



Equitable Policies & Practices Businesses Related to the Built Environment in Vermont

Inspiration for this document taken from International Living Future Institute's [JUST Label](#)

This document was put together by members of the [Alliance for Equity in the Built Environment](#) in 2021. We are a group of volunteers representing various AEC+ companies in Burlington, Vermont, with a shared mission of dismantling racism in the built environment. We took inspiration for this document from the JUST label, but looked at it through a Vermont-specific lens. This document is not comprehensive, nor will it likely ever be "finished." The intent is to use this space to update and share equitable business policies and practices for consideration by Vermont companies looking to be more socially responsible, equitable, and a part of the dismantling of white supremacy in both blatant and subversive contexts in our professional lives.

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Diversity & Inclusion

Statistics and Demographics of Vermont

Description

Understanding the demographics of the areas you live and work are important considerations when determining policies for your business or organization. Having policies for businesses and organizations that reflect the state's diversity is a good start.

Vermont historically has been largely caucasian with a very small percentage racial diversity in its population. The most recent US Census Bureau counts for 2020 highlight this.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Total state population | 643,077 |
| <i>Racial Diversity</i> | |
| Caucasian | 94.2% |
| Black or African American | 1.4% |
| American Indian and Alaska native | 0.4% |
| Asian | 1.9% |
| Hisppanic or Latino | 2.0% |
| Two or more races | 2.0% |

This is relevant because the case is always made that Vermont is too white to have diverse businesses, but the demographics of our firms don't represent the demographics of our communities in many cases (i.e. greater Burlington area). In more populated areas, there tends to be a higher percentage of racial diversity in Vermont such as the cities of Burlington and Winooski. It is advisable to obtain the demographics for your region or area in Vermont for reference. However, it is recommended to base your policies on future projections of diversity in the northeast or the entire US. It is predicted that whites will drop below 50% of the total population with an increase in minorities throughout the country and having a goal more representative of the country at large should be considered.

Policy



For developing policies involving ethnic diversity, they are based on the diversity of your area or state. Start with looking at your county or region first and make a determination as to whether to use this or the entire state.

Another consideration is to look at the profession that your business represents. What is the diversity at large within the profession? Would this be a good indicator to consider when developing an ethnic diversity policy for your business that may be a better goal than just considering the population diversity of your region or the state..

Develop workforce goals based on racial and ethnic minority population of the area (by county or region: northeast kingdom, upper valley, southern vermont, etc).

Other Resources

Several resources that we recommend are below.

1. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/VT>
2. <https://vcgi.vermont.gov/data-release/2020-census-data>
3. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/3-ways-that-the-u-s-population-will-change-over-the-next-decade>

Ethnic Diversity

Description

Having a diverse workforce that represents employees identities that should include but are not limited to religion, sex, race, national or ethnic origin, age, citizenship status, marital status, family status, mental or physical disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and formerly incarcerated.

Many companies over the past several years have been incorporating diversity policies in the workplace. McKinsey & Company has studied and prepared reports and updates on diversity in the workplace which are good resources. However, the statistics have considerable room for improvement. Some of their findings include:

- Companies within the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity at the senior leadership level are 33% more likely to have higher financial returns compared to companies in the bottom quartile.



- Companies in the bottom quartile for ethnicity and race at the senior leadership level are statistically less likely to achieve above-average financial returns than the average companies in the data set (that is, bottom-quartile companies are lagging rather than merely not leading).
- In the United States, there is a linear relationship between racial and ethnic diversity and better financial performance. For every 10 percent increase in racial and ethnic diversity on the senior leadership team, earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) rise 0.8 percent.
- Racial and ethnic diversity has a stronger impact on financial performance in the United States than gender diversity, perhaps because earlier efforts to increase women's representation in the top levels of business have already yielded some positive financial impact.

Being relevant in today's world for businesses is important and having a diverse workforce is part of this. Creating a strategy for ethnic diversity within a business makes financial sense.

Policy

The following are recommended policies for Vermont companies.

