

Racial Disparities Issues- VNAAC Recommendations

Dear Xusana Davis and members of the Vermont Racial Equity Task Force:

Thank you so much for taking the time to request recommendations from our working group and soon-to-be registered nonprofit organization, the Vermont New American Advisory Council (VNAAC). We also appreciate that you granted our request to include representative(s) from the New American community on the Vermont Racial Equity Task Force.

We want to strongly advocate for a more proactive and inclusive process when it comes to equity in the state of Vermont. Given the demographics of Vermont, it should not have been needed for us to advocate for a New American to be included in the Task Force. In fact, many decision-making processes have taken place in Vermont without proactive and meaningful outreach to or engagement with the New American community. Rather, this outreach or engagement seems to be an afterthought, done quickly, and at the last minute. One concrete example is the lack of accessible communication from the State of Vermont to our communities. We recognize and appreciate the hard work of Governor Phil Scott and the administration to provide lifesaving communication in the fight against Covid-19. However, few, if any, of those communication processes have involved translation or interpretation services to communities whose primary language is not English.


We are writing to you from a collaborative but not judgmental view. This is a request to establish a partnership with our state government in serving communities that have traditionally been left without a voice in decision-making processes. The Vermont New American Advisory Council is a coalition of New American leaders already serving our Green Mountain State in areas of health care, education, small business, local and state government, housing, social work, and more. Most importantly, we are in the field and we understand our communities, what people need and want, and how to help them access the benefits and supports to which they are entitled.

As a team of dedicated New American leaders striving for equity and justice, we want to support your initiatives that we believe are geared toward serving the most vulnerable populations in our state. Please harness the lived experience, depth of knowledge and expertise from our working group by consulting us and collaborating with us to make sure no Vermonters are left behind, and all Vermonters, regardless of their background, feel that they belong in our state and are able to live, work, play and thrive in our communities.

VNAAC

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VNAAC's recommendations below focus on New American perspectives. We look forward to further discussing these recommendations with you:

1. Access to COVID-19 funds

- Intentional investment in racial and ethnic equity initiatives via the funding of community groups
- Fair representation and participation of ALL service recipients' communities at the design/planning stage of all of these services, programs, and initiatives
- Tailored technical support available and accessible in multiple languages
- Culturally responsive outreach and communication efforts
- Data recording system to ensure fair and equitable distribution of available resources

2. Access to COVID-19 testing

- Create a delivery system with culturally responsive processes by collaborating and contracting with community groups which operate in requested areas of action to safely
- No first register requirements before getting tested. Due to technology literacy and systematic issues, all barriers to testing should be banned
- Informational/educational material (brochures, flyers) about COVID-19 should be made available in all of the major spoken languages, at all testing sites, and distributed to every person in need
- Masks, as well as hand sanitizer samples, should also be available for every person to grab on their way out at testing sites
- Assure funding to Community Health Workers (CHW), Cultural Brokers(CB), or case managers, community groups aftercare processes and plans design capacity as well as to help with transportation to testing sites

3. Job loss and its impact on housing affordability and relocation

- Evaluation of current services and programs
- Collect data on the experiences and needs of service recipients
- Creation of a culturally responsive, inclusive, and accessible support services system (housing vouchers, rental assistance, etc.) and homeownership programs with tailored outreach activities
- Intentional hiring of people of color--in every sector, at every level, with tailored childcare subsidy support and professional development opportunities (ie. adult education and training to fill existing gaps and inequities)

4. Law enforcement

- Diversity of police officers--intentional efforts in the hiring, recruitment, and retention of POC and multilingual staff in police departments

- De-escalation and cultural responsiveness training for law enforcement staff
 - New American representation in planning, committees, and decision making
 - Encourage public engagement with law enforcement by organizing events and creating conversation opportunities with police departments/officers
- 5. Education**
- Review existing equity audits and reports (Burlington School District audit)
 - Reform licensing policies and processes to allow fair access to New American professionals with credentials and degrees from their home countries (teachers, educators, nurses, social workers...)
 - Hiring multilingual and POC, not only as teachers and support staff, but also at all administrative levels
- 6. Tech Infrastructure**
- Make technology access universal: access to the internet and technology education with relevant, and accessible language support;
 - Increased investment in adult technology education (see Burlington School District’s Parent University program) with stipends for working parents
- 7. Family services, behavioral health, and the slowdown of government services due to COVID-19**
- Appreciation and compensation: Credentials of many immigrants/New Americans were (often on a temporary basis) recognized in the medical field and in other fields with recognized “essential workers,” putting these individuals on the frontline
 - Review quality of service provision versus the quantity of service provision
 - Assessment and analysis of gaps and shortcomings of current programs and services
 - Planning and development of more sustainable service delivery systems to fill and avoid the creation of gaps in services for New Americans, and creation of crisis support system for the most vulnerable
- 8. Information dissemination and communication with the public**
- Assure ongoing funding to New American community groups, such as VNAAC, for outreach and dissemination activities
 - Ensure New American community groups’ meaningful involvement in the designing/planning and assessment of services and programs
 - Diversify state offices’ workforce by intentionally reforming their hiring processes and cultures

The VT New American Advisory Council

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