



**VERMONT  
PROFESSIONALS  
OF COLOR NETWORK**

**February 12, 2025**



## History of VT PoC

**2019**

Founding members start creating networking events for BIPOC professionals. At the first event, 100 BIPOC professionals joined us at the Vermont Comedy club for laughter, joy, food, and community.

**2021**

VT PoC becomes an official 501c3. We run the BIPOC COVID-19 vaccine clinic in Burlington along with partners across the city.

More funding opportunities arise as the community continues to talk about us.

Charlotte Santiago Graf becomes VT PoC's first staff member, followed by Weiwei Wang.

**2023**

VT PoC continues to grow, adding Mimi Duong and Airon Shaw to the team.

VT PoC receives a contract with ACCD and supports the July 2023 flooding recovery process, and continues to offer outreach, resource navigation, technical assistance, and community support to BIPOC Vermonters across the state.

In October 2023, Weiwei and Tino become co-Executive Directors.

**2020**

COVID-19 pandemic halts all VT PoC activities and gives us time to consider the future.

Funding opportunities arise and founders begin 501c3 process.

**2022**

VT PoC gains momentum, hiring our second full-time employee, Krystal Sanchez, who supports data collection of over 250 BIPOC small business owners across the state.

**2024**

VT welcomes Raheemah Madany to the team.

The BIPOC Community Survey is released.

Newcomer Nexus and GROW-VT grant are kicked off.

Although we have done a lot, VT PoC only began in 2019 as two community members with the goal of creating an event for youth of color in the city of Burlington to learn about the various career opportunities available to them as reflected by existing professionals of color around the area.

Our first event attracted about 100 professionals of color from all walks, including entrepreneurs.

In 2021, thanks to fiscal sponsorship from the City of Burlington's Community and economic development office, we were able to grow and received our 501c3 status.

So, it's really only been about four years that we have been able to accomplish what we have, and we continue to grow, thanks to support from this committee. During the 2022 session, my co-executive director, Tino, and I testified here to request that the state support BIPOC-owned businesses and professionals. As a result, ACCD developed the BIPOC Business Development contract, which VT PoC successfully bid on and received in May 2023.

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## Staff



Our organization is made up of six full-time staff, one part-time staff and one intern (not pictured).

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## Organizational Values

**Community** || Creating opportunities to provide **structure, relationships, affinity, safety,** and **openness** resulting in a **network** all to advance the prosperity of BIPOC in the state of Vermont.

**Growth** || Growing relationships with community members and organizations by **engaging in mutual learning, challenges, risks, and personal development** all to advance the prosperity of BIPOC in the state of Vermont.

**Leadership** || Using what we learn to **advocate** and **lead by example, foster respect,** and **earn trust from the community** all to advance the prosperity of BIPOC in the state of Vermont.

**Equity** || Disrupting traditional norms to build and **dismantle oppressive systems** because we are not free until we are all free.

**Service** || Meeting the needs of the community with **care, joy, respect,** and **humility** all to advance the prosperity of BIPOC in the state of Vermont.

VT PoC values community, growth, leadership, equity and service.

## Revisoning Professional



VT PoC Members talk with King Street Center ACE Program students in July 2024

VT PoC defines a professional as any individual **dedicated to developing expertise in a skill or craft** that **contributes to personal growth and/or societal improvement**.

We also believe in revisoning the term “professional”. We believe that a professional is any individual who is dedicated to developing expertise in a skill or craft.