1. Business/organization has a written policy documenting their commitment to an ethnically diverse workforce.
2. The workforce should be representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the population in the region (area or region in the state or a larger area such as the Northeast) where the business/ organization attracts talent. First determine what the racial and ethnic minority population in the region is by percent of the total region population. Whatever the percent of racial and ethnic minority is, the business/organization should strive for at least 100 percent of this number of minorities.to be part of their workforce.
3. Using the percent of racial and ethnic minority population in the region determined above for the business/organization should strive for at least 80 percent of this number for minority representation at the senior leadership level.
4. Business/organization should develop a strong engagement and partnership strategy with one or more NGOs, community-based organizations, racial equity advocacy organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies that serve and work closely with traditionally underrepresented or underserved populations in Vermont.



Other Resources

Several resources that we recommend are below.

- <https://www.aecf.org/series/race-matters-collection>
- <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/diversity-inclusion/best-practices/assets/the-pwc-diversity-journey.pdf>
- <https://diversityproject.com/sites/default/files/resources/Pwc-Diversity%20Project%20-%20Diversity%20is%20the%20Solution.pdf>

Gender Diversity

Description

It is important for a workplace to have gender diversity. There are copious studies showing that a business or organization's operational and financial performance is improved with a diverse workforce. Several reasons for prioritizing gender diversity in a business or organization include:

- Offers a larger talent pool,
- Myriad of perspectives represented in a business/organization helps foster innovation and creativity,
- Provides opportunities for enhanced collaboration,
- Improves staff retention through an inclusive workforce, and
- Increased profitability.

People have different viewpoints, perspectives, ideas, insights, and approaches, all of which enable better problem solving. An inclusive workforce includes individuals who identify as non-binary. A person is non-binary if their gender identity is something other than male or female. Non-binary individuals may identify as gender fluid, genderqueer, agender (without gender), off the binary, or something else entirely.

Policy

1. Business/organization has a written policy that documents commitment to a gender diverse workforce.
2. Women constitute at least 50 percent of the overall business/ organization's workforce.
3. Women constitute at least 35 percent of the business/organizations' senior leadership team.



Other Resources

- <https://centreforglobalinclusion.org/>

Inclusion

Description

Understanding what inclusion is and looks like in a business/organization's culture is often lacking clarity. It really focuses on when people feel supported, respected, and valued for their individuality.

A definition of inclusion is the proactive and sustained organizational practice of creating a safe, warm, welcoming, and supportive environment for all employees. Inclusion is the support for a collaborative environment that values open participation from individuals with different backgrounds, ideas, viewpoints, and perspectives.

Policy

A business/organization should have the following policies:

1. A written policy committing to creating and maintaining an inclusive work environment and culture.
2. Conducts an inclusion survey annually and reports an average score at least 75% rating scale.

Other Resources

- <https://centreforglobalinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GDEIB-APRIL-2021-1.pdf>



Equity

Full-time Employment

Description

Employment of at least 30 hours per week with the appropriate pay and benefits, including medical benefits. Part-time employment typically does not provide insurance, retirement plans, or professional advancement opportunities. Some considerations regarding full-time employment:

- a. without the benefits that come with full-time employment, a person often needs to work multiple jobs;
- b. full-time employment demonstrates an organization's commitment to its employees and to the value they bring to the organization,
- c. full time employment provides stability and predictability so that a person/family can invest in their community,
- d. full time employment provides vacation and sick days;
- e. employers view their full-time employees as a long-term investment and are more likely to promote them than part-time employees.

Policy

1. written policy that documents the organization's intent to provide full-time employment for a minimum of 85% of the total workforce.

Other Resources

- <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/advantages-of-employment>
- https://www.google.com/url?q=https://living-future.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL_WEBSITE_Just_2_0_Manual.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1631275209766000&usg=AOvVaw2I_2a4ErPdZA3a9PtFpZAH

Pay Equity

Description

Equal pay for all human beings, independent of race or gender, when doing the same or substantially the same job, requiring the same level of skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.

Some considerations for why pay equity is important:



- i. to eliminate systemic bias and discrimination that undervalues work traditionally performed by women,
- ii. to ensure that women, LQBTQIA+, and non-white males are compensated equally for work of equal value to that of white males,
- iii. equal-pay litigation against employers has increased dramatically

Pay equity is shown to increase efficiency, creativity and productivity by helping to attract the best employees, reduce turnover and increase commitment to the organization, b) it's the right thing to do.

Policy

1. Written policy that documents the organization's pay-scale equity between all employees, independent of gender or race,
2. Conduct a company-wide audit every 3 years as a critical tool to identify pay disparities and opportunities to improve equity
3. Individual compensation reviews occur annually.

