



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

February 11, 2026

Dear Chair Clarkson and members of the Senate Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs Committee:

Thank you for giving me time to speak with you today. For the record, my name is Weiwei Wang, co-founder and co-Executive Director of the Vermont Professionals of Color Network (VT PoC), and **I am asking for VT PoC to be included in S.327 in the amount of \$75,000 to support business development and workforce support in FY27.**

About VT PoC

The Vermont Professionals of Color Network (VT PoC) is a nonprofit organization operating statewide with the mission of advancing the economic and social prosperity of the community of color, and the state as a whole. You can learn more about us on our website: www.vtpoc.net.

VT PoC Accomplishments

Since 2023, we have held a state contract, which funds five major areas of work:

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 (n=685) and focus groups (n=11, 97 participants).

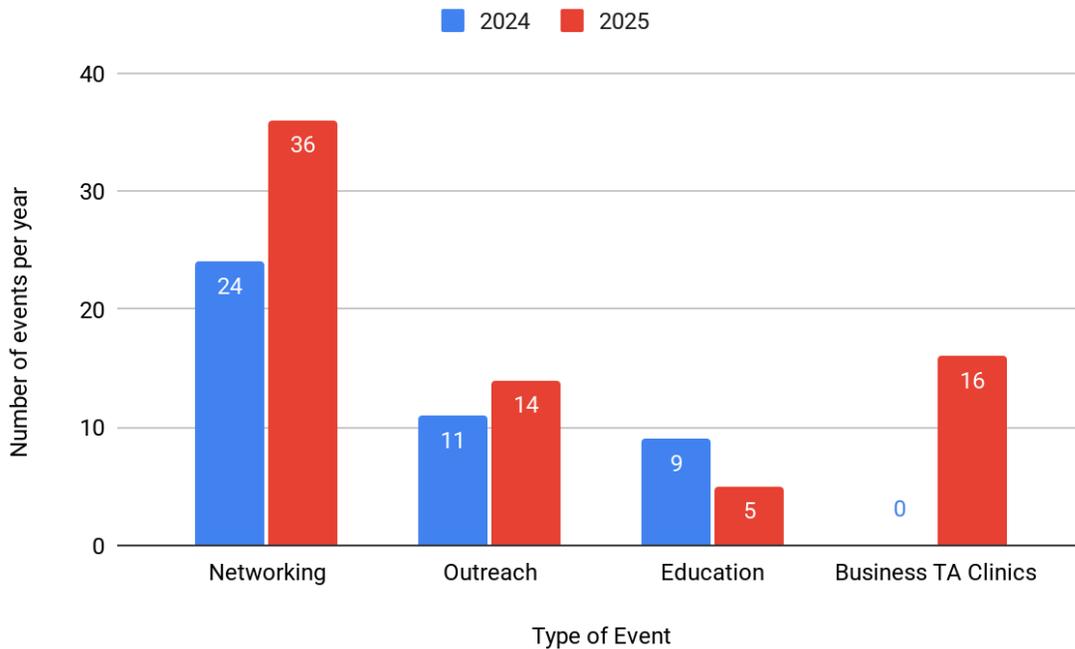


The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

With our first state contract (\$250k over 2 years), we were able to:

- Connect 1,800 individuals to information about statewide resources on a monthly basis via our newsletter.
- Gain at least 89 consistent partnerships with nonprofits, state agencies/departments, and business.
- Support 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.
- Support 72 individuals in the workforce through direct professional assistance with career placement or advancement.
- Connect 415 individuals through professional networking opportunities.
- Successfully conduct 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)





The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

One of the key moments in business technical assistance last year was supporting Maiz Vargas, a Burlington-based artist, musician and business owner. He came to VT PoC to support development of a music album, but ultimately Maiz and I worked together on what ended up being the Latin Connection Festival. In partnership with the City of Burlington and Burlington City Arts, Maiz's vision came to life as an expanded Burlington Twilight Block Party event. This effort brought together 8 music groups, as well as vendors and artists from the Latino diaspora. In total, we raised \$12,000.00 to support this event, with additional support from BCA and City of Burlington.

This event became an income generator for the 8 musical groups, the five Latino food vendors, the myriad Latino market vendors that were directly involved in the event. According to the City of Burlington, the event was highly attended, drawing people from beyond city limits and across the state, which had impact on Church Street businesses and City economy in general.

