



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

April 16, 2025

Dear Chair Marcotte and members of the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee:

Thank you so much for your time and consideration of support for VT Professionals of Color Network within S.122 in the amount of \$350,000.

The \$350,000 request would give VT PoC the ability to:

1. **Maintain our current level of support and provision of access to statewide resources.** Our focus group outcomes show that BIPOC Vermonters are paying attention to VT PoC existing publication of information and would like us to expand to other information channels like WhatsApp and TikTok.
2. **Improve outreach to the immigrant/refugee community** through partnerships with organizations like AALV, VT Language Justice Project, and CVOEO's Community Ambassador Program. We recognize that our current reach has not effectively touched the business community, particularly in the Burlington/Winooski, Rutland, and Brattleboro areas, and we plan to work deeply with local organizations that do have expertise in reaching these communities. This may include translated materials, videos in various languages.
3. **Update our evaluation methodology.** In the past contract, we allocated only \$9,000 to evaluation and reporting, but our organization has grown and our community's needs have shifted. We recognize the importance of this information to the State, and want to improve our metrics and collection methods so that we can more effectively advocate for the BIPOC workforce and businesses and to show our true impact.



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

4. **Create awareness campaigns about existing State of Vermont resources.** SOV has many incredible resources that are currently underutilized by VT PoC's business and workforce community members. Our Community Support Coordinator has identified many aspects of the business development process alone that would be helpful to illuminate. In 2024, we worked with several State departments and agencies to create awareness campaigns; we hope to expand this as these resources are more important than ever.
5. **Dissemination and socialization of the BIPOC Survey and Focus Group data from 2024.** We would like to form the data collected into a narrative report that can be used by the State and other interested nonprofits across the state. As funding shifts, VT PoC's ability to outreach the data may be limited by staff capacity. We learned this lesson during our time on the US SBA funded project, Community Navigator Pilot Project. While we continued the dissemination of this report, we were limited in our ability because our funding shifted and we did not have the ability to expand our outreach on this effort.
6. Bring the **Community Support Coordinator back to 1.0 FTE** and focus on business technical assistance and resource navigation (see below for explanation).

In 2023, VT PoC applied for and was awarded the last ACCD contract. Appendix A is an **annotated version of VT PoC's original ACCD contract submission** (Feb 2023) for the existing contract from 2023-2025. There were five total areas covered: outreach, resource navigation, business owner technical assistance, workforce professional development, and evaluation and reporting.



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

<u>Deliverable Category</u>	<u>Cost over 2 years</u>
Outreach	\$ 30,024.50
Business owner technical assistance	\$ 68,337.50
Workforce professional development	\$ 65,433.50
Resource Navigation	\$ 77,049.50
Program evaluation and reporting	\$ 9,130.00
Total Project Cost	\$249,975.00

In total, VT PoC received **\$249,975.00 over two years** to complete the deliverables in each of those five categories, the cost of which breaks down as follows, which **included the business technical assistance position (Community Support Coordinator) at between 0.55-0.58 FTE across the two years.**

The Community Support Coordinator Position is critical to the work of VT PoC because it is the primary point of contact for BIPOC business owners to VT PoC and statewide resources. VT PoC increased the Community Support Coordinator position to **1.0 FTE between July - November 2023 due to high demand from business in flood recovery mode. Thanks to supplemental funding** by Vermont Community Foundation, we were able to continue this position at 1.0FTE through November 2024 to focus solely on business technical assistance. As a result, this position supported 70 business owners between July 2023 through November 2024.

Starting December 2024, the business technical assistance aspect of this position was reduced to 0.55 FTE due to completion of VCF funding. This limited the position's ability to support business technical assistance as efficiently and as effectively as in



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

the past¹. **Since December 2024, this position has supported 6 business owners.** This shows the importance of state funding, specifically towards the business technical assistance aspects of VT PoC's work.