Other Resources

- http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/EN/AboutUs/Pages/the_difference.aspx
- <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/spring2020/pages/importance-of-pay-equity.aspx>
- <https://changethestoryvt.org/employers/payequity/>
- https://www.google.com/url?q=https://living-future.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL_WEBSITE_Just_2_0_Manual.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1631275209766000&usg=AOvVaw2I_2a4ErPdZA3a9PtFpZAH

Living Wage

Description

A living wage is “enough to meet basic needs and to provide some discretionary income”. It is a market-based approach that draws upon geographically specific expenditure data related to a family's likely minimum food, childcare, health insurance, housing, transportation, and other necessities (e.g., clothing, personal care items, etc.) costs. It does not contain money for leisure time or unpaid vacations or holidays and it does not provide a financial means for planning for the future through savings and investment or for the purchase of capital assets.



Without a livable wage, people need to work excessive overtime hours or multiple jobs; can be denied access to food, shelter, nutrition, health, housing and education; suffer social deprivations such as being unable to take part in cultural or school events; are unable to withstand crises such as ill health.

Workers on living wages are likely to be more productive because they are better motivated; less likely to leave which reduces attrition and leads to lower recruitment and training costs; and are healthier, thus reducing loss of working hours due to sickness.

Policy

Written policy that documents the organization pays a living wage for its location as calculated by HUD's income limits as shown in the following table for 2021:.

| FY 2021 Income Limit Area | Median Family Income Click for More Detail | FY 2021 Income Limit Category | Persons in Family | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|--------|---------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Burlington- South Burlington, VT MSA | \$95,900 | Very Low (50%) Income Limits (\$) | 33,600 | 38,400 | 43,200 | 47,950 | 51,800 | 55,650 | 59,500 | 63,300 |
| | | Click for More Detail | | | | | | | | |
| | | Extremely Low Income Limits (\$)* | 20,150 | 23,000 | 25,900 | 28,750 | 31,050 | 35,580 | 40,120 | 44,660 |
| | | Click for More Detail | | | | | | | | |
| | | Low (80%) Income Limits (\$) | 53,700 | 61,400 | 69,050 | 76,700 | 82,850 | 89,000 | 95,150 | 101,250 |
| | | Click for More Detail | | | | | | | | |

Note: The HUD Living Wage Calculator aims to provide an accurate estimate of the true costs of living in U.S. local areas. Under HUD's new forecasting approach since 2021, its living wage estimates should be more sensitive to recent local changes in housing costs.

Other Resources

- <https://livingwage.mit.edu/resources/Living-Wage-Users-Guide-Technical-Document-2021-05-21.pdf>
- <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2021/2021summary.odn>
- <https://www.ethicaltrade.org/issues/living-wage-workers>
- https://www.google.com/url?q=https://living-future.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL_WEBSITE_Just_2_0_Manual.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1631275209766000&usg=AOvVaw2I_2a4ErPdZA3a9PtFpZAH



Wage Ratio

Description

Fair compensation scales through a maximum limit on the ratio between highest-compensated and lowest compensated employee. An April 2013 study by Bloomberg finds that large public company CEOs were paid an average of 204 times the compensation of rank-and-file workers in their industries. By comparison, it is estimated that the average CEO was paid about 20 times the typical worker's pay in the 1950s, with that multiple rising to 42-to-1 in 1980, and to 120-to-1 in 2000". While not as extreme, similar trends have been observed around the world.

To reduce the large compensation discrepancies between the overvalued senior executives and the undervalued lowest job classifications.

Some benefits include:

- increases staff commitment to firm,
- increases productivity and retention,
- benefits company's work products,
- demonstrates an organization's commitment to its employees and to the value they bring to the organization

Policy

1. Written policy that documents the organization's maximum compensation scale ratio of lowest to highest pay scale,
2. Company-wide audit every 3 years to ensure wage ratio is maintained.

Other Resources

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wage_ratio
- https://www.google.com/url?q=https://living-future.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL_WEBSITE_Just_2_0_Manual.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1631275209766000&usg=AOvVaw2I_2a4ErPdZA3a9PtFpZAH

Freedom of Association

Description

Freedom of association encompasses both an individual's right to join or leave groups voluntarily, the right of the group to take collective action to pursue the interests of its members, and the right of an association to accept or decline membership based on



certain criteria. Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 states: “Employees shall have the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection, and shall also have the right to refrain from any or all of such activities except to the extent that such right may be affected by an agreement requiring membership in a labor organization as a condition of employment as authorized in section 158 (a)(3) of this title.”