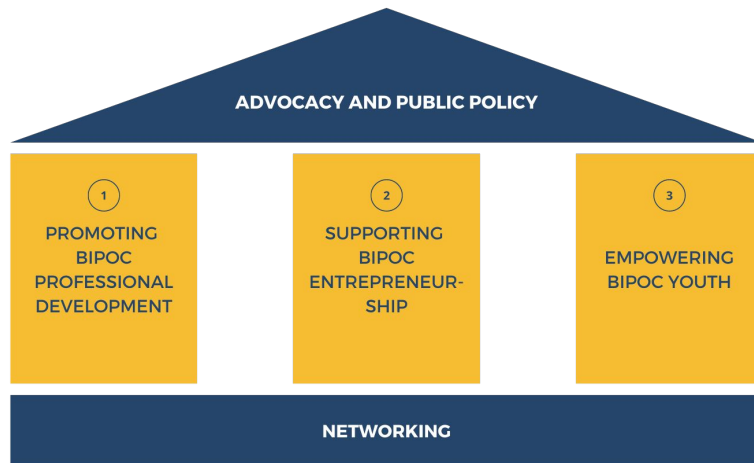
## Mission

VT PoC is a nonprofit organization that works to **advance the social and economic prosperity** of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community in Vermont.

VT PoC has a vision of creating shared prosperity for all.



## Our House



**Prosperity starts with opportunities to climb the economic ladder**

VT PoC is an organization, and also a house that holds the BIPOC community inside of it.

At the foundation, we are fostering community through networking and community-based events. We are helping people to connect to each other to reduce isolation and to instill a shared understanding that Vermont is home. We want our community to feel anchored to Vermont through shared experiences and values.

We built the walls around professional, business and youth development to ensure that we have strong communities.

Above all, we believe in supporting the community through advocacy and understanding public policy, making sure that we know so that we can relay the information to others.

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## VT PoC Presence

- Members/followers in most counties except Grand Isle.
- Most members are in Northern VT.
- Growing numbers in Orange, Essex, Caledonia Counties thanks to our outreach efforts through funding from ACCD and USDA Rural Development.
- Includes those outside of Vermont - prospective VTers.

We have “members” across the state, except Grand Isle County, which we will be working on. We also have a growing community in the Northeast.

\*\*\*We are currently working with Discover St Johnsbury on business outreach and support services in the Northeast region thanks to our contract with ACCD and supplemental support from a USDA rural development grant. In December, we hosted a business networking event that attracted 30 business owners and 5 kids. We will be hosting another event in May, along with virtual business technical assistance drop-in sessions starting in the Spring.

We also have a small following outside of the state, thanks to our social media presence and it is growing thanks to our connection with the ThinkVT GROWVT program. Through this, we have been speaking with professionals across the country who are interested in moving to Vermont. In fact, one individual did move to Vermont last summer, and the first social event they enjoyed was our apple picking event at Shelburne Orchard, which attracted over 40 BIPOC individuals.





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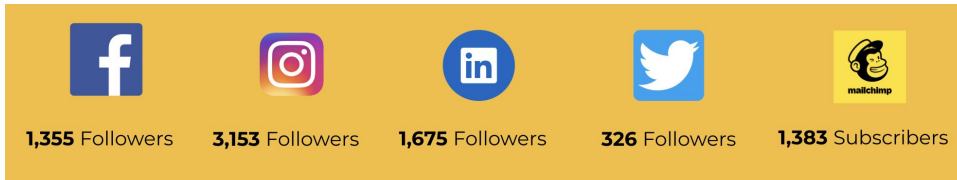
## Our Work

- Outreach
- Community Building
- Research and Data Collection
- Resource Navigation
- Workforce and Business Development

This work is partially funded through an ACCD contract, out of legislation that was supported by both the House and Senate.

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## Outreach



VT PoC outreach includes digital, printed and in-person activities to ensure we are meeting people where they're at.

Our outreach goal is to ensure all BIPOC Vermonters know about existing state-based, and state funded resources, as well as other relevant resources that meet their needs.

Often, the BIPOC community is the last to know about an opportunity because most legacy institutions networks do not include the community.

VT PoC has worked hard to ensure we have a variety of method to reach the BIPOC community, including having a large digital presence as well as printed and in-person outreach methods. In the last year and a half, we have tabled at 13 events in the Northern Vermont. We want to meet people where they're at.

Since we received the ACCD funding, we have developed a strategy to build on the work we have already accomplished. In 2023, we identified that we would focus our outreach efforts initially on the Northeast region. We began with having a digital presence, and then getting to know individuals within the area. Our member and outreach coordinator, Mimi Duong, who grew up in St. J, has been developing deep

ties to individuals, businesses and organizations in the region to learn more about how to best reach the community. This past December, we hosted a networking event at Whirligig Brewery and we had 30 BIPOC business owners and allies attend, along with 5 or 6 kids. We hope to continue this effort into the future, and we would like to have continued funding support to forward our future goal of apply our strategy in southern regions as well.