I share this to convey the importance of State funding to **just one aspect of our work** with the 2023 contract. **Thanks to our first ACCD contract, VT PoC has become a public asset**, supporting the community that has called us to serve. We are grateful for the work we have accomplished, and we hope to continue this work in the coming years.

We hope that the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee will support S.122's inclusion of VT Professionals of Color Network at \$350,000 so that we can continue to support the BIPOC business and workforce communities so that they can continue to invest in themselves and into the Vermont economy. Please feel free to reach out with any questions, and I am happy to share more about the work we have been able to accomplish: Weiwei Wang - weiwei@vtpoc.net

My thanks to the Chair and Committee Members for your consideration for our request.

Sincerely,

Weiwei Wang
Co-Executive Director
VT Professionals of Color Network

¹ This position also supported [resource navigation](#), which called for connecting with existing business and workforce service organizations, as well as creating business education resources.



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

APPENDIX A

ACCD Contract 2023 - 2025 Components [ANNOTATED]

The following is the VT PoC proposed activities for the five proposal components to be completed over the course of the grant life, between March 2023 and February 2025. Activities within each component are listed below, along with a summary and a tentative timeline, as indicated by Year 1 (Y1) or Year 2 (Y2) for when we anticipate the activity will take place. Please note that a visual timeline of activities is included in [Attachment C: Timeline of Proposed Activities](#).

We do want to point out that a two-year \$250,000 grant is not adequate enough to address and undo 400 years of systemic injustice that have created the racial economic and social divide. While this opportunity and the possible outcomes is a start, it is but a step to solving complex social and economic racial justice issues; there is no “silver bullet”. VT PoC is developing a comprehensive and holistic set of concierge solutions to tear down the economic barriers that have kept households of color from building and sustaining wealth, guided by a productive set of “and” possibilities — access to better paying jobs, homeownership, professional development, retirement resources, small business capital and support, education, community, wellbeing, and so on.

Meaningful change takes time, and needs years of sustained collective action to become an embedded part of a community. Our proposal considers the need for a solid foundation from which sustained change can be built, and we build this foundation using research, data collection, and community input to create long-term outcomes and activities that extend beyond two years.

Outreach

Proposed Activities:

1. Direct engagement with BIPOC community members, particularly in Bennington, Windham, Rutland and Northeastern counties;
2. Engagement with community-based organizations that are BIPOC-led;
3. Broader visibility through paid outreach opportunities;
4. Connections with the business community to ensure our services are disseminated through to their employees.

Additionally, VT PoC will integrate all current communication platforms for a constant and consistent stream of information produced via Resource Navigation activities.

Resource Navigation

Proposed Activities:



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

1. Conduct research on available resources around business and professional development, and to continue to build relationships with BIPOC businesses and professionals.
2. BIPOC Professionals Survey and Listening Sessions.
3. Utilize existing and emerging data to improve existing professional service resources, and engage partners in filling resource/service gaps.
4. VT PoC will utilize current knowledge and the results of resource navigation efforts to provide dedicated technical assistance and wraparound services to support businesses and professionals to access the resources and events.

Business Owner Technical Assistance

Proposed Activities:

1. Support BIPOC business owners to navigate available resources using data gathered from Resource Navigation.
2. Create a BIPOC Business Series to support knowledge gaps identified by available data.

Workforce Professional Development

Proposed Activities:

1. Creation of sector/career-specific professional networking events and groups.
2. Use resources gathered to support BIPOC professionals to navigate resources.
3. Utilize emerging data from the BIPOC survey to advise workforce service providers and employers on more effective delivery of resources and programming geared towards BIPOC professional development.
4. Direct career guidance for BIPOC professionals.
5. Development of resources in collaboration with statewide partner organizations based on research and data collection.

Evaluation and Reporting

Proposed Activities:

1. Development and implementation of metrics for technical assistance, as well as for program participation, iterative evaluation and course correction are critical to the success of the efforts laid out in this proposal.