change teams and external partnerships with other institutions and community.



### **Operationalize**

Put theory into action by implementing new tools for decision-making, measurement, and accountability like a Racial Equity Tool and developing a Racial Equity Action Plan.

# **Findings: Top Priorities and Recommendations**

In our co-design sessions, the priority themes that emerged were:



## **Education with a goal for action**



## **Vision, mission, and communications strategy**



## **Procedures and opportunities for accountability and trust**

This section dives into these top priorities and what they mean for VAAF. The Working Group will also engage collaboratively with the State of Vermont Office of Racial Equity (ORE) Education and Outreach staff as they work to prioritize and institute these action items. We aim to engage ORE to leverage the work of others across State of Vermont, assure there is a baseline of quality and consistency across state trainings, and utilize the shared resource library that is being created. While some of the following work will be specific to the VAAF context, we hope to both learn from other State entities and share our work and lessons learned with other State Departments and Agencies, in collaboration with ORE.

# EDUCATION WITH A GOAL FOR ACTION

*“ I am here because I have something to learn and something to share. Our Agency has systemic practices, policies and behavior that are rooted in white supremacy culture. And most of us are unaware of and would be horrified to understand the impact of our efforts on others. We do have a desire to learn from one another, implement new ways, and make change. We are supportive and committed to a landscape, an industry, and a culture of community that believes we can do better, be more aware, and be more inclusive.”*

— VAAFM CDM Participant



## What Does This Mean?

VAAFM, just like all state agencies across the United States, needs to educate staff and leaders on racial equity and belonging within state government. This identity-focused education will need to consider the unique needs of VAAFM administrators, practitioners, and providers. For example, for those staff who are often out in the community and working directly with farm and food businesses, producers, and processors, an approach to education would need to meet them where they are and work around their day-to-day work commitments. Co-design session participants agreed that talking about racial equity in the abstract is not enough. Agency staff and leaders would benefit from education focused on supporting each other in actively contributing towards VAAFM’s commitment to racial equity. To develop this education plan, we suggest exploring the following questions, based on the 4 I’s framework, adapted by the Chinook Fund<sup>1</sup>, which gives us a deeper understanding of how oppressive systems in our society are constructed:



### **Individual**

What resources can VAAFM provide which will support staff in learning about race and identity, and will contribute toward building a culture of belonging, equity, and inclusivity?



### **Ideological**

What education is needed to support managers and leaders in identifying instances of inequity and in understanding their role in intervention?



### **Interpersonal**

How can the IDEA Working Group support Agency leaders in developing the lens, knowledge, and perspective needed to guide VAAFM forward in this work?



### **Institutional**

What practices and procedures can be evaluated now through a lens of racial equity and belonging? What metrics can VAAFM develop to identify when internal and external practices and policies marginalize or disenfranchise People of Color and other historically and currently marginalized people?

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1. GRCC. (n.d.). The Four I’s of Oppression . Grand Rapids Community College.  
[https://www.grcc.edu/sites/default/files/docs/diversity/the\\_four\\_is\\_of\\_oppression.pdf](https://www.grcc.edu/sites/default/files/docs/diversity/the_four_is_of_oppression.pdf).

## Connection Point

Over the past several months, the IDEA Working Group has worked with a research and change management firm to understand the state of racial equity and belonging at VAAF. IDEA Working Group members have changed considerably throughout the process and have subsequently leveraged their knowledge and social capital to bring more staff and leaders across VAAF into this process. That means they have the fundamental tools to use this newfound knowledge and skills to build awareness of this work and to share their perspective and learning with others.

## Challenges + Opportunities

Currently, VAAF staff do not all work in the same, singular environment. Staff working directly with farmers and producers outside of an office environment have more limited availability and will require unconventional and innovative approaches to engage due to their schedule constraints. It will be important to provide them with the same quality of education and awareness-building that is being offered to staff who work in an office or remotely from home.

## Actions

The actions enumerated below were presented to VAAF by MMG. VAAF's response to each action item and commitment to action is specified below each item.

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### Education Strategy Document

**MMG recommendation:** Develop a 2-year education strategy for the Agency. The strategy will need to center racial equity through an intersectional lens. We recommend including LGBTQIA+ terminologies, key concepts, themes, and vocabulary.

**VAAF commitment:** The IDEA Group will develop an education strategy that includes education about racial equity and other intersectional topics including disability justice, language access, gender, class, and sexuality.

## Actions (continued)

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### IDEA Internal Resource Hub

**MMG recommendation:** Develop a list of shared vocabulary and resources in a hub that can be accessed by any member of Agency staff at any time. 2x a quarter update the Internal Racial Equity + Belonging Hub with resources or reflections from an VAAFM member on the importance of this work and individual aspirations they hold for its long-term success.

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Group will develop and structure a SharePoint Document Library or similar site that will be accessible to all Agency staff and that will host a variety of shared racial equity resources. This site will be a central point for sharing the resources (such as vocabulary lists) developed by VAAFM as part of their Action steps and also for saving/sharing articles, documents, and other reflections on racial equity topics. The IDEA Group will file relevant resources in this library as they develop and come across them and will keep this shared library up to date and organized.

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### Training for IDEA Working Group

**MMG recommendation:** Work with an external facilitator to lead an initial Racial Equity training for all members of IDEA Group + Action Plan Design session participants. This training should be led prior to all staff training so that participants can assist with organizing various departments and teams around racial equity training attendance.

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Group will collaborate with Agency leadership to look for funds to support bringing in an external contractor to develop training materials (e.g., webinar recording, slides, handouts) and train IDEA Group staff for a mentor style training program to better prepare IDEA Group members to be advocates for and educators about racial equity within the Agency. The IDEA Group will develop a plan for revisiting and updating training materials to ensure they are up to date over time.

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### All Staff Racial Equity Training

**MMG recommendation:** Work with an external facilitator to lead an initial Racial Equity training for all VAAFM staff. We recommend that this first training be optional and that managers, supervisors, and directors across VAAFM talk to their teams in advance about the importance of the work and education.

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Group will collaborate with Agency leadership to look for funds to support bringing in an external contractor to make racial equity training available for all staff members within the Agency. VAAFM leadership and supervisors will demonstrate their commitment by attending themselves and will strongly encourage staff to attend. In future, VAAFM may work with external facilitators to continue to incorporate racial equity trainings into annual all-staff meetings. This will be a jumping-off point for future work, as we know one training will never be sufficient for meaningful change.

