

DOI -- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

If the Governor has issued a Proclamation for the State why does each town have to do it?

Discussion by citizens of each town is important and each town should decide on what form implementation should take. Each town can craft a statement of declaration, within our guidelines, to reflect the wishes of town leadership and citizenry.

If we like our town the way it is why should we want to adopt your statement?

To make Vermont a popular and desirable destination, every town should be respectful and welcoming to all residents. Ideally every resident should feel a sense of belonging. Most towns are struggling to maintain population and therefore maintain tax base; new residents bring vitality.

I have never seen any racism in our town so why would we want to adopt your statement?

Racism is rarely seen or felt by those who are not a target of it. We want to create a statewide culture of tolerance and welcoming for moral reasons but also for economic reasons: Vermont needs people and it needs younger people.

Does adopting this statement open the town to increased liability?

The legal team at Vermont League of Cities and Towns has looked at our recommended statement and determined that towns do not increase their liability in any way by adopting.

If our town adopts a declaration, is some form of implementation expected?

Yes, we have a Guide to Implementation on our website:

vtdeclarationofinclusion.org. In addition, VLCT has created an implementation toolkit. Making the citizens aware of the Declaration,

If our town adopts your declaration will implementation be an additional expense?

Implementation is important and most steps can be done at little or no cost.

The Vermont Community Foundation has established a fund of \$200,000 for

consultants which towns can apply up to \$10,000. Some towns have engaged to administer implicit bias training and to examine town ordinances for implicit bias.

Why do we need to sign a piece of paper?

The Declaration of Inclusion is really a pledge by town leadership to urge the citizens to be more respectful and accepting of all people. In addition, this is a statewide effort with far reaching implications for Vermont and for each town.

To make this happen we need to state our intentions clearly and then our citizens must really live it. For this to happen, a signed statement by the Select Board will be important as a visible example to follow.

**DECLARATION OF INCLUSION
A VERMONT DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INITIATIVE**

**** PREPARED FOR GOVERNMENT LEADERS ****

Vermont's Declaration of Inclusion is a grassroots effort working with community leaders to reinforce the message that Vermont is a welcoming and safe place for all.

The following information is intended for use by those who are interested in learning more about this initiative as well as providing thoughts for Selectboard members, Town Managers and Administrators, and Legislators who wish to lead this initiative in their respective communities.

Our Partners

- Vermont Chamber of Commerce
- Vermont Interfaith Action
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Vermont Social Equity Caucus
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – Vermont

Visit Our Website: www.vtdeclarationofinclusion.org

INTRODUCTION

It is our vision that Vermont will become known as the most inclusive state in our nation for all people, regardless of how they identify.

With that vision in mind, a small group of Rutland County residents organized in January of 2021 to develop strategies to assist the cities, and towns in the planning, adoption, and implementation of a Declaration of Inclusion.

Goal Statement

To have each Vermont municipality adopt and implement a Declaration of Inclusion.

ADOPT means formal approval by the municipality's governing body.

IMPLEMENT means the development of plans, programs and the initiation of actions which support and advance both the intent and the spirit of the Declaration. Some ideas are found in the Resources Section of: www.vtdeclarationofinclusion.org.

For more specific information, guidance and assistance please consult the following: Vermont Office of Racial Equity and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

Bob Harnish, Pittsford

Al Wakefield, Mendon

Norman Cohen, Rutland City

BACKGROUND

Distressed by recent catastrophic events unfolding across the country relating to human rights, justice, and equality, Bob Harnish, a long-time resident of Pittsford, decided to do something. His concern led him to Al Wakefield, a former businessman in the Rutland area, who shared similar distress and felt a need to do something “hands-on.”

Together, the pair began crafting an overarching statement that would build on Vermont’s agreed upon uniqueness, its long-standing reputation for being a leader in addressing injustices, and ensure that events occurring in Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, and other states do not happen here. They realized that, at the same time, such a statement could attract people with myriad skills and traditions to Vermont to live, work, and raise families.

They found that statement in the Declaration of Inclusion first adopted by the Town of Franklin in 2020.

Intent of the Declaration of Inclusion

The intent of the Declaration of Inclusion is to promote and reinforce the message to all visitors, residents, and those thinking about or planning to come and stay, that:

- Vermont is a welcoming community
- Vermont invites all to bring their families and friends, as well as their talents and skills
- Vermont is a community of people who will treat them fairly, provide encouragement and support for their interests, and
- Vermont will bring the full resources of the State, its cities, and towns to ensure their well-being and security.

REASONS TO ADOPT THE DECLARATION

A Declaration such as this would mark the town and its leaders as a forward-thinking community of people, stepping out in front for what we know is right and deeply rooted in the values that America and Vermont say they champion.

We all learned early in our schooling that America assimilates people from all over the world. America has always welcomed diverse people and embraced their cultures, languages, foods, customs, and religions. This is nothing new. The Statue of Liberty is our monument to this sacred tradition. Let's take this small but affirmative step to continue this most meaningful piece of our heritage.

THOUGHTS ON SELECTBOARD LEADERSHIP

Selectboard members are recognized by their towns for their leadership skills and are respected for their good judgment.

Acting on a Declaration of Inclusion is the type of Selectboard action that is expected by the voters.

The role of the Selectboard is changing. It is no longer limited to budgets, law enforcement, and maintaining infrastructure.

Selectboards are now called upon to affirmatively and aggressively institute and promote policies and programs which support economic growth

By adopting a Declaration of Inclusion, a Selectboard sends a powerful, positive, forward-thinking message for the town and aligns it with other towns that are seeking healthy growth.

By adopting the Declaration of Inclusion the Selectboard joins the statewide effort to encourage businesses, talented individuals, and investors to come to Vermont and specifically to your town. By adopting the Declaration of Inclusion the Town signals its agreement with the Governor's Proclamation of Inclusion.

DECLARATION OF INCLUSION

The Town of _____ condemns racism and welcomes all persons regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age or disability and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community.

As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all our actions, policies and operating procedures reflect this commitment.

The Town of _____ is and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.

Adopted this _____ day of _____, 20____

Town/City of _____, Vermont

PROJECT INCLUSION

The objective of the Declaration of Inclusion is to increase diversity, abolish racism, and have our Towns, their employees, and policies manifest respect for the dignity of all people. This is the obligation of our largely white population and we will benefit and grow from it.

Municipal leaders and law enforcement officials must engage effectively with community members on the subject of systemic racism, racial justice, public safety, and law enforcement. They must lead the public in conversation on these and other issues important to an increasingly diverse population.

Contact Us

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