

# Journey

A GUIDE FOR ADVANCING **DIVERSITY, EQUITY**  
AND **INCLUSION** IN VETERINARY MEDICINE



**VETERINARY  
MEDICAL  
ASSOCIATION**  
EXECUTIVES



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A guide for advancing diversity, equity  
and inclusion in veterinary medicine

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July 20, 2021

Veterinary Medical Association Executives

[www.vmae.org](http://www.vmae.org)



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A guide for advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in veterinary medicine

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### Foreword

The *Journey* cover illustration recalls the story of the master helping a student understand the concept of harmony. After walking some distance into the woods, they came upon a stream. “Look at the stream,” the master said. “There are rocks in its way. Does it slam into them out of frustration? It simply flows over and around them and moves on! Be like the water and you will know what harmony is.”

Similarly, poet Nayyirah Waheed provided this perspective in her poem Options:

*you do not have to be a fire  
for  
every mountain blocking you.  
you could be a water  
and  
soft river your way to freedom  
too.*

It is in this spirit that *Journey* is offered to the reader. We recognize that advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in veterinary medicine is a journey of many stages. Taking this journey calls for patience, understanding, humility, kindness, and being the soft river. And this journey demands an unwavering commitment to sustained systemic change.

*Journey* has been developed for use by executive directors and elected leaders at veterinary medical associations. It is meant to inspire you to undertake the journey and to provide the tools you need to advance diversity, equity and inclusion. It will support you in becoming a more effective leader, a more visible ally, and a more articulate voice on why advancing diversity, equity and inclusion is critical to the future of the veterinary profession.

This guide reflects the mission of Veterinary Medical Association Executives (VMAE), which exists to help veterinary medical association executives create thriving organizations and provide effective leadership within the veterinary profession. *Journey* was conceptualized and developed by the VMAE DEI Committee, which expresses its appreciation to:

- The courageously authentic individuals who have shared their lived experiences, both painful and joyful, to deepen our understanding of what it truly means to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in veterinary medicine
- The many individuals and organizations that have freely contributed ideas and resources to enrich the value of this guide



- VMAE's Strategic Initiative Partners, who make possible such important work through their financial support and encouragement
- The Veteos video production company for their creativity, expertise and generous support in creating the videos that accompany the *Journey* guide
- VMAE's Board of Directors for reflecting a commitment to DEI in the organization's strategic framework and resource allocation, and
- Kim D'Abreu of Diversity Dimensions Consulting for her knowledge and wisdom, and for her ability to nourish souls and lift spirits.

We are grateful for these incredible gifts and honored to weave them into *Journey*. We look forward to joining you as we collectively undertake the journey to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in veterinary medicine.

### **The VMAE DEI Committee**

- Candace Joy – Washington State Veterinary Medical Association (chair)
- Chumkee Aziz, DVM, DABVP (Shelter Medicine Practice) – Association of Shelter Veterinarians
- Jamie Falzone – Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association
- John Tramontana, CAE – Michigan Veterinary Medical Association
- Kim D'Abreu – Diversity Dimensions LLC (consultant)
- Mia Cary, DVM – Pride VMC
- Ralph Johnson – Veterinary Medical Association Executives (staff consultant)
- Tierra Price, DVM, MPH – BlackDVM Network
- Tim Atkinson – New York State Veterinary Medical Society
- Christina Tran, DVM – Multicultural Veterinary Medical Association
- Tyra Brown, DVM – National Association for Black Veterinarians



# Stage 1 – Embracing the Case for Change

## 1.0: Video Introductions to Stage 1

- [Journey Overview](#)
- [Introduction to Stage 1](#)

## 1.1: This Moment in Time

It's easy to assume that one event in a single moment in time suddenly awakens one to seeing the world anew.

In reality, an epiphany or the miracle of insight is rarely due to one incident. It comes about slowly, gently traveling through successive experiences, some are noticed and filed away, and some escape conscious attention. All the while they're building upon each other until they finally converge into one aha moment, spilling out into the conscious mind and changing an individual forever.