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### Open Routine IDEA Sessions

#### *Space for Conversation & Connection*

**MMG recommendation:** Leverage the education strategy to develop a program of events that encourage self-reflection, dialogue, and understanding across varied intersections of identity. These small group sessions would not have to be workshops, but could instead be facilitated by IDEA Group members or an external facilitator and focus specifically on creating spaces for staff and leaders to talk to one another and develop understanding.

**VAAFM commitment:** Informed by the education strategy and supported by the racial equity training of IDEA Group members, the IDEA Group will continue to develop an ongoing series of open, brave spaces for constructive (rather than instructive) conversation about racial equity and belonging topics that are open to all VAAFM staff. These sessions will focus on applied learning. This could take the form of a community of practice.

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### Racial Equity Coaches

**MMG recommendation:** Hire Racial Equity Coaches for Agency leaders with the aim of supporting them in becoming well-versed in issues of social injustice and racial equity.

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Working Group did not come to consensus on how or whether to institute this recommendation, asking questions like: would these be internal or external? Is this the best way to build awareness? Can we do this in a different way that works for our Agency? We will hold this as an item for discussion and integrate into action planning and prioritization.

# VISION, MISSION AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

*“ We are here to plan for, act upon, carry forward, and further the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accountability knowledge and information received over the past many months under the in-depth facilitation of MMG EARTH. We’re here because we’re passionate about creating a culture of change where all are honored and valued and seeing VAAFm become a model and beacon of DEI in the workplace and in state government.”*

— VAAFm CDM Participant

## **What Does This Mean?**

Sometimes people don't know how to support the work, because they have not been provided enough information. Education is the soil and the seeds; consistent and reliable communication is the water. We recommend that the IDEA Working Group create a pathway for ongoing communication between staff-led equity and belonging initiatives and leadership's shared goals, progress, and intended outcomes for racial equity and belonging work.

To make this possible, the Working Group will need clear and detailed boundaries for the power they hold, and do not hold, to engage in decision-making, to intervene as necessary, and to support organizational direction as it relates to equity and belonging work.

MMG EARTH recommends that the Working Group use what they have learned through the REBA process to communicate transparently with staff and organizational leadership.

Why is this being recommended? When engaging in equity and organizational justice work, one of the most common misconceptions is that each time we start we have to begin again from scratch. When we apply this approach to organizational equity work (especially within state government), we end up reinventing the wheel in ways that slow down our progress and create silos of knowledge and information that, if shared, could lead to more meaningful and longstanding outcomes related to organizational equity.

## Connection Point

Through the REBA and CDM process, staff across divisions have been able to come together in ways that they usually cannot. They have been able to hear one another, share ideas, learn and unlearn from each other, and work towards developing a plan of action for VAAFMs racial equity and belonging work. If these connections can be accomplished through this process, what more could staff and leaders do together, with a shared purpose and commitment to this work? The sky's the limit.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The IDEA Working Group has come a long way during this process. Each member represents a different lived experience and achievement as individuals who have applied themselves to learning the skills required to face discomfort and maintain a commitment to this work. The goal is not to look for values, vision, and mission that are so absolute that IDEA can't agree to them collectively nor too vague that they don't hold the power necessary to lead the group's work.

## Actions

The actions enumerated below were presented to VAAFMs by MMG. VAAFMs response to each action item and commitment to action is specified below each item.



## Communications Strategy

**MMG recommendation:** Decide on a frequency for communication updates to the Agency related to preemptively answering the What (What are you doing?) and Why (Why is it important?) of your current and future work. Outlining of the Group's communications strategy for 1 year. We recommend that this strategy include an agreed upon "elevator speech," which takes the above bullet points and condenses them so they are accessible to future Group members and to all VAAFMs staff and partners.

**VAAFMs commitment:** The IDEA Group will collaborate with the Agency Communications Team to develop a communications strategy to highlight the importance of racial equity work to internal and external partners.

## Actions (continued)

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### DEI Spotlight Integration into Routine Meetings

**MMG recommendation:** Develop a template for DEI Spotlights which can be presented during All Staff meetings and via the internal and external Racial Equity Resource Hub. The goal of this template is to introduce the spotlights across the Agency (what they are, why are they important, how they relate to the work of VAAFM.)

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Group will develop a shared plan/template for spotlighting individual divisions' Racial Equity and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work. This plan/template will be centrally located in the SharePoint resource hub. Program managers across VAAFM will be encouraged to use this plan/template to regularly share with their division team members and other divisions about projects they are engaged in that have a racial equity focus.

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### Letter of Support from Agency Leadership

**MMG recommendation:** Either via video or written letter, request that a senior member of leadership write a letter which links to the Resource hub above and responds to the following questions: Why was this audit so important? What commitment has the agency made to racial equity and belonging and why? Does engaging in racial equity work mean that other staff members are not as important? Publish this letter internally and then share externally on VAAFM website and via newsletters or email lists. Include in this letter an announcement about upcoming optional belonging and social awareness training for all members of VAAFM staff.

**VAAFM commitment:** As part of the official release of the MMG REBA report and the Action Plan, Agency Leadership will release a written and/or video statement to all staff underlining the value of Racial Equity work to the Agency's mission. This statement will then be stored on the IDEA SharePoint Resource Hub, posted on our website alongside the REBA report and Action Plan, and shared with farmers and external partners via newsletter.



## Actions (continued)

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### Executive Sponsor or Champion

**MMG recommendation:** Enlist the support of an executive sponsor who for one year will be most accountable for supporting the Group in setting and achieving its goals. 1x a month meet with this executive sponsor and support them in writing quarterly updates to VAAFM staff of what work is being done, why, and how it matters. Note: These communications need to offer tangible ideas for how the work is being moved forward, not empty promises.

**VAAFM commitment:** A person will be designated to attend IDEA Group meetings and serve as an advocate for this work and liaison to the Office of Racial Equity and other leadership, supervisors, and staff. They will generate quarterly updates on IDEA work that will be shared with all of AGR. They will serve as champion to keep leadership informed, accountable for spreading awareness, connecting with resources, and speak to high-level work of group and strategic planning for the future.

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### External Facing Resource Hub

**MMG recommendation:** Develop an external facing Resource Hub focused on providing articles, podcasts, and videos on racial equity work in agriculture. We highly recommend that this hub not live behind a paywall and be open and available to anyone who visits the VAAFM website.

