



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

February 20, 2026

Dear Chair Scheu and members of the House Appropriations Committee:

Our names are Weiwei Wang and Tino Rutanhira, Co-Founders and Co-Executive Directors of the Vermont Professionals of Color Network (VT PoC), a nonprofit organization operating statewide with the mission of advancing the economic and social prosperity of the community of color. Since 2019, we have worked towards convening the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) community across the state of Vermont for the purpose of business and professional networking, education and training, direct business and workforce technical assistance, and data collection. You can learn more about us on our website: www.vtpoc.net.

We are submitting this written statement to request \$200,000.00 in appropriations for VT PoC as the Committee discusses the FY27 budget.

Since 2023, state funding has supported five major areas of work for VT PoC:

1. Business technical assistance - coaching for small business owners who are looking to prepare for business loan and financial support, supporting more established business owners to connect with existing resources, as well as working with employers to improve their recruitment and retention efforts.
2. Workforce assistance - coaching professionals who are looking to advance their careers within or outside of their current sectors.
3. Networking opportunities - creating connections for professionals, c-suite executives, businesses, and employers.
4. Outreach - supporting outreach efforts for partner organizations, employers and businesses, state entities and municipal bodies.
5. Data collection - we conducted and completed data collection about the BIPOC community in 2025, inclusive of a survey with 685 responses and 97 focus group participants.

With these dollars, we have:

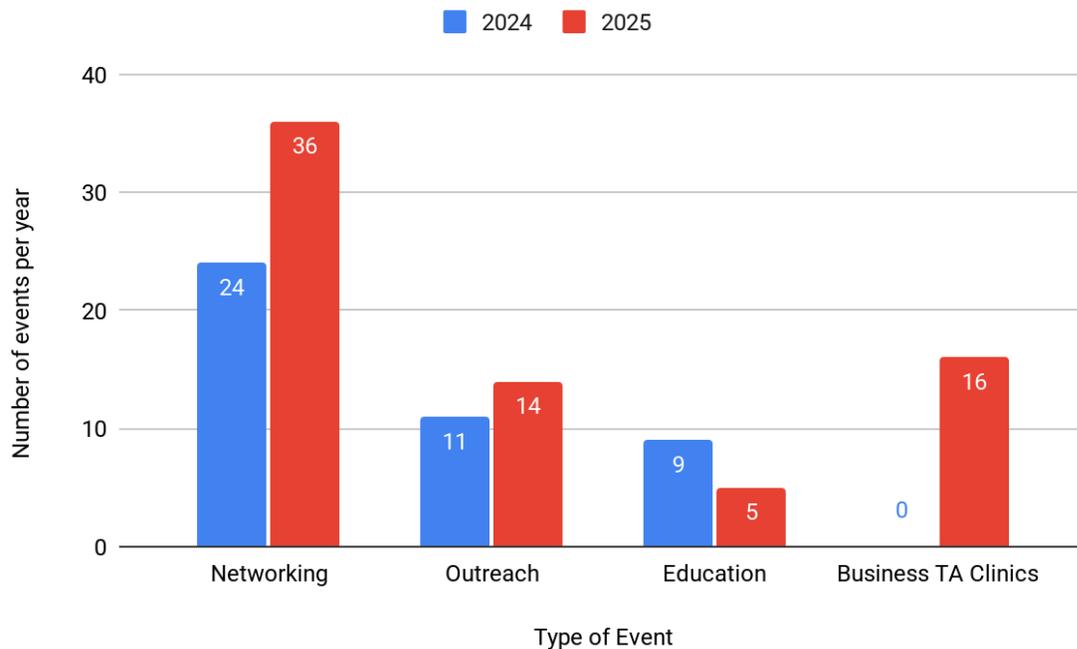
- Connected 1,800 individuals to information about statewide resources on a monthly basis via our newsletter.
- Gained at least 89 consistent partnerships with nonprofits, state agencies/departments, and business.



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- Supported 98 business owners directly through business technical assistance, and 577 businesses through business or outreach networking opportunities as well as education workshops.
 - This includes supporting businesses through the flood recovery period.
- Supported 72 individuals in the workforce through direct professional assistance with career placement or advancement.
- Connected 415 individuals through professional networking opportunities.
- Successfully conducted a statewide survey on BIPOC workforce and community, which received 685 responses and followed up with 11 focus groups that garnered 97 participants.
- Hosted a variety of events as shown in the graph below:

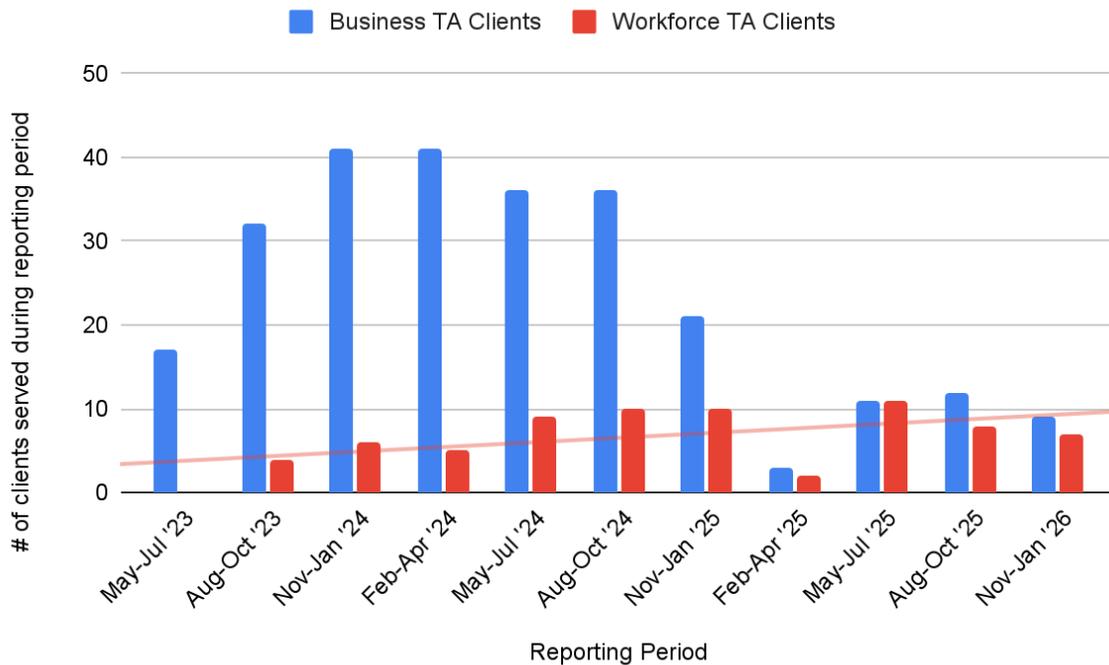
Figure 1. VT PoC events produced with support from State of Vermont, by type (2024-2025)