That's what happened for many with the brutal killing of George Floyd by white police officers in the summer of 2020. Suddenly Americans, and indeed the globe, seemed to finally wake up to the unending racial violence and injustice that happens in this country. Floyd wasn't the first Black man to be killed by police. There's a long and tragic list of deaths of Black individuals, lives taken at the hands of law enforcement or violent white citizens, each one building upon the memory of the previous ones until at last it's understood that such violence can no longer be tolerated. Many Americans finally recognized that light must shine into society's darkest corners to end systemic racism and the violence it inspires. At no time since the Civil War have so many felt so strongly about the need for change in how Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) are treated.

The summer of 2020 was also a pivotal moment for the veterinary profession. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, a group of nearly a dozen veterinary associations representing diverse veterinarians [called on the profession](#) to act to address the lack of diversity and to end discrimination in veterinary medicine. It was time to acknowledge the race problem.

[WakeUpVetMed](#), their Call to Action, and the awareness it brought with it was the necessary wake-up call and it is the light that will lead the profession in the direction that's long overdue.

At [approximately 90% white](#), veterinary medicine is one of the least racially and ethnically diverse professions in the United States, and racially and ethnically diverse students don't apply in high enough numbers to veterinary colleges.



Just like in the rest of society, there are too many examples of how racism, discrimination and injustice play out across the profession, committed by management against employees, veterinarians against veterinarians, veterinary teams against clients and clients against veterinary teams, faculty against students, students against students, and team mates against one another. Anyone who may be perceived as different can be a target.

It plays out in other ways, both large and small. Gender pay discrimination continues to plague women in the profession. Generational differences and resistance to change prevent a deeper understanding of the educational debt that plagues new graduates and lead to tone deaf, ageist comments.

Clients face discrimination from veterinary teams when assumptions and judgments are made based on tropes that should have ceased long ago. “Black people don’t take care of their animals.” “The disheveled man dressed in a ripped shirt and pants who drives an old, dented truck can’t afford to pay.” “Speaking loudly to the woman with broken English will make her understand.”

[Studies](#) show that discrimination and injustice negatively affect mental and emotional health, including causing low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and other health conditions. Those who work in the profession don’t need another stressor and clients who seek veterinary care for their animals shouldn’t have to suffer stress due to unjust treatment.

### **What is Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)?**

While racism has been the main focus of discussion in America, the term diversity encompasses the full range of human differences. The American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) [defines diversity](#) as “the recognition of many dimensions, including, but not limited to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, cultural background, language, cognitive style, nationality, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and other forms of differences, both visible and invisible.”

Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. It means providing people what they need rather than treating everyone the same. Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed.

When talking about diversity, it’s important to acknowledge the concept of “intersectionality,” which is defined as the intersection of oppressed identities and how they simultaneously affect an individual’s experiences. [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#) coined the term to encourage acknowledgement and understanding of individuals’ differences. A lens through which the world is viewed, Crenshaw says it’s “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as





race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”

Consider a Black man who is gay. A transgender female ostracized by her strict, religious family. A Latina daughter of an undocumented immigrant who suffers from a learning disability. A lesbian woman being physically and emotionally abused by her partner. Stopping discrimination requires working collaboratively to acknowledge and leverage differences for the benefit of all. The concept of diversity is more than what makes individuals unique. It’s about respecting and appreciating one another for those differences as well as the state of feeling respected.

Bias is a natural inclination for or against something or someone and can lead to unfair treatment of a person or group of people. Bias is also, to a degree, a normal socio-bio function; the brain takes shortcuts to process vast amounts of information. These shortcuts can result in prejudgments that can lead to discriminatory beliefs or practices. Because many biases can be largely unconscious, building self-awareness is key to uncovering them.