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Working Group did not come to consensus on how or whether to institute this recommendation. There was consensus that we should have some high-level information on our public-facing website about the IDEA efforts underway at VAAFM. There was also some interest in referencing state partners working on DEI in agriculture and featuring a few external resources on that page as well, but there wasn't interest in curating and maintaining a list of podcasts and articles. The IDEA Working Group also discussed that finding outlets to continuously share about our work and our partner organizations' work will be more effective in reaching people than building out a static webpage.

# GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRUST

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*“ I’ve been thinking about power dynamics—how constituents view VAAFM and feel comfortable reaching out/pushing back/asking for what they need. I think we often try to counter this by being really kind, supportive, and available, which is great. But I’m here to learn more about how to break down some of those power dynamics and how some individuals may have more access or social capital to access VAAFM than others.”*

— VAAFM CDM Participant

## **What Does This Mean?**

The conversation surrounding governance structures was the most popular theme among co-design session participants. Sometimes, when building action plans people can focus so much on where to start that they fail to start at all.

To figure out which structures to focus on first in this work, we don't need to assign absolute truth to any single feeling or observation. The fact that the feeling exists is an invitation to be curious about its origin. In our discussions, VAAFM staff shared that the bureaucracy of state government can be confusing to navigate. In addition, participants discussed how this confusion is emphasized by shifts in government. "If we decide on a change and successfully reach our goal, how do we know that a future elected official won't undo it," one participant asked.

There is no such thing as a perfect or absolute governance structure. Developing pathways for staff to connect, build capacity for difficult or uncomfortable conversations, and develop understanding of one another is an important aspect of governance that can support VAAFM in building the accountability and trust needed to engage staff and leaders in racial equity work for the long-term.

Grant processes were another very common topic that was raised by staff and partners during the REBA process. We would highly suggest beginning by evaluating current grant processes to determine what short-term changes can be made and what long-term changes can be advocated for within the Agency. [Learn more about simple steps to equitable grantmaking here.](#)

## Connection Point

The Agency has already undergone a fairly extensive Racial Equity + Belonging Audit process. The IDEA Working Group and grant program managers across Divisions can work together to use that process as a model for future improvements to our grants process and review decisions.

[Learn more about grantmaking with a racial equity lens here.](#)

## Challenges + Opportunities

Racial equity work has been in existence at the state level for many years but will be new to a number of staff and leaders at VAAF. It's important to keep in mind that you will experience resistance. Oftentimes, we see change within our organization as something we should fear. Racial equity and organizational belonging work exists to identify, diagnose, and solve problems. In a society founded on injustice and inequity, we are bound to uncover experiences and perceptions that differ from our own. This is a good opportunity to self-reflect on the ways that we not only experience marginalization but also the ways we experience privilege. Privilege often functions as a barrier to understanding. We don't understand how others can experience so differently the same Agency we work in every day, so we disagree that inequitable experiences can be possible. As an individual who has experienced racialized bias or harm, we deny that anyone could ever experience an organization in a positive light. Absolutism destroys bridges and keeps us distracted. Nuance (where applicable) helps us to develop a more holistic view of people, the workplace, and greater society. Experiencing privilege does not mean that we are inherently bad people. Acknowledging this privilege and seeking to learn how it shapes our lived experiences and perceptions helps us to be the leaders our communities need to move this work forward.

## Actions

The actions enumerated below were presented to VAAFAM by MMG. VAAFAM's response to each action item and commitment to action is specified below each item.



### Racial Equity Charter Document

**MMG recommendation:** Design a Racial Equity Charter to document VAAFAM's commitment to Racial Equity and Belonging. We recommend this charter include: Definitions for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Privilege, Race, Anti-Racism, and Racial Equity, Gender Equity, LGBTQIA+; Define the problem VAAFAM is seeking to solve; Clearly define decision-making power that the IDEA Group holds, and what priorities the Group will focus on while being accountable to VAAFAM staff and leaders; Process for decision-making (is decision-making based on consensus? Do specific members' viewpoints hold more weight based on their lived experience with a specific form of harm, marginalization, discrimination, etc.); Outlining of the Group's communications strategy for 1 year. We recommend that this strategy include an agreed upon "elevator speech," which takes the above bullet points and condenses them so they are accessible to future Group members and to all VAAFAM staff and partners. Once finalized, present the Racial Equity Charter Agency-wide.

**VAAFAM commitment:** Once action planning is complete, the IDEA Group will meet to design a Racial Equity Charter. It will begin the design process by defining the problem that the Agency is seeking to solve. The IDEA Group will then discuss, reflect upon, and determine the structure, makeup, and decision-making process of the IDEA Group and its individual members' roles, responsibilities, and authority. As part of this process, the IDEA Group will also re-visit its existing Mission and Vision, refining them if necessary. The IDEA Group will share the Racial Equity Charter with Agency leadership, the Office of Racial Equity, and Agency staff. The design of the Racial Equity Charter, revising of the existing Mission and Vision, and the outlining of the Year 1 communication strategy will be done closely alongside the work to develop an education strategy, including the development of a shared vocabulary, as described under "Education with a goal for action: Education Strategy" and the work to develop a strategy for communications as described in "Vision, Missions and Communications Strategy: Communications Strategy." The Racial Equity Charter, the revised Mission and Vision, the Education Strategy and the Communication Strategy will inform the work of the IDEA Group moving forward.

## Actions (continued)

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### IDEA Group Annual Goals/Values/Strategies Retreat

**MMG recommendation:** Lead an annual meeting at the beginning of the year with the IDEA Logistics Group to discuss shared DEI goals and to provide input through a lens of DEI using the [four I's framework](#)

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Group will dedicate one meeting annually at the beginning of each year to revisit and update its Mission and Vision and goals; reflect on progress it has made to meet its goals; makes plans for the upcoming year, the next three years, and the next five years for taking action to further meet its goals; and establish standards to use to determine if it makes progress towards meeting its goals. It will perform this work informed by the framework of the Four I's: ideological; institutional; interpersonal; and internalized oppression.

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### All Staff Annual Meeting on IDEA Strategy

**MMG recommendation:** Lead an annual meeting to present VAAFM's Racial Equity and Belonging strategy.

**VAAFM commitment:** The IDEA Group, vocally supported by leadership, will share updates on the IDEA progress and strategies at semiannual All-Staff meetings and give opportunity for input from staff.