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## Community Building



VT PoC regularly hosts community-based **events for remote workers and young professionals** to connect with each other.

Once we have reached the community, we like to build events that connect them to one another. While networking events has been at the heart of what we do, we also recognize that there are a lot of remote-workers across Vermont since the pandemic, and we have developed community building events for them to get to know Vermont and the BIPOC community to reduce isolation.

Since summer of 2023, we have held 34 events for the purpose of community building, outside of professional and business networking events.

These events include Co-work and Chill, a monthly event held across the state. VT PoC identifies partner venues, announces that staff members will be present at the location, and we invite folx to join us to co-work. We have held this event across Chittenden County, Washington County, the Upper Valley and NEK thus far. It gives remote workers and opportunity to get to know their local community, to get to know one another, and to get to know us so that we can help share our knowledge of resources.

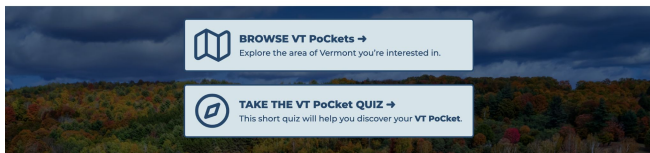
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## Resource Navigation



### My VT PoCket Guide

Ready to discover your Vermont? We've got you covered!  
Explore our digital guides to different Vermont regions, or take  
our tastes quiz to get a custom guide just for you.



In 2024, VT PoC launched the VT PoCket Guide to help new Vermont residents to search for community resources across the state.

- Career exploration/introductions
- Identifying business resources
- Job Board and Internship Board
- Civic engagement board
- BIPOC Business Directory
- VT PoCket Guide

Resource navigation is a big part of what we do. When someone arrives in Vermont, it's hard to know where everything is...mostly because you can't get there from here, and, when we're thinking about all of the great civic resources, it can be overwhelming. VT is great because we do have much to offer.

As part of the ACCD contract, VT PoC has been and continues to identify critical existing resources for community and business members.



## Workforce and Business Development



VT PoC partnered with CVOEO, US SBA, and SOV Treasurer's Office on the 3rd Annual Lunch with Lenders event (2/8), bringing ~ **100 immigrant, refugee, and BIPOC identified business owners** together to meet with lending institutions and business resource services at Winooski High School.



VT PoC Business Networking event in **St. Johnsbury** in December 2024 brought together **30 BIPOC and Allied business owners**. This event was supported by **ACCD BIPOC Business Development Contract** and USDA Rural Development.

Education workshops = 20

Networking events = 16

71 businesses supported

20+ professionals served

- Technical assistance
  - Career connections
  - Helping to research resources
  - Meeting supports
  - Grant and loan application assistance
- Creating toolkits based on what we know

We offer one-on-one support in career exploration and navigation, we have worked with professionals to direct them to state-based resources. Our website also features a job and internship board, which features statewide opportunities from entities that are working to diversify their workforce. We actually work directly with the State's Department of Human Resources to feature jobs available at a variety of different

state departments.

We also host a **civic engagement board** featuring volunteer opportunities from municipalities, nonprofits, and other entities. We want to make sure that our community is deeply involved, are rooting themselves in community and are able to showcase their skills outside of their normal workday.

We also support businesses to navigate through the startup and growth phases. There are over 6k nonprofits in Vermont, and it's hard to navigate to the right one. We have partnerships with business support orgs across the state, as well as financial institutions, and help business owners to startup and scale.

We also have a relatively new program called Newcomer Nexus, which is a concierge service for businesses and organizations who are recruiting BIPOC candidates and want to ensure that they have a smooth transition to life in Vermont. This service starts from the point of hiring and follows the new employee through the first three to six months of transition.