Systemic racism comprises the systems and structures that disadvantage BIPOC. It’s a complex mixture of how policies, culture and institutions create disparities in wealth, employment, housing, healthcare, politics, education and the criminal justice system. If proof it exists is needed, consider that the [average net worth](#) of a typical white family in America is ten times that of a Black family, all as a result of the complex conditions that play out against BIPOC.

### **“I Don’t See Color”**

A common response to a discussion about racism is “I don’t see color.” It’s usually well-intentioned, a way of signaling someone doesn’t discriminate, that they treat people equally regardless of their race or ethnicity. But can a white person honestly say that they don’t see the skin color of the Black person standing in front of them, or the veterinarian from India who’s sitting next to them at an educational event?

In a [recent article](#) in *Today’s Veterinary Business*, Dr. Lisa Greenhill writes that a statement of colorblindness in response to a conversation about racism is a way to avoid uncomfortable feelings and the examination of one’s behaviors or beliefs. In fact, it can feel like a dismissal and serves to shut down conversations. Greenhill says that colorblindness “absolves us of the need to do any personal work to understand our social roles in perpetuating white supremacy, and all of us, including BIPOC, unwittingly prop up white supremacy in one way or another.”

### **He, She, They, Ze – Why do Gender Pronouns Matter?**

Pronouns are words that people use to refer to others, and they are typically used based on someone’s appearance. While sex is a label that’s assigned at birth based on genitalia and chromosomes, gender is a social construct, a set of expectations from society. Gender identity is



an internal perception of gender and how people label themselves. Assuming a person's pronouns without first asking can cause harm. A key to a safe space for people of all sexes and gender identities is using gender pronouns respectfully.

### Allyship

The way to counter discrimination and to support and assist a marginalized person or group is to become an ally. What does it mean exactly? It's more than just voicing support on social media. It's actively and consistently using one's privilege to stand up against acts of injustice and promoting and advancing a culture of inclusion. In another [recent article](#) in *Today's Veterinary Business*, Dr. Greenhill writes that there are five key elements of allyship that must be pursued constantly and simultaneously:

1. Commit to lifelong learning about all forms of oppression including racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, etc.
2. Expect to follow and not lead, as allyship centers on elevating the voices that have been silenced.
3. Be vulnerable and willing to demonstrate your commitment to change.
4. Recognize how your own life has benefitted by the systems in place and use your privilege to effect change.
5. Never walk away from the work of being an ally.

It's critical that those who are privileged learn how systemic discrimination impacts everyone, and not expect the people who've been marginalized to be the educators.

### 1.2: Why Executive Directors are Critical to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in Veterinary Medicine

Veterinary medical associations (VMAs) play an important role in making veterinary medicine more diverse, equitable and inclusive. As leaders in the profession, association executives are in a unique position to influence positive change. Working with boards, executives can facilitate a thoughtful process with the intent of increasing awareness, advancing their organizations, assisting members, and ultimately benefiting the animals and communities the veterinary profession serves. Association executives have the power to effect powerful and lasting change.

To begin, though, self-examination is required. Meaningful work can't take place without first recognizing personal biases, stations of privilege, how they affect one's worldview, and the way others are treated.



Equally important, it must be acknowledged that racism exists in all aspects of society and within the veterinary profession. BIPOC in the profession consistently report that they feel undervalued, unsafe and exhausted from navigating unwelcoming environments. Other marginalized veterinarians and team members report similar feelings. It's imperative they are listened to and steps are taken to truly understand how they're affected.

### 1.3: How Leading in DEI Benefits Veterinary Associations

*"Associations that intend to remain relevant today and long into the future recognize the strategic importance of diversity and inclusion as an association management discipline."*

American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)

According to [ASAE](#), not only are there numerous benefits to associations adopting DEI principles, policies and strategies, it's critical to maintaining relevance. Key to pursuing DEI is that it must be tied to mission. ASAE affirms that DEI enhances an organization's mission because a diverse group of people in an inclusive culture is more likely to speak freely, think creatively, take risks, and is better able to develop solutions. In addition, DEI is proven to be profitable and improves competitive advantage through improved productivity, increased retention of employees, attracting new members, and fostering loyalty.