## Actions (continued)



### Grantmaking Focus Group

**MMG recommendation:** Choose 3-4 grantmaking practices or programs and audit them using a focus group model. Pay external partners to participate in focus groups, present short-term and long-term recommendations to executive leadership. Once grantmaking process changes have been approved, compose a communication update and share this update across VAAFAM and with partners who participated in the focus groups.

**VAAFAM commitment:** The IDEA Group will examine the Agency's grantmaking practices and programs and identify 3 to 4 specific areas to explore. The IDEA Group will then create a focus group to audit these identified practices and programs and make recommendations for changes, following a process and using standards informed by MMG's work. If possible, an external facilitator will lead this focus group and external partners will be paid to participate in the focus group. The focus group will develop three sets of recommendations for making changes to the audited practices and programs - recommendations for changes to be made within 1 to 3 months, 6 to 9 months, and 12 to 18 months. The focus group will further identify whether any of the recommended changes need approval from leadership or Agency of Administration. The focus group will present these recommendations to the IDEA Group, Agency leadership, Office of Racial Equity, and Agency of Administration (as needed). Any changes that do not require approval or that Agency leadership approves will be implemented. The IDEA Group will contact focus group participants to inform them of the changes to be implemented and thank them for their participation. Acknowledging that the Agency's contracting processes also would benefit from being audited with the DEI lens, the IDEA Group will consider convening a similarly structured contracts focus group when making workplans at annual meetings in the future. similarly structured contracts focus group when making workplans at annual meetings in the future.

# ACTION PLAN NEXT STEPS

The action plan will utilize the MICHA framework<sup>2</sup> to organize the three primary priorities committee members named during the CDM process. MICHA stands for **Manager, Informed, Consulted, Helper, Accountable** and is a matrix used to clarify and define roles, responsibilities, and accountability.

The IDEA Working Group will take the action items in this plan and prioritize actions, develop a timeline, work through lingering questions, and establish roles and capacity needed to move each item forward. This work will be done in collaboration with Agency leadership and with consistent communication to internal and external stakeholders.

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## Manager

People or stakeholders who do the work. They must complete the task or objective and make decisions that drive the project forward as they oversee the work. Several people can jointly manage the progress of an action, task, or project.

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## Informed

People or stakeholders who need to be kept “in the picture.” They need updates on progress or decisions, but they do not need to be formally consulted, nor do they contribute directly to the task or decision. This section also includes the frequency of being informed.

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## Consulted

People or stakeholders who need to give input before the work can be done and signed-off on. These people are “in the loop” and active participants.

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## Helper

External stakeholder who implements aspects of the work and contributes to success. The helper may own a significant area of work with its own MICHA (a cascading MICHA).

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## Accountable

Person or stakeholder who is most accountable for the outcome. They must **sign off** when the task or objective is complete and **approve** any major decisions made by the manager. This person must make sure that responsibilities are assigned in the matrix for all related activities. Success requires that there is only one person or committee **Accountable**.

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2. The MICHA framework is a framework MMG EARTH developed by integrating existing workflow frameworks, namely the RACI and the MOCHA.



# REFLECTIONS

*Developing structures informed by principles of equity and shared decision-making within an organization is no easy task - especially as it relates to justice and belonging work. It requires people to show up vulnerably and honestly. It also means developing skills needed to build brave spaces where people can surface their agreement and alignment but also where disagreement can be discussed and acknowledged. VAAFm has reached a major milestone. It now holds a unique position where collective insights, knowledge, and commitment sit at the beginnings of a strong foundation. Now is the time to push the work forward.*

# APPENDIX: PERFORMANCE MEASURES

## Education With a Goal for Action

### Education Strategy Document:

Develop a 2-year education strategy for the Agency. The strategy will need to center racial equity through an intersectional lens. We recommend including LGBTQIA+ terminologies, key concepts, themes, and vocabulary.

**What is our commitment (action)?** The IDEA Group will develop an education strategy that includes education about racial equity and other intersectional topics including disability justice, language access, gender, class, and sexuality.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?** Agency staff will be more educated about racial equity and intersectional topics and have the tools and support to continue learning about these topics over time once the strategy is implemented. The Agency will adopt a shared language for talking about racial equity and belonging. Investing in our education will help Agency staff and leaders continually identify areas where we want to revise how we operate. When we are aware of the history of why systems operate how they do, we will be better resourced to avoid causing more harm.

### What is the outcome (product)?

- An education strategy document will be developed
- Education strategy document will include list of definitions of key concepts, themes and vocabulary including LGBTQIA+ terminologies

### How will we know the outcome was successful?

- 100% of staff are shared definitions and strategy guide and know where to find in future.
- Educational strategy is used to guide staff training and events.

**Roles:** IDEA Group with leadership support, potentially supported by outside contractor and/or Office of Racial Equity.

### Lingering Questions/Considerations:

- Let's be more concrete about key concepts, themes, vocab, and terminologies to be explored.
- Do we want to be less specific with naming categories of intersectional topics and identities we will feature in the terminology list?
- In developing this strategy, can we identify known areas where staff are seeking training? The IDEA Working Group has heard that diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring and recruitment is an important topic for supervisors and managers. We also know that expanding the reach and accessibility of all our programs is an area for improvement.

**IDEA Internal Resource Hub:**

Develop a list of shared vocabulary and resources in a hub that can be accessed by any member of Agency staff at any time. 2x a quarter update the Internal Racial Equity + Belonging Hub with resources or reflections from an VAAFM member on the importance of this work and individual aspirations they hold for its long-term success.

**What is our commitment (action)?**

The IDEA Group will develop and structure a Share-Point Document Library or similar site that will be accessible to all Agency staff and that will host a variety of shared racial equity resources. This site will be a central point for sharing the resources (such as vocabulary lists) developed by VAAFM as part of their Action steps and also for saving/sharing articles, documents, and other reflections on racial equity topics. The IDEA Group will file relevant resources in this library as they develop and come across them and will keep this shared library up to date and organized.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

The Agency will have centralized resources will support staff to continue their learning with individualized education at their own pace. The site will serve as a “one-stop shop” for learning about and engaging in the Agency’s IDEA work and staff will be able to find and access the resources on the site. Agency staff will use this site for sharing our own personal development for others to learn and gain/grow from. As a result, this site will facilitate shared learning and a culture of continuous improvement and peer learning.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- Centralized Sharepoint Site or document library is created and filled with relevant resources
- Resources will include vocabulary lists developed by VAAFM as part of their Action steps and also articles, documents, and other reflections on racial equity topics.
- Standardized process (SOP?) is created for updating, adding new items, and keeping the site organized
- The link to access the SharePoint site is shared with all current employees, and the site is also included in a centralized location so that new staff automatically gain access to it.