The employer's job is to make sure the employee connects in the workplace. VT PoC's work happens outside of the office to create community and a sense of belonging.

## Research and Data Collection



**Vermont Small Business  
Environment Assessment for  
Underrepresented Communities**

COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR PILOT PROGRAM | SEPTEMBER 2023

SUBMITTED BY



2025 Report Forthcoming  
Funded by ACCD BIPOC  
Business Development  
contract

[https://www.vtpoc.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/CNPP\\_Report.pdf](https://www.vtpoc.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/CNPP_Report.pdf)

2023 published a report from 2022 data on the small business environment for BIPOC, rural, veteran, and women owned businesses.

In total the survey received 498 responses, and VT PoC conducted 21 listening sessions.

We learned that the BIPOC community challenges are not dissimilar to what others face when it comes to business, except:

- Lack of information
- Lack of community capitals
- Lack of financial resources: credit, assets, collateral, family assets

But BIPOC business owners want to be in Vermont because many said the chances of them achieving their dream was more likely here.

## Current Projects

[Community Impact Grant](#)

[Flood Relief Fund](#)

[GROW: Think Vermont Relocation Assistance](#)

[Newcomer Nexus](#)

[The Things in Between: An Educational Series](#)

[VT PoCket Guide](#)

## Past Projects

[BIPOC Listening Sessions](#)

[Community Navigator Pilot Program \(CNPP\)](#)

[Flood Resources](#)

[2023 BIPOC Job Fair](#)

[BIPOC Non-profit Grant System Series](#)

[Financial Literacy Program](#)

BIPOC listening sessions and flood resources page were paid in full or in part by the ACCD DED contract.

Newcomer Nexus: <https://www.vtpoc.net/about/our-work/newcomer-nexus/>

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## Some Numbers

- **BIPOC Business Directory** lists 413+ businesses and receives ~10,000+ impressions on a quarterly basis
- **Job Board** lists 600-700 jobs annually and receives ~12,000+ impressions on a quarterly basis
- 8,000 followers across **social media platforms**, which offer weekly spotlights of BIPOC businesses across the state.
- **70+ businesses supported** through our technical assistance program since 2023.
- **685 completed survey responses** in the 2024 BIPOC Community Survey

Business directory and our job board is our top 2 visited pages on our website.

Businesses like to request spotlights at key points in the course of the year to generate additional revenue.

We have been asked by some partners to expand the directory and job board to be inclusive of bordering states because of the larger impact of these tools.

### **Resources:**

Job and Internship Board: <https://www.vtpoc.net/jobs-board/>

BIPOC Business Directory: <https://www.vtpoc.net/bipoc-business-directory/>

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## (some) Partnerships

- Office of the State Treasurer
- Office of the Secretary of State
- ACCD Department of Economic Development
- ACCD Department of Tourism
- City of Burlington
- City of South Burlington
- City of Winooski
- Discover St. Johnsbury
- Downtown Winooski
- CVEDC
- BDCC
- CVOEO
- Mercy Connections
- Center for Women and Enterprise
- VT Women's Fund
- Local Motion
- Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
- Unlikely Riders
- Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance
- VT Works for Women
- King Street Center
- Montpelier Alive
- VT Department of Labor
- Vermont Business Roundtable
- Champlain Housing Trust
- Champlain College
- University of Vermont
- UVM Medical Center
- Vital Communities
- Upper Valley BIPOC Network
- US Small Business Association
- Flynn Theater
- Vermont Comedy Club
- AALV
- VT Language Justice Project
- VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
- VT Womenpreneurs
- VCET
- VT Futures Project
- CCRPC
- NAACP Windham County
- NAACP Rutland County
- Racial Justice Alliance
- Liberation Ecosystems
- Barre Area Development Corp
- Vermont Housing Finance Agency
- VT League of Cities and Towns
- VT Small Business Development Center
- VT Small Business Law Center
- Community Capitals
- VT Community Loan Fund
- NEK Prosper

We can't do the work that we do alone, and VT PoC has had the honor of working with many departments and organizations across the state. This list shows just some of those partnerships over the years.



