

State of Vermont
Vermont Commission on Women
126 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633-6801
women.vermont.gov

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Vermont Commission on Women
Meeting minutes

Friday, September 20th, 2024 | 9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Pavilion Office Building
4th Floor Conference Room
109 State Street, Montpelier, VT
And virtually

Commissioners present:

In-person: Chair Esther Charlestin, Heather Bouchey, Alex Hilliard, Kate Lucier, Sophia Rabe, Linda Joy Sullivan, Susan Sussman

Online: Kellie Campbell, Brenda Churchill, Alex Hilliard, Kelly-Rue Riso

Commissioners absent: Hazel Brewster, Nancy Kaplan, Annie Mackin, Ashley Messier

Advisors present: Margaret Overman of Vermont Works for Women

Staff: Cary Brown, Ellie Lane, and Emily O'Hara

Presiding: Esther Charlestin

Recording: Ellie Lane & Emily O'Hara

1. Meeting called to order

Meeting called to order at **9:35 a.m.**

2. Approve Agenda

MOTION made by Brenda, seconded by Susan

To approve the proposed amended meeting agenda, giving discretion to the chair to deviate from the agenda as necessary.

MOTION APPROVED. Agenda adopted.

3. Approval of June 21, 2024 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Brenda, seconded by Susan

To approve the June 21, 2024 minutes as submitted.

MOTION APPROVED. Minutes adopted.

4. Welcome & Introductions

- Everyone went around and introduced themselves.
- Esther challenged the group to complete a story chain.

5. Annual review and affirmation of group agreements

Esther asked everyone to name one thing you need to be productive in our meeting time:

- Meetings to start and end on time.
- Name when people enter the space so people who can't see the screen know who is here.
 - Have a process person who can name what's happening in the space.
- Achievable, reachable tasks and goals.

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- Agenda in advance to review – extra think time.
- We assign deadlines when we decide on goals or actions.
- To have a purpose.
- To raise hands during open discussions so everyone has a chance to be heard.
- Full engagement from everyone.
- Have a feedback method. People are going to say things that don't sit well with everyone, we need a method for addressing that.
- Careful and reflective listening.
- Stepping into creativity and imagination. Validating all ideas.
- Mutual respect, which we do really well.
- Collaboration. Opportunity to soundboard and collaborate.

Esther asked the group to review our previous group agreements. How do we feel about this being the foundation of how we are in space together? Which ones stand out to us?

- Acknowledge and take into consideration those perspective that are not in the room.
 - Concern about being performative rather than genuinely prioritizing this.
 - Acknowledging the absence, who is not at the table?
- Understand that we all make mistakes.*
- When we disagree, we do so with respect for each other's perspectives.
- Be patient with ourselves and others.
- Share the job of holding each other accountable to these agreements.**
 - What does that look like? How do we practice that?
- Bring self-awareness of our own state of mind, emotions, and influences.
 - Add and respect confidentiality
- Take space, make space, hold space.***
- Take responsibility for the impact of our words and actions on each other.

Additional discussion:

- If we can have fun, that's important. The work we do is deep and tough, having fun with each other can really help.
- Are these the agreements we want to continue with?
- Difference between process norms and expectations and these group agreements – many of what people shared they need might belong in the group agreements and not necessarily in the group agreements.
- Engagement and responsibility, communication.

MOTION made by Susan, seconded by Heather

To reaffirm the group agreements

MOTION APPROVED. Group agreements adopted.

6. Priorities for the year

Cary presented the results of the climate surveys.

Esther asked people to complete the priorities survey, and the group discussed the results. The top 5 were:

1. [Workplace equity](#)
2. [Legal Rights of Women in Vermont update](#)
3. [Women in the criminal justice system](#)
4. [Reproductive justice & women's health](#)
5. [Operationalizing DEI in our work](#)

Data collection:

Cary updated folks about our partnership and thinking about data reporting with VWW and VT Women's Fund. There is a lot of state-required data in the education space, and this would be a good place to beat the drum this year, to start in the public school space by tracking gender in data. The group also discussed federal and state requirements in data reporting that aren't comprehensive and undermine the quality of the data collected.