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- Number of staff who add content to the hub
- 100% of staff know where the hub is located and have access to it

**Roles:** Led by IDEA Group with technical support from IT office, and potentially informed by conversations with Office of Racial Equity on how this can complement the existing SOV-Racial Equity Teams Channel. Potential advising from other state agencies that might maintain similar document libraries.

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- It may be a challenge to vet resources – determine a process for this
- How will this intersect with the communications goals in this Action Plan?
- How to measure culture shift? How often do conversations about racial equity topics emerge in small office chat?
- Do we want to do a survey to understand how hub is used and how useful it is? Do people feel like they have a place where they are learning something new? Are the resources in the hub helping people identify areas for growth and change in their work/behavior/thinking? How is this helping understand interactions with customers as well?
- What is the best format for this – is it a sharepoint site that connects to a Microsoft Teams channel or chat? Do we also want to host our routine meetings from that team for clarity and accessibility? How do our efforts to pull together IDEA resources into one location align with efforts to clarify email and communications lists, meeting invitations, ongoing teams chat threads, etc?
- Is this duplicative of ORE’s SOV resource library? Work with ORE to determine if we need an additional resource.
- Is this duplicative of ORE Impact Assessment tool? If not, what is the exact need that isn’t covered by that tool?
- Let’s make sure we are orienting new staff to this education strategy document once developed and shared.

**Training for IDEA Working Group:**

Work with an external facilitator to lead an initial Racial Equity training for all members of IDEA Group + Action Plan Design session participants. This training should be led prior to all staff training so that participants can assist with organizing various departments and teams around racial equity training attendance.

**What is our commitment (action)?**

The IDEA Group will collaborate with Agency leadership to look for funds to support bringing in an external contractor to develop training materials (e.g., webinar recording, slides, handouts) and train IDEA Group staff for a mentor style training program to better prepare IDEA Group members to be advocates for and educators about racial equity within the Agency. The IDEA Group will develop a plan for revisiting and updating training materials to ensure they are up to date over time.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

The IDEA Group will have the connections, resources, and relationships to engage in ongoing learning and training on racial equity concepts. IDEA Group members can serve as mentors and subject matter intermediaries to their peers related to racial equity and other intersection points and feel comfortable with IDEA learning and materials. There will be increased clarity and consistency in IDEA group's work.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- Contractor/external trainer is brought onboard
- Training materials are developed by an external contractor/ORE to support peer learning

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- 100% of IDEA Group members trained
- Regular use and reference training materials developed for peer learning by staff.
- 100% of the staff will know who to go to if they have questions.

**Roles:** IDEA Group will solicit a contractor, with Agency leadership approval and financial support, and much of this work will be done by the IDEA Group in collaboration with an external racial equity and belonging trainer/consultant

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- Incorporate training for supervisors and leadership into this action, if the "Racial Equity Coaches" recommendation is cut?
- Is there capacity or interest within ORE to support mentorship development? Are there any current efforts underway in this space?
- How can we lean on and leverage trainings made available by Center for Achievement in Public Service (CAPS) or the Office of Racial Equity (ORE)? Could we get some DEI fundamentals trainings from one of these state agency partners and then develop some supplemental trainings specific to agriculture for VAAFM staff?

**All Staff Racial Equity Training:**

Work with an external facilitator to lead an initial Racial Equity training for all VAAFM staff. We recommend that this first training be optional and that managers, supervisors, and directors across VAAFM talk to their teams in advance about the importance of the work and education.

**What is our commitment (action)?**

The IDEA Group will collaborate with Agency leadership to look for funds to support bringing in an external contractor to make racial equity training available for all staff members within the Agency. VAAFM leadership and supervisors will demonstrate their commitment by attending themselves and will strongly encourage staff to attend. In future, VAAFM may work with external facilitators to continue to incorporate racial equity trainings into annual all-staff meetings. This will be a jumping-off point for future work, as we know one training will never be sufficient for meaningful change.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

This training will socialize/normalize racial equity and intersectional concepts with those that might not be familiar with them. This training will demonstrate leadership commitment to racial equity work and support gradual movement towards culture change.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- Execute a contract with an external facilitator to lead trainings
- An expert will lead at least one all-agency racial equity training

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- Agreed upon percentage of leaders and supervisors present for all agency training
- Number of VAAFM staff that attend the training
- 100% of the staff will know who to go to if they have questions.

**Roles:** IDEA Group will solicit a contractor, with Agency leadership approval and financial support, and much of this work will be done by an external racial equity and belonging trainer/consultant

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- Explore more/consult with MMG about recommendation of mandatory vs optional trainings
- Need to determine if this specific recommendation is around a one-off training and/or how to institute ongoing trainings - meaningful change cannot happen with just one training. How to make this a jumping-off point?

## Open Routine IDEA Sessions

### *Space for Conversation/Connection:*

Work with an external facilitator to lead an initial Racial Equity training for all VAAFAM staff. We recommend that this first training be optional and that managers, supervisors, and directors across VAAFAM talk to their teams in advance about the importance of the work and education.

#### **What is our commitment (action)?**

Informed by the education strategy and supported by the racial equity training of IDEA Group members, the IDEA Group will continue to develop an ongoing series of open, brave spaces for constructive (rather than instructive) conversation about racial equity and belonging topics that are open to all VAAFAM staff. These sessions will focus on applied learning. This could take the form of a community of practice.

#### **What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

There is routine space for applying learning and sharing best practices and ideas as we integrate racial equity principles into our day-to-day work. Staff feel connected and supported by one another in their ongoing learning. Participants create, expand, and exchange knowledge, and develop individual capabilities to promote equity at work. Culture is changed with the knowledge that culture change is an ongoing, iterative process.

#### **What is the outcome (product)?**

- Open IDEA sessions are scheduled and facilitated on a routine basis
- Culture is changed!!

*Did not come to a consensus on the following:*

### **Racial Equity Coaches**

Work with an external facilitator to lead an initial Racial Equity training for all VAAFAM staff. We recommend that this first training be optional and that managers, supervisors, and directors across VAAFAM talk to their teams in advance about the importance of the work and education.