Policy

1. A written policy that documents freedom of association principles and workplace democracy.

Other Resources

- <http://ufcwlocal8d.com/know-your-rights/section-7-rights/>
- https://www.google.com/url?q=https://living-future.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL_WEBSITE_Just_2_0_Manual.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1631275209766000&usg=AOvVaw2I_2a4ErPdZA3a9PtFpZAH



Employee Benefits, Health & Well-Being

Healthcare

Description

Offering plans/funds allow employees to access the care they need equitably, rather than just offering each employee the same exact thing when their needs may be different.

Policy

1. ACA uses ~9% of pay as a threshold for an “affordable” plan - this is a good benchmark.
2. Ensure health care plans/funds
 - a. cover mental health care to the same extent that cover physical health care
 - b. Cover care specific to LGBTQ+ populations, and gender-affirming care
 - c. Have a large network of providers in the area, who represent diverse populations in their own identities

Paid Leave

Policy

1. Employees encouraged to use time off
2. Any family/parental leave offered to people of all genders
3. No religious holidays are prioritized over others

Overall Health & Well-Being

Ranges from building design to workplace culture.

Physical Health

Some strategies may include ensuring frequent breaks throughout the day, providing facilities such as bike racks and showers, incentives to promote non-vehicular transportation, discounts on gym memberships, healthy snacks and food at company events, standing desks and ergonomic furniture, etc.



Green incentives: free bus passes, free bike tune-ups, money for good walking shoes, etc.

[CDC's Workplace Health Model](#) is used to assess the progress of physical health promotion

Mental Health

Reducing stress and energizing employees. Some strategies may include keeping to 40-hour work week, assistance for mental health costs (counseling, etc), legal assistance for divorce or other personal issues, create a culture allowing/encouraging use of “sick time” (if differentiated from other PTO) for mental health not just physical illness, access to green spaces, access to quiet spaces, etc.

Upper management modeling behavior for all employees -- overtime hours, actually taking vacations, taking time to unplug, boundaries around when is “work time” and when is “personal time”, etc.

Management periodically checks on mental health / stress / well-being with all employees.

Workplace Safety

LEVEL 1

1. Organization has a written policy that documents its work to optimize the physical health status of employees.
2. Organization has a written policy that documents its work to optimize the emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of employees.

LEVEL TWO

1. Organization has a written policy that documents its work to optimize the physical health status of employees.
2. Organization has completed Steps 1 (Workplace Health Assessment) and 2 (Planning The Program) of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Workplace Health Model. Alternatively, organizations that have achieved WELL Building Certification at the Silver Level or Fitwel Certification at the 1 Star Level can apply for this level of recognition.
3. Organization has a written policy that documents its work to optimize the emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of employees.
4. Organization has begun planning and has initiated some components of a comprehensive employee well-being program (that includes flexible working



arrangements, mindfulness training, financial education, lactation/ breastfeeding room, meditation/prayer/reflection space, gender neutral bathrooms, employee resource groups, employee assistance programs, planned social/volunteer outings, and counseling programs).

LEVEL THREE

1. Organization has a written policy that documents its work to optimize the physical health status of employees.
2. Organization has completed Steps 1, 2 and 3 (Implementing The Program) of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Workplace Health Model. Alternatively, organizations that have achieved WELL Building Certification at the Gold Level or Fitwel Certification at the 2 Star Level can apply for this level of recognition.
3. Organization has a written policy that documents its work to optimize the emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of employees.
4. Organization has initiated and provides documentation of a comprehensive employee well-being program.

LEVEL FOUR

1. Organization has a written policy that documents its work to optimize the physical health status of employees.
2. Organization has completed Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Evaluation) of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Workplace Health Model. Alternatively, organizations that have achieved WELL Building Certification at the Platinum Level or Fitwel Certification at the 3 Star Level can apply for this level of recognition.

Student Debt Reimbursement



Networks

- f. Equitable & Environmental Purchasing
- g. Sourcing services from BIPOC-owned and run businesses

Community

- h. Volunteerism
- i. Charitable Giving
- j. Fostering Welcoming & Safe Communities