

Vermont Commission on Women

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 10, 2020 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Remote Meeting via video and teleconferencing

Commissioners present:

Lisa Senecal (Chair), Ed Adrian, Nancy Brooks, Kellie Campbell, Mary Daly, Erica Hare, Kim Nolan, Marcia Merrill, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Lisa Ryan, Kerry Secrest, Heidi Tringe

Commissioners absent:

Lisa Carlson, Charlotte Dennett, Emilie Kornheiser

Advisors present:

Meredith Roberts of ANA-Vermont
Gwen Pokalo of the Center for Women & Enterprise
Amanda Hoffman of Girls On The Run Vermont
Jen Horwitz of Let's Grow Kids
Thea Wurzburg of U.S. Congressman Welch's Office
Katarina Lisaius of U.S. Senator Sanders' Office
Matt Levin of Vermont Early Childhood Alliance
Karen Tronsgard-Scott of Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Alison Lamagna of Vermont Works for Women
Pat Heffernan of Women Business Owners' Network
Katherine Vose and Marguerite Adelman of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Burlington Chapter

Guests: Jessica Nordhaus of Change The Story Vermont

Staff: Anna Brouillette, Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

Presiding: Lisa Senecal

Recording: Hannah Lane

1. Welcome/Introductions

Meeting called to order at 9:37 a.m.

Lisa welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves.

2. Approval of May Meeting Minutes

Approval of May 2020 Minutes

MOTION made by Kerry Secrest, seconded by Marcia Merrill

To approve the May 2020 minutes as submitted.

MOTION UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY ROLL CALL VOTE.

Roll Call

Mary – Yes
Marcia – Yes
Kerry S – Yes
Nancy – Yes
Lisa R – Yes
Ed – Yes
Heidi – yes
Kim - Yes
Kellie -Yes

Addition to agenda to approve meeting schedule for FY20-FY21.

In November, Veteran’s Day falls on the 2nd Wednesday, Hannah proposes meeting the day before on Tuesday, November 10.

Some folks have suggested that we continue meeting through the summer given everything going on, having a long break might not serve us.

Kellie and Nancy expressed support for this idea.

Approval of FY21 Meeting Schedule

MOTION made by Marcia to approve the schedule as presented, and to meet in July and August on the second Wednesday, seconded by Lisa Ryan.

Marcia moves to meet in July and in August. Lisa Ryan seconded.

MOTION UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED BY ROLL CALL VOTE.

Roll Call

Mary – Yes
Marcia – Yes
Nancy – Yes
Kerry – Yes
Ed – Yes
Lisa R – Yes
Kim – Yes
Heidi - Yes
Kellie – Yes

3. Change the Story VT

The steering committee has been discussing the possibility of extending Change The Story for another year. If we are going to do that, we might want to take some time to back up and think about the goals of Change The Story, and to be clear about the goals and objectives of extending the term. Jessica Nordhaus from Change The Story joins us and can chime in with a staff perspective. Kim Nolan, VCW advisor to Change The Story, and Lilly, who often join those meetings can also weigh in. Cary gave a brief overview of the origins and goals of Change The Story, and explained that the VT Women’s Fund is

interested in extending funding for CTS. What are your thoughts about the value of Change The Story, and whether we should continue?

Points raised:

Who will lead if Tiff gets elected? Tiff is running for election to the VT House of Representatives in her Burlington district. She has stepped way back in her role as director as she dedicates her time to the campaign. There is a question about whether we need to replace her time.

Jessica shared that the thought as of now is that she would become director, Aly's committed to continuing working at the existing number of hours through March, 2021, Jessica – 30 hrs/wk, Aly, 35 hours/wk. Tiff is working 5 hours per week through the end of December, primarily on evaluation, the racial equity learning community, and advocacy/testimony work. CTS may want to bring someone on for project-based work. Jessica has been there for 5 years, Aly for 1 and a half; they have a deep understanding of the work.