#### **Lingering Questions/Considerations**

If we don't do this – how else can we best support leaders to be advocates for this work? Is incorporating them into the trainings laid out above sufficient?

#### **How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- Number of staff participating in Open IDEA Sessions
- Percentage of participating staff that share ideas or questions in the Open IDEA Sessions
- Number of staff engaging in IDEA Group increases over time

**Roles:** IDEA Group (potentially supported by external contractors)

#### **Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- What is the difference between the recommended “small group sessions” and workshops?
- How to make open to all of VAAFAM while still maintaining as a brave space/small group?
- How we can utilize the VAAFAM Teams channel to support this ongoing learning?
- We want culture change to be an outcome – don't know how to measure this though
- How can we emphasize relationship building in the execution of this action?
- Is there interest in identity/affinity group spaces as well?

## Vision, Mission, and Communications Strategy

### Communications Strategy:

Decide on a frequency for communication updates to the Agency related to preemptively answering the What (What are you doing?) and Why (Why is it important?) of your current and future work.

Outlining of the Group's communications strategy for 1 year. We recommend that this strategy include an agreed upon "elevator speech," which takes the above bullet points and condenses them so they are accessible to future Group members and to all VAAF staff and partners.

**What is our commitment (action)?** The IDEA Group will collaborate with the Agency Communications Team to develop a one-year communications strategy to highlight the importance of racial equity work to internal and external partners.

### What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?

The IDEA Group can effectively communicate our work and its importance to the Agency and partners. Our audience will have a greater understanding of the importance of racial equity and barriers imposed by systemic racism. All staff will be continuously informed of Idea Group actions and feel included in work on behalf of the Agency.

### What is the outcome (product)?

- A communications strategy document will be created.
- Document includes a clear plan for updating, revision, and sharing with staff and partners.
- Document includes an elevator speech about "what" and "why" of work.
- Document will be provided to Agency leadership and supervisors. Agency staff will be made aware of its availability

### How will we know the outcome was successful?

- 75% of staff will be able to explain what racial equity is and why it's important after one year
- 50% of farmers/partners/Vermonters will understand components of the racial equity work is taking place at the Agency

**Roles:** IDEA Group with Agency Communications Team support (potentially supported by Agency leadership and Office of Racial Equity)

### Lingering Questions/Considerations:

- Need to have a document to outline our work, but is charter the right word? Isn't that similar to this document? Also do we need one decision-making process or would that vary depending on the topic?
- Do we include external partners here? Internal for year 1 and external for year 2?
- Let's make sure other state agencies are part of our audience.
- Let's ensure part of our communications strategy is to share about our work and also to uplift the work that our partners are doing.

**DEI Spotlight Integration into Routine Meetings:**

Develop a template for DEI Spotlights which can be presented during All Staff meetings and via the internal and external Racial Equity Resource Hub. The goal of this template is to introduce the spotlights across the Agency (what they are, why are they important, how they relate to the work of VAAFM.)

**What is our commitment (action)?**

The IDEA Group will develop a shared plan/template for spotlighting individual divisions' Racial Equity and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work. This plan/template will be centrally located in the SharePoint resource hub. Program managers across VAAFM will be encouraged to use this plan/template to regularly share with their division team members and other divisions about projects they are engaged in that have a racial equity focus.

VAAFM leadership will also continue to restate the importance of this work as it continues. For example, VAAFM leadership will routinely include on their routine management meetings an agenda item for update of IDEA Group work. They will verbally share routinely about the importance of this work at all-staff meetings and will continue to add their support of IDEA initiatives via emails to all staff (e.g., upon release of future trainings send an email encouraging staff to participate).

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

There will be routine incorporation of racial equity and DEI work into Division meetings by staff and leadership and a standard way to share updates on work happening to help facilitate DEI conversations. Program staff will feel enhanced accountability and encouragement to share this work.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- Template for sharing equity work
- Leadership initiates IDEA work in all-staff meetings and other leadership communications

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- Template used regularly in Division and/or cross-Division updates
- Leadership presents at all-staff meetings

**Roles:** IDEA Group to create template. Division leadership to support use of template.

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- Internal highlights to other teams/team members, or external to the public?
- How often is regularly?
- Would we want what divisions write up updates to be reviewed for consistency across divisions, because the tone of one division's message might differ from another. Can a template be developed so that we make sure we're covering the same bases with each division update?
- Eventually, some of these internal updates might be a good fit for external communications as well.



**Letter of Support from Agency Leadership:**

Either via video or written letter, request that a senior member of leadership write a letter which links to the Resource hub above and responds to the following questions: Why was this audit so important? What commitment has the agency made to racial equity and belonging and why? Does engaging in racial equity work mean that other staff members are not as important?

Publish this letter internally and then share externally on VAAFM website and via newsletters or email lists.

Include in this letter an announcement about upcoming optional belonging and social awareness training for all members of VAAFM staff.

**What is our commitment (action)?**

As part of the official release of the MMG REBA report and the Action Plan, Agency Leadership will release a written and/or video statement to all staff underlining the value of Racial Equity work to the Agency's mission. This statement will then be stored on the IDEA SharePoint Resource Hub, posted on our website alongside the REBA report and Action Plan, and shared with farmers and external partners via newsletter.

Leadership will publicly demonstrate racial equity work. This will support a shared understanding of the Agency's commitment to this work and show alignment between the IDEA Group and leadership.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

There will be routine incorporation of racial equity and DEI work into Division meetings by staff and leadership and a standard way to share updates on work happening to help facilitate DEI conversations. Program staff will feel enhanced accountability and encouragement to share this work.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- Written statement and/or video from leadership
- Conversation with leadership to ensure sets tone for rest of communications strategy and IDEA work

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- 90% of staff have read and/or seen statement and/or video

**Roles:** Leadership, with support from WG

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- Where does land acknowledgment fit in - here and in other internal/external comms? Could we do follow-up surveys to see if shift happens?

**Executive Sponsor or Champion:**

Enlist the support of an executive sponsor who for one year will be most accountable for supporting the Group in setting and achieving its goals.

1x a month meet with this executive sponsor and support them in writing quarterly updates to VAAFM staff of what work is being done, why, and how it matters. Note: These communications need to offer tangible ideas for how the work is being moved forward, not empty promises.