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Figure 2. Quarterly Business and Workforce Technical Assistance Client Count (2023-2025)



Our request for \$200,000 in the FY27 budget will ensure continuity of our services in outreach, resource navigation, direct assistance to businesses, employers and workforce professionals, as well as continued building of our networking events statewide.

Stability is critical for business owners right now, especially those who live in rural regions of our state. According to the [Vermont Future's Project's recent business climate survey report](#), workforce was the biggest challenge faced by businesses. We have heard from our own business community members that due to the tenuous political environment, they are having trouble attracting and retaining employees. Many business owners are concerned for the safety of their staff, patrons, and for themselves as well as their families. Therefore, any funding directed towards VT PoC would support small business owners.

Based on our calculations, **each VT PoC business technical assistance case costs the state on average approximately \$101.24**. That gives a business client five to ten hours of direct support from one of our staff members. Each business we support means another business is connected to



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critical economic resources, and that businesses can stay open, a family can create generational wealth and we continue to unlock the full economic potential of the state.

Since 2023, we have felt the steady increase of workforce support requests. We offer up to five hours of support, which might include identifying transferable skills and new career pathways, and connection or introductions to potential employers. Lately, it has also included resume and cover letter support. These services cost the state on average \$134.00 per person for the five hours of support. We have been fortunate that every client we have worked with has secured an advanced opportunity or made a successful career transition. As a result, they have chosen to remain in Vermont, increased their earnings and benefits, and contributed to much needed growth in state revenues.

For example, a client in education worked with VT PoC staff to identify a new opportunity for career advancement. Over the course of five hours of direct support, the client was connected to new potential employers with aligned values and goals. This client successfully found a career advancement opportunity and was able to increase their annual income by \$12,000.00 exclusive of their benefits package. **For that \$134.00 of state investment, VT PoC helped retain this individual in the state, and increased their annual earnings by \$12,000.00.** While this does not put the individual in a new tax bracket, it does mean increased state tax revenue.

Our work is impactful and it has a high return on investment for the state.

This funding would also support our work in partnering with state agencies and departments. We believe that state agencies consider VT PoC as a resource, and in return, VT PoC can direct our members to trusted ambassadors that we have built relationships with. We look forward to continuing to build these relationships with more state entities.

Increasing the number of business and professional networking events. Thanks to state funding support, we were able to offer 36 networking events in 2025, a 50% increase in the number of events offered compared to 2024. On average, we spent less than \$900.00 per event, inclusive of advertising, marketing materials, venue costs, transportation, and staff time. In FY26, we are hosting over 52 events that include our BIPOC community members, partner organizations, and the broader Vermont public. For many BIPOC professionals in a rural state like Vermont, isolation and loneliness are real barriers to success and retention.



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These events create connection, community, and trust. When people feel they belong, they stay, they contribute, and they help build the future Vermont needs.

Continuation of educational workshops and videos. Educational workshops and videos are a core part of VT PoC's mission to support economic growth for the state. Our workshops have included financial literacy, legal webinars to support businesses, and resources from the state, such as myvoterpage.org in partnership with the Secretary of State's office to encourage civic engagement. Over the first two years of our contract, we developed 44 videos to support workforce and business growth, as we will continue offering educational workshops and series with state funding. These tools help BIPOC professionals advance their careers, launch businesses, and build networks that anchor them here. That means stronger workforce retention, more entrepreneurial activity, and increased tax revenue.

Support for collaborative efforts and outreach. One of our successful collaborations has been the Lunch with Lenders event, in partnership with CVOEO, the Treasurer's Office, and US Small Business Administration. This single day event connects small business owners to lending institutions, including credit unions, VEDA and Vermont Community Loan Fund. In-person attendance usually averages 75 participants and 15-25 lenders from 8-10 financial institutions. With support from state funding, we will continue to offer Lunch with Lenders and other similar collaborations.

The BIPOC community is the fastest growing in our state, and is essential to reversing the aging workforce, labor shortages, and slow population growth trends. When VT PoC succeeds, BIPOC professionals and entrepreneurs thrive, Vermont employers benefit. Businesses gain talent. New companies launch. Customer bases grow. The tax base strengthens.

Support this work and you are not helping just the BIPOC community. You are investing in Vermont's future. Thank you for reading our statement and for your consideration for our inclusion in the FY27 in the amount of \$200,000.00.

With gratitude,

Weiwei Wang and Tino Rutanhira

Co-Executive Directors of the Vermont Professionals of Color Network

www.vtpoc.net