Have you talked nuts and bolts about how to plug into what's happening around Racial Equity and COVID-19?

Yes, and our work is primarily supporting our partners. Racial Equity Learning Community, Open Source Consulting, with our three partners and VT Network. Making sure that we are advocating for those who are hardest hit, ensuring our approach is intersectional and anti-racist.

Is a year enough? What happens when this is ending and the story hasn't changed?

We've been talking about how this work will continue when our partnership dissolved. We can't keep going forever, but we've learned a lot about how we can work together, amplify each other's work, and keep going? How do we maximize this time with formal staff, and think about how to continue afterward.

The Steering Committee meeting more often to have these conversations.

The VT Women's Fund might be interested in taking on this work in a more formal way, and we're discussing whether the Women's Fund will be able to pick up some of the pieces. The brand has become valuable – is there a way to carry forward the brand?

We need a two-pronged approach in terms of data collection. We need to be collecting data relative to women and people of color; this has to be embedded in every agency and across our work. The other prong is a deep investment in our IT system which are antiquated, and can't hold this data.

If we continue for another year, do you have thoughts about what CTS should focus on?

- Racial Equity
- Data

- Systemic focus, data is important. Building allyship now, so it's not so hard to be pushing. In this timeframe, how can we build a stronger network, help things get more integrated, with an eye towards structural change?
- The power of the relationship between the partner organizations, it is the power of the brand and mobilizing the networks of each of those partners. How do we mobilize people? The Change The Story brand is recognized and respected. What about Change The Story serving as a thought leader in the integration of the systemic data collection, internally. What each report has generated is that we don't have good data. I wonder if there is an opportunity for VCW to mobilize some research entities.
- Another question I have is about those questions we started to draft a few months ago. How do we make that report more intersectional, how do we connect themes? Do we have the right people around the table? Do we need to invite more people to the table so that we have representation?

4. Racial Justice

VCW is starting Racial Equity Learning Community with CTS, VWW, VWF, VT Network. We have hired Open Source Consulting to convene this group. VCW will send Hannah, Cary, Lisa S., and Kim N. Feminism has long been focused on issues primarily of concern to middle- and upper-class white women. We have focused too much on these issues while ignoring other important issues that impact different groups of women. If you have input about what we should be talking about and working on, please let us know. This is an internal learning process.

What are some ways that VCW can take action towards racial justice right now?

lots of resources out there right now, deconstructing white feminism. Incorporate racial justice resources on the website. Elevate the voices of women of color.

Just an observation, globally. I don't know everyone's economic profile, but I imagine it's not representative of State of Vermont, and the Commission is not representative of Vermont. Seek out people of color, lower-income folks,

We always stress with the appointing authorities that we need better representation, and we will continue to do this. Commissioners should be thinking about whether there people that you know to recommend to apply. Commissioners can talk to appointing authorities that you have relationships with and encourage them to appoint folks from diverse backgrounds. That's the Governor, Speaker of the House, the Senate Committee on Committees, for whom Lt. Governor Zuckerman accepts applications.

What are we doing to focus on this in schools? Better to teach early.

VCW policy should be reviewed, we want to make sure it is explicit that one of our goals is racial justice. Cary asked the Civil & Legal Rights Committee to review and come up with a proposal, or suggest another process.

Three hours in the middle of a workday is hard for people. Consider having shorter meetings towards the end of the day.

We need to bring more people to the table; being a Commissioner takes a level of privilege.

We are bringing in more folks to serve as advisors to the Commission, hopefully including a new group focused on incarcerated women.

I'm thinking about the racial equity task force, do you know how that's going? When they are meeting? Who is included?

Xusana Davis came before Social Equity Caucus, she is the chair, and is organizing this. Her vision is that the one position for a member of the public might be rotating and bringing in different folks coming different areas and communities. The Social Equity Caucus is following this and did push back about the fact that there is only one public member. They meet Wednesdays at 9:00 a.m.