**What is our commitment (action)?**

A person will be designated to attend IDEA Group meetings and serve as an advocate for this work and liaison to the Office of Racial Equity and other leadership, supervisors, and staff. They will generate quarterly updates on IDEA work that will be shared with all of AGR. They will serve as champion to keep leadership informed, accountable for spreading awareness, connecting with resources, and speak to high-level work of Group and strategic planning for the future.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

Ensure Group has a champion and designated voice to engage with leadership and other partners.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- Identifying a person to serve in role and outlining expectations

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- 1 person will be designated
- Leadership and other groups are contacted, informed, and engaged on a regular basis (built-in meetings or otherwise)

**Roles:** Designated person, Group, with support from leadership

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

Recommendations for selecting this role within Agency to provide strategy and accountability.

- Still need to determine separate person to lead group’s activities: logistics of Group meetings, notes, project responsibility: This individual will attend IDEA Group meetings, take notes, help facilitate conversations, send reminder emails to members and staff, help keep track of who is taking on individual projects, and take on discrete projects themselves as needed.
- TBD how often to check in with leadership and/or other groups
- Need to determine how we select that person/is it formally part of job description/funding breakdown
- What is the role of the VAAFM Office of Racial Equity Liaisons in serving this need?

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**Roles:** Designated person, Group, with support from leadership

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

Recommendations for selecting this role within Agency to provide strategy and accountability.

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- TBD how often to check in with leadership and/or other groups
- Need to determine how we select that person/is it formally part of job description/funding breakdown
- What is the role of the VAAFM Office of Racial Equity Liaisons in serving this need?

*Did not come to a consensus on the following:*

**External Facing Resource Hub:**

Develop an external facing Resource Hub focused on providing articles, podcasts, and videos on racial equity work in agriculture. We highly recommend that this hub not live behind a paywall and be open and available to anyone who visits the VAAFM website.

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

The IDEA Working Group did not come to consensus on how or whether to institute this recommendation. There was consensus that we should have some high-level information on our public-facing website about the IDEA efforts underway at VAAFM. There was also some interest in referencing state partners working on DEI in agriculture and featuring a few external resources on that page as well, but there wasn't interest in curating and maintaining a list of podcasts and articles.

The IDEA Working Group also discussed that finding outlets to continuously share about our work and our partner organizations' work will be more effective in reaching people than building out a static webpage.

Some lingering questions included: Why can't we just have a website page dedicated to this topic? Perhaps we want to start with a website that just shows our work and documents and have the additional articles as TBD in the future. Who generates this content and how to curate?

## Governance Structure For Accountability And Trust

**Racial Equity Charter Document:**

Design a Racial Equity Charter to document VAAFM's commitment to Racial Equity and Belonging. We recommend this charter include:

- Definitions for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Privilege, Race, Anti-Racism, and Racial Equity, Gender Equity, LGBTQIA+
- Define the problem VAAFM is seeking to solve
- Clearly define decision-making power that the IDEA Group holds, and what priorities the Group will focus on while being accountable to VAAFM staff and leaders
- Process for decision-making (is decision-making based on consensus? Do specific members' viewpoints hold more weight based on their lived experience with a specific form of harm, marginalization, discrimination, etc.)?
- Outlining of the Group's communications strategy for 1 year. We recommend that this strategy include an agreed upon "elevator speech," which takes the above bullet points and condenses them so they are accessible to future Group members and to all VAAFM staff and partners.
- Once finalized, present the Racial Equity Charter Agency-wide. Still need to determine separate person to lead group's activities: logistics of Group meetings, notes, project responsibility: This individual will attend IDEA Group meetings, take notes, help facilitate conversations, send reminder emails to members and staff, help keep track of who is taking on individual projects, and take on discrete projects themselves as needed.
- TBD how often to check in with leadership and/or other groups
- Need to determine how we select that person/is it formally part of job description/funding breakdown
- What is the role of the VAAFM Office of Racial Equity Liaisons in serving this need?

**Racial Equity Charter Document (continued):**

Design a Racial Equity Charter to document VAAFMs commitment to Racial Equity and Belonging. We recommend this charter include:

**What is our commitment (action)?**

Once action planning is complete, the IDEA Group will meet to design a Racial Equity Charter. It will begin the design process by defining the problem that the Agency is seeking to solve. The IDEA Group will then discuss, reflect upon, and determine the structure, makeup, and decision-making process of the IDEA Group and its individual members' roles, responsibilities, and authority. As part of this process, the IDEA Group will also re-visit its existing Mission and Vision, refining them if necessary. The IDEA Group will share the Racial Equity Charter with Agency leadership, the Office of Racial Equity, and Agency staff.

The design of the Racial Equity Charter, revising of the existing Mission and Vision, and the outlining of the Year 1 communication strategy will be done closely alongside the work to develop an education strategy, including the development of a shared vocabulary, as described under "Education with a goal for action: Education Strategy" and the work to develop a strategy for communications as described in "Vision, Missions and Communications Strategy: Communications Strategy." The Racial Equity Charter, the revised Mission and Vision, the Education Strategy and the Communication Strategy will inform the work of the IDEA Group moving forward.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

The Agency will have a Racial Equity Charter designed by the IDEA Group through a thoughtful intentional process and IDEA Group members will have a better understanding of their role and the tools and processes they have to carry out the Mission and Vision. They will share the Racial Equity Charter, the revisited Mission and Vision, and the Year 1 communication strategy with Agency leadership, the Office of Racial Equity, and staff.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- A Racial Equity Charter will be developed.
- The Charter will include definitions for pertinent terminology, such as Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Privilege, Race, Anti-Racism, Racial Equity, Gender Equity, and LGBTQIA+, that align with the Education Strategy
- The IDEA Mission and Vision will be updated.
- A prioritized timeline of action steps and responsible parties that is informed by this Action Plan will be developed.

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- 1 person will be designated
- Leadership and other groups are contacted, informed, and engaged on a regular basis (built-in meetings or otherwise)

**Roles:** IDEA Group

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- As part of the IDEA Group's work to design the Racial Equity Charter its members may decide that the charter should have a different name and be distinguished in some manner from the group's previous work.
- The IDEA Group may also determine that there may need to be multiple types of decision-making processes for the group to use dependent upon the issue to be decided upon.
- Let's make sure when we develop this charter that we focus on creating opportunities for all VAAFMs staff to get involved in IDEA work. Inclusion and belonging are important values to the IDEA Working Group that we want to write into the charter document.