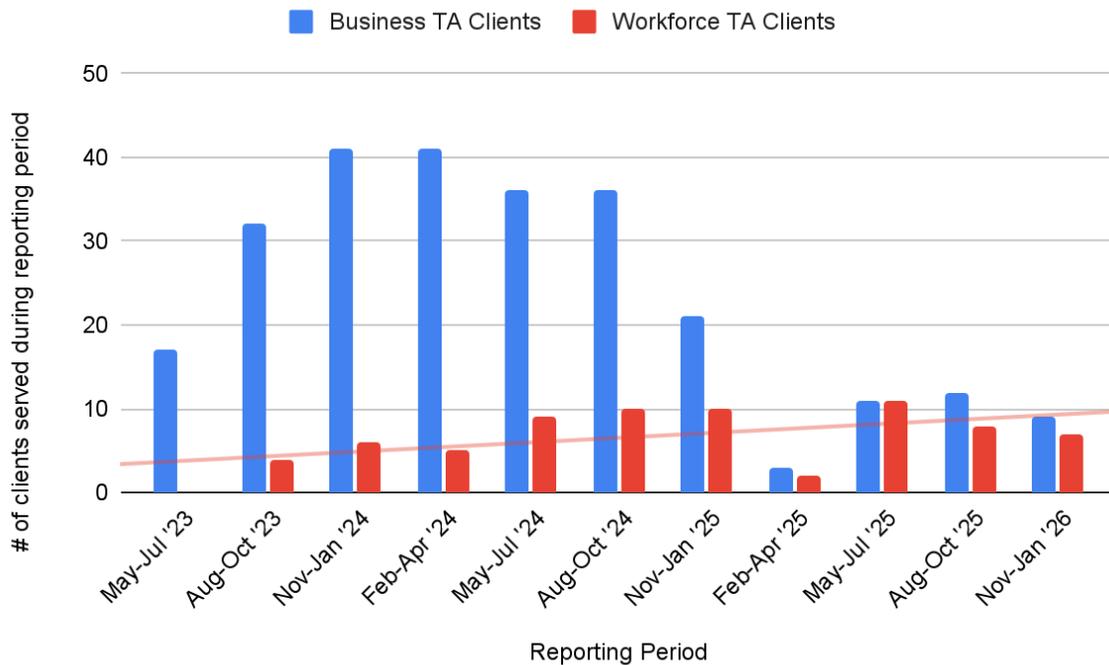
Our ability to support this event's production was possible thanks to state funding - we helped Maiz and his vision through our business technical support services. While this is not a typical TA case, its success had ripple effects beyond the day. For Maiz, it was hearing from local schools for speaking engagements to students. It was a local dance instructor gaining a wider audience through her dance class in City Hall Park. This event had larger economic ripple effects than what we know of.

Based on our calculations, **each VT PoC business technical assistance case costs the state approximately \$101.24**. That gives a business client five to 10 hours of direct support from one of our staff members. For someone like Maiz, who had the vision and knew exactly what he wanted, 10 hours of support was more than enough. **VT PoC was directly involved in securing \$7,000.00 of the \$12,000.00 in event production funding. That means for every dollar the state spent on my work with Maiz, he received \$69.30 in project funding (69:1).**



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

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



Since 2023, we have felt the steady increase of workforce support requests. This has typically been from mid- or advanced-career professionals who are looking for the next step. Currently, we do not have partners that support mid-career or advanced career professionals, so most of the work is completed in-house. 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 costs \$134.00 per person for the five hours of support. We have been fortunate that all of our clients have seen success in finding an advanced opportunity or a career path change, resulting in immediate earning benefits or higher future earning potential.

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 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.



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

Our work is impactful and it has a high return on investment for the state. Each business we support at \$82.93 means another business that stays open, and another family that can create generational wealth. Each professional that we support at \$134.00 means another individual can stay and work in the state, and build their future.

Where we are going next

Currently, we are maintaining the same effort around business and workforce assistance, networking, outreach, and data collection. We are committed to maintaining the same level of high-quality services for business and professionals across the state. We currently have a \$200,000 contract with ACCD to continue our work, and we are building upon a successful 2025 year in terms of business and workforce supports. These efforts include:

- Continuing supporting business clients (averaging 12 businesses per month).
- Continue supporting workforce clients (currently averaging 10 per month).
- Produce 52+ networking and community support events.
- Support outreach for employers, municipalities, state agencies and departments.
- Develop new partnerships with statewide organizations and state entities, eg HireAbility VT, UP for Learning, and more.
- Deepen existing partnerships by creating long-term, sustainable efforts.

Funding request

My request for this committee today is for VT PoC be added to S.327 with funding towards support of small business development and workforce support. Our original intention was to request \$200,000 to be added to the base budget. However, given the current state of the budget, **we are amending our ask to \$75,000 to be included in the state's base budget.**

Such an adjustment from our current budget, and even from our previous \$125,000 per year contract would mean reducing our current portfolio of offerings. However, we are committed to continuity of our business and workforce technical assistance work as we see the continued needs. 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 even without the current social concerns, they are having trouble attracting and retaining employees. Many business owners are concerned for the safety for their staff, patrons, and for themselves as well as their families. Therefore, any funding directed towards VT PoC would support small business owners.



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

This funding would still partially support our work in partnering with state agencies and departments. Our hope is that state agencies and departments see VT PoC as a resource, and in return, VT PoC can direct our members to trusted ambassadors that we have built relationships with.

This also means a reduction in other work that we do:

1. Reduction in 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.

2. Reduction in 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.

3. Reduction in our ability to support 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 a reduction in state funding, our ability to participate in such collaborations may be diminished.

We hope to work with this Committee in the future to ensure that these public assets are able to continue in the future. In the meantime, we hope to continue our work with small business development and workforce support.



The Vermont Professionals of Color Network

Thank you again for giving me time to speak with you all. Again, **we are formally asking to be included in S.327 in the amount of \$75,000 to be included in the base budget** and not as a one-time appropriation so that we can continue to support the small business community.

With gratitude,

Weiwei Wang
Executive Director, Community and Policy
Vermont Professionals of Color Network
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