In their [DEI Case Statement](#), ASAE lists the 10 key advantages for pursuing diversity and inclusion for associations:

1. Creates a competitive advantage for the organization. Greater diversity brings more potential links to sources for identifying trends and opportunities. Organizations can take a better pulse on the environment the more communities it is tapping through its employee and volunteer base.
2. Lowers organizational risk of litigation. Real and perceived discrimination can undermine the work climate. The association can be used as a setting to address societal biases and inequities.
3. Achieves a high-quality, satisfied and dedicated workforce. Employees that feel better about their work environment, and their relative status within it, are likely to have lower absenteeism and turnover, contributing to a workforce of exceptional personnel and reducing recruitment costs.
4. Reduces the potential for "groupthink." A diverse team is more likely to have members who will challenge conventional wisdom and be willing to advocate unpopular or less well-known positions.
5. Supports innovation and problem solving. Diversity can improve analytics and result in more creative solutions.



6. Enhances the organization's reputation. Members feel an affinity with an organization that appears to value them, some scholars and diversity practitioners argue that they also prefer to buy from it.
7. Increases sales and market share. Diversity is said to expand organizational reach and relationships in new markets and bring insight and cultural sensitivity to marketing efforts.
8. Facilitates connections and community. People are likely to be more drawn to the organization, and satisfied with their experience with it, if they can connect with organizational contacts who understand their values and interests.
9. Takes the "pulse" of the operating environment. Diverse communities help in making an organization more responsive to environmental changes and at less cost.
10. Eliminates rankism. An inclusive team or organization helps individuals learn, develop, and connect with one another and is less likely to create a culture of "somebodies" and "nobodies" in the organization.

### Inclusive Leadership

In addition to an association's mission, strategy and practices, commitment to DEI requires inclusive leadership. Inclusive leaders demonstrate authentic commitment, humility, awareness of their own biases, curiosity about others, cultural intelligence, and effective, empowering collaboration.

Making organizations more diverse, equitable, and inclusive will lead to positive and meaningful change for those who for too long have been marginalized and discriminated against. DEI-advanced veterinary medical associations will help propel the profession forward, create more opportunities for BIPOC to choose veterinary medicine, and ultimately benefit animal and public health.

As leaders work to enact DEI principles and attract a more diverse population to enter the profession and join organized veterinary medicine, it's important that associations aren't just ticking a box by offering an occasional DEI session at a conference or displaying imagery showcasing diverse people. It's important to engage in *meaningful* change by including DEI in strategic plans and through the annual allocation of resources.

The better it's understood how to create diverse, equitable, and inclusive associations, and to implement strategies for DEI success, the sooner DEI can be advanced throughout the entire profession.



### 1.4: DEI Leads to Improved Workplaces and Greater Financial Success for Associations and Veterinary Practices

Implementing a DEI strategy in business is not just the right thing to do. Associations and veterinary practices that make DEI a strategic priority reap the benefits and the rewards. Employing DEI strategies will lead to a more satisfied and productive team and improved financial health.

Hiring a diverse workforce combined with an environment that's inclusive, equitable, fair, and open creates a culturally caring and psychologically safe environment, one that fosters a sense of belonging regardless of a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, or other form of identity. Such a work environment not only leads to an improved sense of safety, resilience, and wellbeing, it increases morale and engagement, reduces conflict, and allows for authentic and transparent communications. Because employees feel more satisfied in their work, retention is increased and the replacement cost for employees is lower. It's also easier to attract new employees. A satisfied workforce is the best marketing tool a business has to attract new members of the team.