**IDEA Group Annual Goals/Values/Strategies Retreat:**

Lead an annual meeting at the beginning of the year with the IDEA Logistics Group to discuss shared DEI goals and to provide input through a lens of DEI using the four I's framework:

Four Is of oppression are ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression all of which are interconnected.

- ideological: one group is somehow better than another, and in some measure has the right to control the other group.
- institutional: one group is better than another group and has the right to control the other gets embedded in the institutions of the society--the laws, the legal system and police practice, the education system and schools, hiring policies, public policies, housing development, media images, political power, etc.
- interpersonal: one group is better than another and has the right to control the other, which gets structured into institutions, gives permission and reinforcement for individual members of the dominant group to personally disrespect or mistreat individuals in the oppressed group.
- internalized: Oppressed people internalize the ideology of inferiority, they see it reflected in the institutions, they experience disrespect interpersonally from members of the dominant group, and they eventually come to internalize the negative messages about themselves.

The above is taken word-for-word from the article presenting this framework which can be found here:

**GRCC. (n.d.). *The Four I's of Oppression. Grand Rapids Community College.***

[https://www.grcc.edu/sites/default/files/docs/diversity/the\\_four\\_is\\_of\\_oppression.pdf](https://www.grcc.edu/sites/default/files/docs/diversity/the_four_is_of_oppression.pdf).

**IDEA Group Annual Goals/Values/Strategies Retreat: (continued)**

**What is our commitment (action)?**

The IDEA Group will dedicate one meeting annually at the beginning of each year to revisit and update its Mission and Vision and goals; reflect on progress it has made to meet its goals; makes plans for the upcoming year, the next three years, and the next five years for taking action to further meet its goals; and establish standards to use to determine if it makes progress towards meeting its goals. It will perform this work informed by the framework of the Four Is, ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

The IDEA Group will hold itself accountable to carrying out its Mission and Vision and to meeting its goals. It remains responsive to unforeseen needs that arise as it carries out its work and takes action to address those needs. Agency leadership not in attendance at the IDEA group's annual meeting will be informed of the outcomes of this meeting.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- IDEA Group will hold an annual meeting at the beginning of each year.
- IDEA Group will invite Agency leadership and all staff to the annual meeting.
- Evaluation of progress made to date (accomplishments), identification of areas for improvement, establishment of priorities for the upcoming year and the next three and five years, and descriptions of how the priorities will be addressed. This work will be documented and the documentation will be saved in the Resource Hub in a folder entitled "IDEA Annual Meetings."

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- Mission and Vision and goals will be updated as needed.
- Evaluation using the standards that the IDEA Group create will measure whether there has been progress towards IDEA goals the previous year.
- IDEA Group will feel that timelines are being met or reasonably adjusted.

**Roles:** IDEA Group

**All Staff Annual Meeting on IDEA Strategy:**

Lead an annual meeting to present VAAFMs Racial Equity and Belonging strategy.

**What is our commitment (action)?**

The IDEA Group, vocally supported by leadership, will share updates on the IDEA progress and strategies at semiannual All-Staff meetings and give opportunity for input from staff.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

Agency staff are aware of the work and goals of the IDEA Group and are aware of the chance to provide input into this work. It is clear to Agency staff that Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Action are deeply held values of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- IDEA will present, at least briefly, at every All-Staff meeting
- The updates on the IDEA progress and strategies that are presented at the All-Staff meetings will also be documented and the documentation will be saved in the Resource Hub and also sent out to staff in an email so that staff who are not at the All-Staff meeting are informed.
- Staff will be informed of the IDEA group's work as well as any opportunities for them to be involved in this work moving forward.
- Staff will routinely be given the opportunity to provide input.

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- 100% of staff will be informed of the IDEA group's progress and plans
- Staff will have an increased understanding of IDEA group work and goals
- Staff will know that this work is important to the Agency
- Meaningful input from staff will be gathered

**Roles:** IDEA Group with leadership support



**Grantmaking Focus Group:**

Choose 3-4 grantmaking practices or programs and audit them using a focus group model. Pay external partners to participate in focus groups, present short-term and long-term recommendations to executive leadership. Once grantmaking process changes have been approved, compose a communication update and share this update across VAAF and with partners who participated in the focus groups. This could include:

- Hiring an external facilitator to lead focus groups on existing grant processes.
- Utilizing caucusing to lead groups for People of Color, young and new farmers + producers, and a general group (for any who would like to attend) focused on gaining a better understanding as to how grants processes are working, and not working, for constituents. The goal of these caucus groups will be to develop a deeper understanding of how existing processes are in alignment and out of alignment with VAAF's racial equity and belonging goals.
- Presenting the findings from the focus groups to Agency leadership with three recommendations for applying feedback within 1-3 months, 6-9 months, and 12-18 months.
- Once Agency leadership has approved the implementation of changes, contacting focus group participants to express gratitude for their time and labor and to share the changes being implemented based on their feedback.

**What is our commitment (action)?**

The focus group will present these recommendations to the IDEA Group, Agency leadership, Office of Racial Equity, and Agency of Administration (as needed). Any changes that do not require approval or that Agency leadership approves will be implemented. The IDEA Group will contact focus group participants to inform them of the changes to be implemented and thank them for their participation.

Acknowledging that the Agency's contracting processes also would benefit from being audited with the DEI lens, the IDEA Group will consider convening a similarly structured contracts focus group when making workplans at annual meetings in the future.

**What is the end goal (overall vision statement)?**

Our grants, and eventually contracts, will be set up and delivered in a more equitable manner so that all Vermonters have equal access to Agency-managed financial resource opportunities.

**What is the outcome (product)?**

- A focus group centered on inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility will be created
- An audit of 3 to 4 of the Agency's grantmaking practices and programs through a DEI lens will be completed.
- Recommendations to make changes to these practices and programs, based on the results of the audit, will be presented to Agency leadership.
- Improvements will be made within the bounds of state granting requirements, as informed by input from Agency leadership.

**How will we know the outcome was successful?**

- Agency grant-making programs will be changed to be more DEI informed.
- **Agreeing upon and reaching a set percentage of dollars and of grant amounts awarded to historically underserved grantees will increase**

**Roles:** IDEA Group (potentially supported by external contractor, Agency leadership, and Office of Racial Equity/Chief Performance Office)

**Lingering Questions/Considerations:**

- Needs support from an external contractor? If so, would need to find funds.