1. Workplace equity (pay equity, gender-based violence, and harassment, workplace discrimination)

Education, events, legislation; Partner with VWW and VWF to put on an educational event for employers; Update the employer resource section of the Workplaces for All website; Partner with HRC and AG to conduct public education on recent changes to equal pay laws

- Educational campaigns. Salary in job postings law – we are legislatively directed to do a public education campaign about this.
- Educational event to bring people together and really set priorities and educate about the tools available.
- Workplaces for All website update.

Priority: Public Education on recent changes to equal pay laws

2. Legal Rights of Women in Vermont

Publish updated version in 2025

We have started doing this work, and some Commissioners have joined meetings to participate. It's a huge project and we could use engagement. What's in it, how we publish it, how it's used, etc.

Including new pay equity protections.

Interested: Linda & Heather. Susan, Kellie, and Alex have already begun work on this.

3. Women in the criminal justice system

Provide input from most impacted people to the process of replacing the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF)

Provide input from voices that are not already included. Women who are currently or have previously been incarcerated and their families.

- Public forums
- Meetings with state agencies
- Interviews
- Focus groups

It's important to recognize that we might not have the same level of access to the most impacted individuals that we have had in the past due to Commissioners.

Priority: Solicit, summarize, and provide input from the most impacted people in the process of replacing CRCF

4. Reproductive justice & women's health

Update VCW policies; consider supporting legislation expanding reproductive choices for VTers

- Health education and options, in addition to policies.
- Creating a container for space in the future.
- HR policies to support women going through menopause, perimenopause, etc.
- Updating VCW policies thinking to the future to better empower staff.
- Women's health broadly, cancer awareness, health care education and awareness. Incredible new technology for treating cancers that people aren't aware of.

Priority: Updating VCW policies thinking to the future to better empower staff.

5. Operationalizing DEI in our work

Internal policy and procedure changes...?

- An overlay to everything we do. We don't want it to get lost, but it should be integrated into everything we do.
- What about diversifying commissioners as we recruit?
- Office of Racial Equity resources ([Advisory Bodies guidelines](#), for example)
- Esther would like to do some work together before we operationalize racial equity.
- Accessibility and how we work together.

The group discussed identifying outcomes Commissioners are going to be working toward:

- The Commission needs to be more thoughtful about the processes before we send Commissioners out to community meetings and events.

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- Being more concrete about the roles for each of these priorities.
- We need to set achievable goals.

7. Committee structure and operations

Deliberation about the proposed structure (breaking it out by function, rather than theme/priority).

The group decided on the following Committees, which will meet at the beginning of regular VCW meetings:

Workplace Equity

1. Heather

Women in the Criminal Legal System

1. Kate
2. Sophia
3. Linda

Reproductive Justice & Women's Health

1. Esther
2. Susan

In addition to the committees, the group created a working group for the Legal Rights of Women in Vermont. Participation in the working group is voluntary and is in addition to service on one of the three committees. The working group is led by Susan, and a meeting has been scheduled for October 1st at 9:00 am.

Staff will work to schedule Committee meetings before our October 18th VCW meeting.

8. Updates and announcements

Staff:

- Cary's update:
 - Pay equity
 - March 2025 event and data collection with VWW and VWF
 - Paid Family Medical Leave
 - Decided we are not going to be trying to pass a law this session, but will be focused on public education. We are applying for a grant to do public education about the benefits of public education for young children.
 - NACW
 - Summer 2024 conference recap
 - Oklahoma 2025 conference
 - Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
 - "Cities for CEDAW" movement to adopt CEDAW at the municipal level (also connected to reproductive rights)

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- CRCF
 - Cary has a meeting with the Women's Services Director at the DOC about VCW being able to talk to incarcerated individuals at CRCF.
- Vermont Works for Women (VWW) Women Can Do Conference
 - 2023 recap (Esther attended)
 - October 10, 2024 (Kellie [Campbell] attending)
- Advisory Council
 - Current composition revisited = outreach/recruitment underway (update forthcoming at next VCW meeting)
- Violence
 - Hazing, harassment, and bullying = potential bill introduction regarding the composition of that board to be more representative (beyond school officials and lawyers)
- Ellie's update:
 - Budget season = potential 3% operations deficit for next year
- Em's update:
 - ORE conference in Stowe
 - SOV Continuous Improvement web design group

Commissioners update:

- Linda shared an upcoming human trafficking event in Newport
- Susan scheduled a Legal Rights of Women in Vermont handbook update meeting on October 1, 2024 at 9:00 am.

Meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.