A diverse workforce in an inclusive environment is essential for success in today's world. According to a [2017 study](#), diverse and inclusive teams make better business decisions 87% of the time, and they make them twice as fast in half the number of meetings. The study results also indicate that diverse teams deliver 60% better results. A diverse workforce is a key driver of innovation. Companies that are diverse and inclusive develop more relevant products and services. Better solutions can be developed when there are diverse ideas and approaches from myriad points of view.

#### **Millennials and Generation Z**

Millennials and Generation Z in particular take diversity into account when considering taking a job and they stay longer with companies that understand the needs of a diverse workforce. They expect organizations and businesses they work for, and buy from, to place DEI front and center in their business strategy, not as lip service but incorporated into the company ethos and the work ethic of their leaders. They've grown up with the understanding that DEI is critical to a fairly functioning society and they reject leaders and businesses who deny racism is a problem or whose ethics marginalize groups of people.

#### **DEI and Business Success**

Research has proven that businesses that have a diverse workforce and are more inclusive outperform the competition. It turns out that increasing diversity within a business not only is predictive of success but it's also a catalyst.





According to a [report](#) from global consulting firm McKinsey & Company, in 2019 businesses with the greatest gender diversity within their leadership teams were 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies with the least gender diverse management. Businesses with the greatest proportion of mixed ethnic and cultural composition outperformed those with the least ethnic and culturally diverse teams by 36% in profitability. Non-diverse executive teams come with a penalty. McKinsey found that companies with the least gender, ethnic and cultural diversity consistently underperformed as compared to all other companies.

Diversity, it follows, not only benefits those who are underrepresented. Diversity is a successful revenue generating business strategy for veterinary associations and practices, and indeed all types of businesses. Thriving in a competitive business environment requires creative thinking. When a business engages people with a diversity of minds, ideas, and approaches, better solutions are developed.

### 1.5: DEI Improves Veterinary Care Delivery and Creates Healthier Veterinary Practices

Veterinary medical association executives can directly impact animal and public health and veterinary practice success by fostering DEI principles within their organizations and by assisting in the facilitation of DEI principles in veterinary practice.

The U.S. population is becoming more diverse with each passing year. It's critical for the outcome of the patient that veterinary teams understand the clients they serve. Not as in mastery of all cultures and their norms, but through recognition of one's own biases, awareness of cultural dynamics, and being willing to adapt.

In human healthcare, it's [well documented](#) that unsatisfactory doctor-patient communication can be a contributing factor to noncompliance, poor health outcomes, adverse events, and litigation. Delivering care to multicultural and minority populations with a lack of effective, culturally sensitive communication by medical teams can worsen the problem.

Cultural sensitivity is both the awareness and non-judgment of the differences and similarities that exist between people. In healthcare, each patient's sociocultural background affects his or her behavior and beliefs about health. Providing culturally competent care means to be aware of biases and resolving differences that can lead to misunderstandings. A doctor or team member who's unaware of his or her biases, who doesn't understand and accommodate cultural differences, or who is unable to overcome a language barrier can lead to incomplete health assessments and potentially negative health consequences for the patient.

It's been found in the [medical profession](#) that a diverse workforce with diverse perspectives leads to greater cultural sensitivity and communication and in addition, greater problem solving, better health access, and it lessens health disparities. A diverse team that is representative of the surrounding community, with diverse perspectives and effective



communication, leads to improved compliance and patient outcomes. When clients from diverse backgrounds are treated respectfully and feel understood, compliance improves.

