



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan

A Strengthening of our Commitment

Introduction

Venture For America is committed to prioritizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in all of our programs and stands solidly with the Black community and all Racial and Ethnic Minorities.

While we've taken many steps over past years to become an onramp to entrepreneurship for underrepresented communities, we partnered with Yardstick Management to conduct a full audit on our DEI practices. This engagement culminated in an assessment highlighting short and long-term opportunities for growth in each department. We also received a list of demands, requests, and recommendations from a collective of Fellows on how we can better support underrepresented members of the Fellowship community.

Our Team then worked to combine these recommendations into a comprehensive DEI implementation plan. This document is an external-facing summary of this extensive plan that highlights our overarching goals. We acknowledge that this is a starting point on a long-term dedication to how we can better live up to our commitment to DEI, and we look forward to partnering with our community to achieve these aims.

Venture For America

Key Terms

We understand that race, ethnicity, gender, and other aspects of identity are social constructs; therefore, all language used to discuss the multiple identities we hold will be inherently flawed. However, in the interest of being clear on our intentions, we wanted to share why we used some of the language we did. Some definitions are based on language from the D5 Coalition, Racial Equity Tools Glossary, Independent Sector, and UC Berkeley:

Diversity

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. While diversity is often used in reference to race, ethnicity, and gender, we embrace a broader definition of diversity that also includes age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance.

Equity

The fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources.

Inclusion

By this, we mean the act of creating environments in which any individual or groups can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate.

An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. It's important to note that while an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group isn't always inclusive.

Racial and Ethnic Minority (REM)

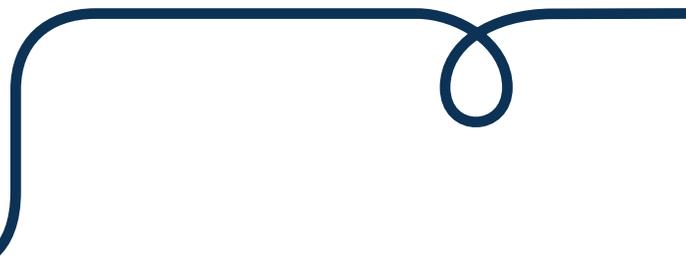
Throughout this document, we use the term Racial and Ethnic Minority as an umbrella term when discussing individuals that do not identify as non-Latinx white individuals.

Under-Represented Minority (URM) / Under-Represented Communities

By this, we specifically refer to individuals who identify (in whole or part) as Black/African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Native American or Native Hawaiian, as these groups are significantly underrepresented in tech and entrepreneurship relative to other groups.

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC)

By this, we refer to individuals who do not identify as cis-generated male or female (e.g., as an umbrella term for all individuals who might identify as trans, transgender, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary, etc.). We know it is imperfect as it centers male and female as something to 'conform' with.



Our Timeline: 2020-2021

RFP released for
DEI Consultant

DECEMBER

We received 5 strong proposals
and Yardstick was hired to
conduct DEI audit

MARCH

Yardstick reviewed internal
documents & conducted
focus groups with the
Team, Alums, and Fellows.

APRIL

MAY

VFA received demands from Build
21 & RISE Leads and we combined
those with our recommendations
from Yardstick

JUNE

Departmental Actions

Talent

- Recruitment, Selection, and Confirmation and Onboarding
 - Recruit a diverse Class of 2021 with applicants from a wide range of backgrounds
 - Build awareness of our commitment to DEI across our networks so that all prospects can see themselves belonging at VFA
 - Design an equitable and anti-oppressive Selection Model
 - Prepare all incoming Fellows for success in Match, Training Camp and integrating into their new cities
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Company Partnerships

- Expand the number of URM and women/GNC-owned/led company partners
 - Develop a standardized rubric for evaluating a company partner on the indicators we value, including DEI
 - Build a portfolio of company partners that meet our standards for a commitment to DEI
 - Provide resources for company partners to create a more inclusive workplace and team culture
 - Provide an equitable and inclusive Match experience for all Fellows
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Programs

- Design a diverse and inclusive 2021 Training Camp
- Ensure all Fellows experience VFA with a consistent level of satisfaction
- Equip incoming Fellows with a baseline to be able to self-educate on the history of their VFA placement city through the lens of racial injustice
- Entrepreneurship programming content is diverse and inclusive
- Entrepreneurship programming participation is diverse from the top of the funnel to the bottom
- VFA funding is distributed equitably across our Founder community

Marketing

- Provide Fellows greater control over how their likeness is used across our marketing collateral and promotional pieces
 - Utilize marketing tools to create a diverse pipeline of future VFA employees
 - Enhance marketing efforts to increase awareness of and participation in the Fellowship among REM, women/GNC and LGBTQ+ candidates
 - Support the Company Partnerships Team in generating additional traction with REM founders to create a more diverse slate of employers that hire Fellows
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Fundraising

- Ensure successful fundraising efforts for programming that directly supports Fellows from underrepresented groups
 - Build diverse and impactful Regional and National Advisory Boards
 - Create processes and policies that hold VFA donors to anti-racist standards
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Operations and Finance

- Define Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for VFA
 - Ensure equitable policies and processes for employee reviews and promotions
 - Diversify the Senior Leadership Team
 - Equip the VFA Team with the necessary DEI education and training to be internal and external change agents
 - Diversify the VFA Team
 - Maximize the potential of VFA's financial resources to bolster URM-owned businesses
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Governance

- Diversify the National Board of Directors
- Equip Board of Directors to monitor and evaluate success of DEI implementation plan

Looking Forward

While these actions provide a clear intent of our actions for this year and next, we're dedicated to being better standard bearers of DEI for the remainder of our organization's existence. It's imperative that we honor this commitment for our stakeholders of today and tomorrow.