## It's about access



Figure 1. Dimensions of accessibility, adapted from Penchansky and Thomas (1981) and Sauerman (2015) by Weiwei Wang.

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The why of our work is all about access. Access to each other, access to resources, access to the sense of place and that desire to give back to Vermont.

This is a framework of access that I created while at UVM's CDAE program; it's basis is in public health, but it applies to the work that we do because in order to economically and socially develop, there must be access.

And access can be understood as having six dimensions:

1. Availability of resources
2. Awareness of resources
3. Physical accessibility of resources
4. Affordability of resources
5. Accommodation of the community by the resources
6. Acceptability of the resource by the community.

This last point can be understood as whether a resource is trusted by the community. For example, I'm far more likely to hire an electrician

who just graduated from CVCC because I trust the quality of the programs that they have and the care that they place into educating students.

For an entire community to have access, all six dimensions must be active and present, otherwise, SOMEONE from the community is missing out.

Right now, for the community that VT PoC serves, awareness is a significant issue...and I don't need to be a betting person to know that more than just the BIPOC community is missing out on so many of the incredible resources Vermont has to offer.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>There are <b>29,293</b> VT firms</p> <p>These firms employ <b>253,323</b> people</p> <p>And account for <b>\$4.1 billion</b> in wages</p>                           | <p>There are <b>27,204</b> VT firms with <b>0-19</b> employees (21,687 of those have 0-4 employees)</p> <p>These firms employ <b>77,364</b> people</p> <p>And account for <b>\$1.3 billion</b> in wages</p> |
| <p>There are <b>1,758</b> VT firms with <b>20-49</b> employees</p> <p>These firms employ <b>68,065</b> people</p> <p>And account for <b>\$985 million</b> in wages</p> | <p>There are <b>331</b> VT firms with <b>&gt;100</b> employees</p> <p>These firms employ <b>107,894</b> people</p> <p>And account for <b>\$1.8 billion</b> in wages</p>                                     |

**To reiterate from two weeks ago, the majority of Vermont businesses are small businesses. Access to resources benefit every single one of them.**

**MAIN POINTS:**

- Vast majority of businesses are solopreneurs or VERY small (fewer than 20 employees)
- They may not represent the largest economic output for the state in dollar amount but...
- They do represent almost the entirety of the small business ecosystem in Vermont
- They are the ones with least resources and most need for support (as they navigate the stages of business development over time)

Source: Vermont Department of Labor, Economic and Labor Market Information, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, published August, 2024.

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## What do BIPOC business (owners) need

- Information about and/or access to existing resources
- Financial resources: credit, assets, collateral, family assets, **working capital**
- Flood recovery resources
- Marketing capacity
- Business plan development
- Understanding of how to get business started
- Networking opportunities
- One-off requests (medicare biller, website developer, accountant)
- Affordable cost of living - housing/rental costs - cost of goods/supplies/materials
- **Accessible/affordable training** for trade jobs

We are informed by:

- Direct one-on-one conversations
- CNPP Small Business

Business directory and our job board is our top 2 visited pages on our website.

Businesses like to request spotlights at key points in the course of the year to generate additional revenue.

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## Economically Speaking

- BIPOC community injects more than **\$1 billion** into Vermont's economy annually (ACS Data).
- **2.9%** of VT small businesses are owned by racial minorities = **800 businesses who are registered** and according to 2021 data.
- Growing demographic group - increase by 112% from 2010-2020 census, but **just over 10% of the total Vermont population.**

The BIPOC community is a large part of Vermont's economy.

Resources:

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/vermont-population-change-between-census-decade.html#race-ethnicity>

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## VT PoC's Request

- Support for the Governor's recommendation: \$250,000
- Additional request for \$100,000 as one-time request for business support services, inclusive of resource navigation, technical assistance, in-person events and support

We see ourselves as a public asset to Vermont.



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# Thank you!

**Weiwei Wang**

Co-Executive Director

VT Professionals of Color Network

[weiwei@vtpoc.net](mailto:weiwei@vtpoc.net)

[www.vtpoc.net](http://www.vtpoc.net)