### How cultural differences play out in veterinary medicine

In veterinary medicine, the client's cultural background may affect his or her behavior and beliefs about their animal's life and medical needs. In the following real-life situations, clients presented the veterinary team an opportunity to better understand cultural differences:

*A family stood in the exam room. Their small, white Bichon had lived a long and happy life but the veterinarian recommended euthanasia for a humane ending. The veterinarian administered the euthanasia solution and the dog's life came to a peaceful end. The veterinarian told the family to take all the time they needed with their beloved dog and exited the room. Almost immediately, the father, mother, and the teenage boy and girl began crying loudly, wailing their grief at the loss of their beloved friend. The sound alarmed the staff and waiting clients, but because of the veterinarian's awareness and sensitivity she was able to inform the team and the other clients that it was normal for the members of their culture to mourn publicly.*

*In another scenario, a woman who had recently emigrated to America had to call and obtain her husband's permission for the veterinarian to collect blood on their cat. The veterinary technician was taken aback by this display of deference to her husband, but the veterinarian reminded them that in some cultures and religions, husbands have the place of authority within the family.*

In an [article](#) on Kansas State University's website, they use other examples of how culture, ethnicity, religion, or ability may affect an owner's visit to the veterinary practice and how important it is for veterinarians to sensitively acknowledge these differences. Consider the Jewish pet owner who won't schedule a Saturday appointment because of the Sabbath, the blind gentleman facing an extended inability to navigate life while his dog recuperates from surgery, or the Native American woman who holds deep spiritual beliefs about the animals in her care. Posting welcoming language in the veterinary hospital goes a long way to reinforce an inclusive environment.

As Dr. Patty Khuly writes in an [article](#) in *Veterinary Practice News*, a person's culture often plays a bigger role in a patient's outcome than any treatment prescribed by the veterinarian.

Veterinary teams who are diverse and able to provide a non-biased and culturally sensitive approach to their clients lead to improved client compliance and health outcomes for the animal patient, and also increase client satisfaction and retention. In the [VMAE | ThinkWORKS 2018](#) conference on DEI, Dr. Kauline Cipriani Davis said it's accomplished through increasing



self-awareness and knowledge of and appreciation for other cultures, through understanding the dynamics of difference, and by adapting behavior to match shifting cultural conditions.

Said another way, the report *Road Map for Veterinary Medical Education in the 21st Century: Responsive, Collaborative, Flexible* from the North American Veterinary Medical Education Consortium (NAVMEC) stated, “Veterinarians and their teams must have an understanding of the manner in which culture and belief systems impact the delivery of veterinary care while recognizing and addressing biases in themselves.”

### **Culturally competent care leads to healthier veterinary practices**

Veterinary clients who feel understood and respected, and whose social, cultural or linguistic needs are fully met, are more likely to remain loyal and compliant for the life of the animal and beyond. It follows then, that better retention leads to increased profits. A report from [Bain & Co.](#) notes that businesses that increase their customer retention rates by 5% results in 25% - 95% increased profit. According to [Lee Resource, Inc.](#), it costs five times more to attract a new client than it does to keep an existing one. In addition, loyal clients lead to more loyal clients. All one must do is watch clients’ Facebook feeds to see how often referrals to various professionals are requested.

Culturally competent care combined with a profession made up of diverse individuals point the compass towards improved health outcomes, loyal clients, and successful practices.

### **1.6: DEI Benefits the Public**

An increasingly diverse veterinary profession, one that reflects the changing demographics, ultimately improves animal and public health through the improved delivery of veterinary care. A diverse veterinary profession will have a more thorough understanding of how culture and belief systems affect those who seek care for their animals.

The cost of veterinary care is out of reach for many of the pet owning public. A 2018 [study](#) by the Access to Veterinary Care Coalition (AVCC) found 28% of pet owners had recently experienced a barrier to veterinary care mostly due to financial reasons, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers may have grown higher. [Approximately](#) 50% of households with pets that participate in a federal nutrition program are racially and ethnically diverse.

Of course, many veterinarians do what they can to help clients facing financial hardship, but the numbers are simply too great resulting in animals being relinquished or suffering prolonged illness, pain, and premature death.

In addition to the inability to pay for care, there are cultural, language, and transportation barriers for pet owners to seek care for their pets. It’s a complex social issue, but AVCC’s study found that overwhelmingly, regardless of the reasons for the lack of access to care, owners



consider their pets essential to their lives. They're bonded to their non-human family members. The myth must be dispelled that minority populations or those from economically disadvantaged areas don't love pets enough to take them to the veterinarian.