5. Child care concerns

Child care at St. Mikes & UVM not reopening, there are concerns about health and safety of children and employees. Cary thought we should have a conversation about this. The perspective that we bring to this is of working women in Vermont - working parents, but especially women. Women need childcare to go to work, and this is one of the biggest impediments to equal pay and it's essential to the whole economy that parents have child care to go to work. At the same time, women who are working in this industry are underpaid and subjected to difficult work environments.

Points raised included:

We've talked about this quite a bit on the Education & Human Development Committee. There are a number of folks who are working this. Women are 7x more likely to cite child care as a reason for leaving the workforce, and this affects different populations of women differently.

What are family experiences looking like? What have family care needs been, how are they changing and evolving? Let's Grow Kids is doing survey with a long list of community partners. They released the survey yesterday. Only keeping it open for a week; it closes next Tuesday at 11:59 PM. Please share it widely. Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VTCOVID19familysurvey>

Lack of childcare is one of the top challenges we are hearing from women we support - it is preventing them from continuing job searches they were engaged in before COVID, and now is preventing women from returning to work. Employment and career specialist reports that almost every woman she was working with on job searches has had to halt because of child care concerns. This continues to be a major barrier to women returning to work. The wage gap exacerbates this because women often make less than their partners and it often makes economic sense for their family for them to be the ones to stay home.

We are communicating immediate needs, as well as long-term ways to build up the structural changes. What are the opportunities to make some immediate investments to sustain the early care infrastructure?

It's so effective when people write op-eds and letters to the editor. If we could get essential workers and childcare workers to write in about these issues so that communities can begin to understand how important this is for getting folks back to work.

Legislators and the business community both seem to understand the bigger picture and how important childcare is.

There is a legislator dashboard on the LGK website. Trying to illustrate stories and key pieces. Stories highlighting current challenges and what changes might help. Survey lets folks opt into sharing their stories with legislators via op-eds, etc.

How do we keep inequities front and center? How do we share information and stories that we have?

There are a lot of things that can be done, either at the organizational level and individual level. Call your legislators and share your stories. If you have a good story to tell, reach out and tell it.

At the national level, there have been a number of conversations related to this. ½ early care educators nationwide are women of color. How can we make sure the problems that existed before COVID-19 aren't exacerbated, and how do we address them and build a stronger early childhood education system?

6. Staff updates

Anna has created a data dashboard answering many of the questions that we've been asking. This is more of a visual report, due to technical and budgetary constraints. It has a nice combination of the data we can continuously update and indicators from reports that show how women are more impacted.

Anna shared her visual report with the group and provided a brief overview. Positive feedback all around from Commissioners and Advisors. Reach out to Anna with suggestions about how to make this stronger.

Budget update – House rejected Gov.'s proposal to fund the 1st FY21 quarter at 23% of FY20, and passed 25% of FY20. We will have to make some cuts to offset increases from FY20 – FY21, but it does not look like we'll have to cut staff time for the first quarter. Things may get harder in future quarters as we get revenue projections this summer.

Lisa Ryan offered a committee update. Sent out an email to Civil & Legal Rights Committee, asking two questions – about their capacity to stay engaged and what the committee should focus on? The overwhelming answer was yes. Some ideas they're considering include protection and education of civil rights, maternity leave, and access to voting rights. Both Rhoni and Alison have joined the Committee as advisors. Women, racial equity for most vulnerable at the center of decisions. Will concentrate on what takes priority.

7. Announcements

Cary shared that this is the last meeting for Kerry Secrest and Marcia Merrill. She offered thanks to both, who have been incredible for the Commission and we're grateful. We will continue to call on you for support in the future.

Lisa echoed Cary's sentiment and expressed regret that we couldn't say farewell in person.

We can contact the reporters we know and ask them to ask the questions we need answers to.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:43 a.m.