

# VLCT Civic Engagement and Belonging Plan

## Reason for the Plan

The Board of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns believes strongly that its member municipalities must ensure all people feel engaged and are invited to participate in local government affairs, regardless of race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, gender identity and expression, age, disability, socioeconomic or housing status, or any other protected characteristics.

As part of its mission “to serve and strengthen Vermont local government,” the VLCT Board commits to assisting municipalities undertake this work by undertaking the following actions.

- **Inclusivity.** VLCT will adopt the Declaration of Inclusion and share information about the Declaration of Inclusion with its membership.
- **Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee.** This temporary advisory committee to the VLCT Board will help VLCT understand what engagement resources and tools municipalities need.
- **Partnerships.** VLCT will work with partners, including the State Office of Racial Equity, the National League of Cities, the Secretary of State’s Office, and other engagement experts to amplify our efforts to effect real change.
- **Representation.** VLCT is committed to expanding our own engagement efforts to ensure all members feel welcome on our boards, committees and staff.
- **Education.** VLCT will offer engagement and prosocial behavior training opportunities to our boards, members and staff.
- **Resources.** VLCT will build and maintain resources that assist members with engagement and prosocial behavior practices.
- **Communications.** VLCT will promote inclusion of diverse voices, perspectives and imagery in our messaging and publications.

## VLCT’s Role

VLCT is a membership-based organization that provides services and resources to Vermont’s municipalities. Member elected and appointed officials (and staff) avail themselves of these benefits as they choose. VLCT does not tell member municipalities what to do, but rather provides direction on what should be considered when making decisions, and helps identify activities or policies that might be of assistance.

Our members include cities and towns (regular) as well as other “political subdivisions of the state,” including villages, fire districts, regional planning commissions and others (associate). Recipients of our benefits must hold an official office for the municipality.

## The Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee

### Charge

The Civic Engagement and Belonging Committee's charge is to advise the VLCT staff and Board of Directors on how best to improve engagement and prosocial behavior to foster stronger, more connected communities.

### Scope of Work

The Committee's work will assist municipalities (external) as well as VLCT's operations (internal). The action plan will establish tasks and a timeline to accomplish them.

### Member Assistance

The committee will discuss and investigate tools municipalities may need and how to develop them, as well as explore other ways the League can support its members as they seek to establish a culture of engagement, belonging and prosocial behavior in their own communities.

In addressing the scope of work, the Committee must be mindful of the following considerations:

- Municipal officials need practical tips and resources to engage in community conversations and requests for action.
- Municipal officials need tools to facilitate leadership to maximize engagement and belonging within their governing boards, at municipal meetings, and their communities.
- In many cases, member municipalities may need help understanding how to better engage with new Vermonters, historically under-represented Vermonters, and people who feel alienated from the traditional power structures of government.
- Vermont's towns are mostly small to medium-sized, with an average population of 1200 and with little to no staff capacity to assist equity efforts. Governing board members may take the lead or formally appoint volunteer committees or individuals to help them.
- Most municipalities don't provide services beyond statutory requirements.
- VLCT's relationship with municipal members, and the League's role to provide assistance and options.

Within the scope of work are several core issues the Board believes must be considered:

- Operational issues/best practices/ standards
- Municipal communications (municipal websites, public notices, forms, advertising, information sharing)
- Meeting formats (remote, hybrid, in-person)
- Municipal recruitment, hiring, and human resources practices, including recruitment for volunteer positions on boards and commissions
- Equitable budget processes
- Effective resident engagement
- Community development – planning, housing, businesses
- Data collection and data driven decision making
- Reducing current barriers to accessibility and innovating and promoting new pathways for access

Other considerations for municipalities may include:

- Law enforcement policies in accordance with the town’s voted governance structure
- Human services provision
- Overall service delivery and accessibility
- Facilities accessibility
- Improving voter participation

Potential tools and resources the Committee may recommend developing or promoting can include but are not limited to:

- Best practices by area or topic, such as:
  - Creation of a learning and resource hub
  - Creation of a community of practice for municipal officials participating in engagement and belonging work
- Templates for policies, resolutions, and other municipal documents
- Communications and facilitation tools to help with difficult conversations
- The Vermont Secretary of State’s 2025 Civic Health Index Report and Civics Program.

The VLCT Board recognizes the enormous breadth and depth of the work to be accomplished and acknowledges that it, in fact, will never be finished. The Board will work with the Committee to address additional areas of exploration and scope as they arise.

Adopted by the VLCT Board of Directors on June 18, 2026