Having money is no guarantee a pet will be loved and provided adequate care. Diverse populations have pets and consider them to be members of the family, but many have competing financial priorities. It's a lack of material resources and/or access to affordable care, rather than a lack of love or desire to care for their animal.

Another myth that arises from bias and lack of understanding is that if more minority families owned pets there would be a more diverse population of people attracted to veterinary medicine. To be sure, diverse populations already own animals. Building a more diverse pipeline into the profession requires that the profession do more to foster relationships, support STEM education, expand BIPOC scholarships, and more deeply understand how "shadowing" experiences relevant for some in the pipeline are blocked by barriers for others.

A diverse veterinary profession will have a more thorough understanding of how culture and belief systems affect pet ownership, and animal owners who are able to see veterinarians and teams who look like them will be more likely to seek care. In an article in [dvm360](#), Oklahoma State University's veterinary school dean, Dr. Carlos Risco, also points out that individuals from underrepresented groups enter professions that will directly impact social issues facing their communities. Right now, it may not be clear how becoming a veterinarian will solve issues such as food insecurity or the lack of access to veterinary care.

A veterinary profession that reflects the changing demographics and reduces language and cultural barriers ultimately improves animal and public health through the enhanced delivery of veterinary care to all populations, especially in communities where economic and racial disparities exist. It will help lessen disease outbreaks and reduce both pet overpopulation and shelter relinquishment. It will also ensure a safe and secure food supply which depends on understanding cultures and reducing language barriers.

More broadly, it's been found that a diverse health workforce increases medical knowledge and innovation because a diversity of thought and viewpoints contributes to better decision-making and enhanced communication, which leads to new medical interventions. Indeed, it can lead to accelerated advances in public health and medical research.

### 1.7: DEI and the Veterinary Profession

The veterinary profession must do better. Whether it's working to attract more veterinary students from underrepresented populations, doing more in getting veterinary professionals up to speed in cultural competency, increasing understanding that DEI makes good business sense,



fosters happier employees, and benefits animal and public health, there is much work to be done.

Following the death of George Floyd, ten DEI affinity organizations came together to address systemic racism in veterinary medicine and to challenge the profession to do better. Their [letter and list of actionables](#) was brought to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), and has subsequently been endorsed by VMAs, veterinary colleges, individual veterinarians, industry, and others committed to taking action. The actionables are broadly grouped into seven categories appropriate to any organization or individual who wishes to advance DEI in veterinary medicine. In addition, they produced a [video](#) featuring the personal stories of 387 veterinarians and veterinary students who have experienced racism and discrimination.

The good news is that positive movement is being made, although it's important to remember that the journey has barely begun. It's also important to note that marginalized colleagues should not be expected to do the work on behalf of others. It's up to those who are privileged to effect change.

The AVMA has implemented new goals within the organization. Together with the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), they've created the Commission for a Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Veterinary Profession. Made up of representatives from several veterinary organizations and industry, the Commission aims to promote DEI within the profession, expand the student pipeline, encourage welcoming workplaces, as well as encourage and assist VMAs and animal health companies to measure and improve DEI. AVMA has also developed continuing education programs, podcasts, and toolboxes to foster a more culturally conscious profession.

For some time, the AAVMC has been placing importance on diversity and inclusion as it pertains to veterinary student enrollment. They are actively working to attract a more racially and ethnically diverse student population that is more reflective of society and their efforts have resulted in the diversity of the U.S. student population increasing to just over [20% as of 2021](#). But even at that rate, it will take a long time to change the make-up of the profession.

Colleges of veterinary medicine across the U.S. have also increased their commitment to an inclusive institutional climate by preparing graduates to work in an increasingly diverse world, hiring diverse faculty, and developing programs to attract a more diverse student body.

