

VLCT Welcoming and Engaging Communities Program

The VLCT Welcoming and Engaging Communities Cohort is a partnership with Vermont cultural transformation consultancy Abundant Sun that offers municipal leaders the opportunity to participate in the firm's Ethical Performance Improvement Campaign (E.P.I.C.). The E.P.I.C. Journey is a strategic methodology based on data and science aimed at catalyzing organizations to build better cultures from within. Cohort participants will join up to eight Vermont municipalities on a six-month journey including eight two-hour workshops on topics that include "Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion," "Employee Engagement & Client Service," and "Data Analytics & Building Strategy". The sessions are paired with an opportunity for municipalities to collect and analyze key inclusion and belonging metrics by surveying elected officials, appointed officials, and paid staff using Abundant Sun's Inclusion and Belonging Survey.

VLCT subsidizes ninety percent of the cost of participation in the Welcoming and Engaging Communities Cohort. The cohort program is akin to "Cultural Transformation 101", aimed at helping communities enhance their equity journey. Each selected municipality will be asked to enroll three municipal officials to the cohort. Eligible officials who can enroll in the cohort include members of a municipality's legislative body (city council, selectboard, trustees), a city or town manager or town administrator, a mayor, a clerk, or a department head.

The program launched in 2022 with eight participating communities: Brandon, Hartford, Hinesburg, Jericho, Middlebury, Putney, Richmond, and Williston. VLCT is currently running the second cohort of communities through the program.

In 2023/2024, 12 municipalities are participating in the Welcoming and Engaging Communities Cohort 2.0. Eight new cities and towns are participating: Barre, Bradford, Essex Junction, Milton, Morristown, Shelburne, Waterbury, and Winooski. Two regional planning commissions are participating: Chittenden and Lamoille. In addition, two municipalities are serving as mentor communities for the cohort: Bradford and Hartford.

VLCT may run the program again depending on funding availability.

More about the 2024 cohort is below.

Timeline

Program Announcement: October 2, 2023

Application Deadline: **Extended to Tuesday, December 12, 2023**

Notification of Selection: Friday, December 22, 2023

First Cohort Meeting: Tuesday, January 9, 2024

Conduct Survey: January-March 2024

Cohort Meetings:

- IN PERSON – VLCT Office in Montpelier: Tuesday, January 9, 2024, 12 p.m. - 2 p.m.
- ONLINE: Wednesday, January 31, 2024, 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.
- ONLINE: Tuesday, February 20, 2024, 12 p.m. - 2 p.m.
- IN PERSON – VLCT Office in Montpelier: Tuesday, March 12, 2024, 8 a.m. - 10 a.m.
- ONLINE: Wednesday, April 3, 2024, 8 a.m. – 10 a.m.
- ONLINE: TBD
- IN PERSON – VLCT Office in Montpelier: Tuesday, May 14, 2024, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Cost

\$500 per municipality, invoiced at completion of program. If a majority of a municipality's cohort members attend 80 percent of the meetings, VLCT will reduce the cost to \$100 per municipality. VLCT significantly subsidizes the cost of participation in the program thanks in part to a grant from VLCT's risk-sharing pool, VLCT PACIF.

Program FAQs

[What is the cost of the program?](#)

VLCT is subsidizing the cost of the program. Municipalities will be charged \$500 at the end of the program. Should a municipality participate in 80 percent of the meetings, VLCT will reduce the cost to \$100.

[What officials may participate in the program?](#)

Each municipality must select three municipal officials to participate in the program. Eligible participants include mayors, city councilors, selectboard members, village trustees, town managers and administrators, clerks, department heads, and similar officials. While not required, VLCT encourages at least one of the officials to be a member of the municipality's legislative body.

For VLCT associate members that do not have statutory municipal officials, eligible participants include executive directors, department heads, board members, and other officials in leadership positions. Should you appoint an individual that VLCT or Abundant Sun feels is inappropriate, you will not be disqualified from program participation, but you may be asked to appoint an alternate.

[What is the time commitment?](#)

Over the six months of the program, participants will be asked to attend eight meetings: a ninety minute in-person meeting in Montpelier, and a two-hour remote meeting roughly every other week through April. In addition, there will be a four-hour in-person meeting scheduled for May. If timing allows, one of the biweekly meetings mid-program will be in person (currently scheduled for March 12th). One of the virtual cohort meetings will be an opportunity for all elected officials and appointed officials from the participating municipalities to undertake basic education on cultural transformation, in an effort to expand the reach of the program beyond the three participants of each municipality.

[How do I apply?](#)

Visit <https://www.abundantsun.com/vlct-application/>.

[What's the difference between the Welcoming and Engaging Communities Cohort Program and the State of Vermont's IDEAL program?](#)

Welcoming and Engaging Communities Cohort Program is primarily focused upon the internal health of municipality organizations, its leadership and the satisfaction of those who work within and who serve our communities. This program aims to improve the overall leadership and governance of participants. It supports the work of IDEAL and at the same time is distinct from it.

[Watch a video that tells you more about the two programs.](#)

[What is the Inclusion and Belonging Survey, and how will results be shared?](#)

Abundant Sun will issue a survey that helps you evaluate the culture in your town hall. This survey includes an employment Net Promotor Score, a well-tested and well-known gauge of workplace culture. Participant municipalities will be asked to share the survey link and champion survey participation amongst elected and appointed officials. Municipalities will be able to compare their survey data to other organizations Abundant Sun has worked with, including non-profit and for-profit organizations, and the first Welcoming and Engaging Communities Cohort. Abundant Sun will present the results to your selectboard via virtual participation.

[UPDATED: Can VLCT's Associate Members apply?](#)

Yes. Eligible participants from associate members include board members, executive directors, department heads, and similar officials.

[NEW: Does my board, selectboard, or city council need to vote to participate?](#)

Not necessarily. If your community has a municipal manager, the manager can apply on behalf of the city, town or village. For associate members, an executive director may apply. If your municipality or board does not have a municipal manager or executive director, the legislative body or board should apply.

[NEW: How many meetings do I need to attend to qualify for the maximum reimbursement?](#)

Eighty percent. VLCT is providing a significant subsidy to municipalities to offer this educational opportunity for \$500 per member. To further incentivize participation, and to make the program accessible to our smallest members, VLCT will further subsidize the

program by reimbursing the member \$400 at the conclusion of the program if at least two representatives from the municipality attend 80 percent of the meetings.

Publication Date

10/02/2023