

Vermont Commission on Women Meeting Minutes
Friday, September 8, 2023 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
93 Pilgrim Park Rd, Waterbury Village Historic District, VT

Commissioners present:

In person: Esther Charlestin (co-chair), Sarah Mell (co-chair), Ashley Messier, and Kiah Morris.

Remotely: Wendy Knight

Advisors present:

In-person:

Jessica Barquist, Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Alison Lamagna, Vermont Works for Women
Margaret Overman, Vermont Works for Women

Remotely:

Katie Salina, Let's Grow Kids

Guests:

Staff: Cary Brown, Karen Cygnarowicz, and Ellie Lane (remotely)

Presiding: Esther Charlestin & Sarah Mell

Recording: Ellie Lane

Commissioners absent:

Hazel Brewster, Kellie Campbell, Brenda Churchill, Alex Hilliard, Nancy Kaplan, Sarah Lang, Annie Mackin, Sophia Rabe, and Lisa Senecal.

1. Call to order

Meeting called to order at 9:34 a.m.

2. Approve agenda

Approval of agenda postponed due to lack of quorum.

3. Review Group Agreements

4. Approval of June 21, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Postponed due to lack of quorum.

5. Welcome/Introductions & Group Building

Sarah thanked the Network and Jessica for hosting us in their space. Esther welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves and to share a happy memory from childhood or adulthood with the group.

6. Framing of work for year

Sarah talked about how they and Esther are thinking about our work for the year and how we integrate racial equity into all of our work, including tools that they might provide. Sarah called attention to the stories that Black women in Vermont have been sharing about their experiences with racism in our state. Sarah talked about centering who is impacted, who is centered, and asking “how is this impacting Black Vermonters?” about everything that we consider. And if we don’t know, why? Sarah offered to speak with any Commissioners, particularly white Commissioners, who have questions or don’t understand why we are centering this work.

Some of the points raised in discussion included:

- how these events are treated individually but we need to be connecting the dots and looking at Black women’s experiences with racism collectively
- what’s been happening in Burlington around Tyeastia Green investigation and the experiences of Black women and the backlash they have experienced as a result of showing up
- what could VCW’s role be in connecting the dots
- collaborating and supporting Xusana Davis
- looking ahead to public forums and how we can show up for folks, including the idea of these meetings having a service component that we could do to show up for our communities
- one person mentioned that she doesn’t really understand what she can and can’t do with her Commissioner hat on. Who is the permission giver? We need a framework for Commissioners and Advisors

What’s important to people in VCW’s work this year?

- Listening to women’s stories
- Trans youth
- Public engagement and how we can support communities
- Understanding culture
- Being bold
- Clarity, both in ourselves, who we are, what we think, and then in our outward communications.
- Clarity in our roles.
- Data collection and how we can get it, and advocating for compiling data that we can’t access.
- Public engagement and listening to what people need
- Shine a light on structural inequities
- Talk about patriarchy all the time
- Advocating for the consideration of gender equity at every decision-making
- Hearing from people who aren’t being heard in traditional channel
- Making the Commission safe for everyone who feels comfortable in a female-identified space
- How do we lift up the marginalized folks we say we want to hear from
- How do we center accessibility and put out front opportunities to ask for what people need to participate
- Creating a space where we can say “ouch”, disagree, and have hard conversations

7. Committee planning

Sarah talked about our [existing committees](#) from FY23: the Health Equity Committee, the Workplace Equity & Security Committee, and the Housing & Caregiving Committee. Sarah identified more narrow goals are easier to generate energy and get folks to show up. Sarah asked the group about what's been working and what hasn't been?

- When we have a specific and narrow goal it's easier for us to engage and feel like it's task-oriented and know what to do to make progress, like with the Equal Pay Compact.
- It tends to work better when there is a point person, or chair, for committees, who can make sure meetings get called and be a go-between person.
- What if we, as a Commission, identified two to three priority tasks and then established committees or working groups to work on those priorities
- If we had an agreement on what the work products are that should come out of our work that's distinctly different than what's happening in other spaces.
- Is VCW creating an annual report? If not, who is doing that?
- Building in a public comment period into agendas.
- Data-focused committee, a public engagement committee working on public forums.
- Rather than a data-focused committee, each committee should be focused on data.
- Can we keep our committee structure and provide directive to each committee about what to work on?
- Is there an opportunity to anticipate what's coming up at the state/policy level?
- Sometimes having a public agenda closes off public participation – because we're telling people what they need rather than the public telling us what they need.
- Part of the goal of going into community more is the non-legislative work. Where we might have more influence.
- Provide guidance to each committee, in terms of how they use data. A template.

Sarah proposed that we move forward with our existing committees and at the next meeting we decide as a group what the work of the committees should be. There were no objections.

8. Public forums planning

Identifying Commissioners to work on each of the locations at upcoming meetings to collaborate by bringing folks to the space, doing outreach, and letting folks know we are coming to the space. The Chairs have agreed to set the agendas early so folks know what we're talking about and what we want to hear about and can facilitate communications. Social media posting, boosting, and asking advisors to share.

Commissioners discussed length, timing, space, and goals.

The group decided to move the meeting to 10 am – 1 pm, and to have the public forum component from 12 – 1 pm over the lunch hour.

9. Staff updates

Ellie announced her pregnancy and anticipated parental leave beginning toward the end of November.

Cary talked about Act 80, which is the new workplace harassment and discrimination bill. One thing we're thinking about is that students were excluded from these protections, and we're hoping to see that change next session. The other piece is a public education component in regard to these legal changes, and we are talking with the Attorney General's Office and the Human Rights Commission about that and also looking at our Workplaces for All website and the updates that need to be made there. Additionally, we need to expand the employer resources, and how to look out for pitfalls. We need to expand support.

Cary shared that we're hoping for paid family and medical leave to pass this next session. The coalition is reenergized, and Charlie Gliserman at AARP is taking lead.

Karen talked about the Women Can Do conference, and asked if any Commissioners could commit to joining her an hour or two in Randolph. Please let her know soon.

Karen is working on producing more podcast episodes and would love any suggestions of good gender-equity focused podcasts.

Margaret talked about the Women Can Do conference for high school students about the trades.

Margaret talked about the Trailblazer's program and an event on September 21 in Hartford about the federal infrastructure money and gender equity requirements for those funds. She also shared that they are planning a Gender Equity Round table in December on Allyship.

Katie shared that Let's Grow Kids is planning celebration events about the passage of the child care bill, and to do some public education. They've launched a website explaining the bill.

<https://letsgrowkids.org/vermont-child-care-bill-act-76-educators-families-kids>

Jessica shared that the VT Network has two major events coming up, including Pride this weekend, and next week they will be hosting Shine. Vermont Network's Uplift campaign is working on resources for employers about how to create a culture free of violence and identified some potential for collaboration. They are launching a podcast soon as well about culture change.

Kiah will be performing at a fundraiser and festival next weekend, come join her.

8. Closing Out

Sarah asked folks to go around and share one word about how people are feeling after our first meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:26 p.m.