### **Educational Pipeline**

According to an [article](#) about promoting health equity and increasing minorities in secondary education in the U.S., students from low-income backgrounds, communities of color and first-generation college families are underrepresented in training programs for the scientific professions. In fact, out of one million active physicians, less than 6% are from racial and ethnic





minorities. And it extends to other science and engineering professions as well. Studies show that health equity depends on a racially and ethnically diverse workforce who focus on underserved communities. Unfortunately, barriers to achieving diversity are established early in the educational pipeline because of inequities in funding, access to quality education, and adequate preparation for higher education.

The educational pipeline is the continuum that begins in early childhood and continues through high school, preparing students to successfully graduate from college. For the veterinary profession, pipeline development is the key to diversifying the profession by attracting and widening the pool of applicants to veterinary school from underrepresented groups of students.

Veterinary colleges have implemented new pipeline programs to achieve diversity but more needs to be done. VMAs can play a role in pipeline development through a variety of volunteer programs that foster kids' interest in animal husbandry and expose them to the field of veterinary medicine. Summer camps, career days, collaborating with science teachers, guidance counselors and community non-profits, involvement with animal science or pre-vet clubs, and setting up scholarships are all ideas that can influence a young person to view veterinary medicine as a valid career.

There are so many young people who can enrich and improve our profession; we need to do more to create a welcoming, inclusive profession that they will be eager to explore and join. The more students from underrepresented groups that graduate from veterinary school, the easier it will become for animal owners to see a veterinarian who more closely resembles them and it will encourage others to enter the profession in the future.

But modeling and mentoring aren't all that should be kept in mind. Race and ethnicity often are accompanied by a lower socio-economic status, and underrepresented students often don't have some of the same advantages, rendering it more difficult to achieve academic success and entrance into veterinary school. High tuition and a lack of awareness about the costs also prevent many students from attending. Given that graduates often return to their hometowns, the more diverse students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds that graduate from veterinary school, the greater likelihood that they'll go back to provide veterinary care and serve as role models to attract more students to the profession. It will become easier for animal owners to see the value of veterinary care when they work with a veterinarian who more closely resembles them.

Successful pipeline programs and a more diverse profession benefits the public sphere as well. The [National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education](#) states "Individuals with higher degrees can expect to earn higher incomes. The result: more tax revenue and economic activity for the state. An educated, skilled population makes fewer demands on social services such as welfare and corrections. The result: less expense to the state."



### 1.8: Professional Values and Ethics

#### Veterinarian's Oath and Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics

Honoring diversity and practicing medicine equitably and inclusively are an important part of a veterinarian's professional values beginning with the [Veterinarian's Oath](#):

*Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society.*

*I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.*

*I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.*

The [Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics](#) reiterate the oath, expecting all veterinarians to adhere to an ethical code of conduct with regard to DEI.

*9. A veterinarian should view, evaluate and treat all persons, in any professional activity or circumstance in which they may be involved, solely as individuals on the basis of their own personal abilities, qualifications and other relevant characteristics.*

*9.1. As health professionals seeking to advance animal and public health, veterinarians should strive to confront and reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination that may lead to impediments to access of quality animal and public healthcare for clients/patients or lack of educational, training and employment opportunities for veterinary colleagues/students and other members of the animal healthcare team. These forms of prejudice and discrimination include, but are not limited to, race; ethnicity; physical and mental abilities; gender; sexual orientation; gender identity; parental status; religious beliefs; military or veteran status; political beliefs; geographic, socioeconomic, and educational background; and any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law.*

#### Veterinary Technician Oath

Like veterinarians, veterinary technicians take an oath and are expected to adhere to their Code of Ethics.

*I solemnly dedicate myself to aiding animals and society by providing excellent care and services for animals, by alleviating animal suffering, and promoting public health.*



*I accept my obligations to practice my profession conscientiously and with sensitivity, adhering to the profession's [Code of Ethics](#), and furthering my knowledge and competence through a commitment to lifelong learning.*

### Association Executive Ethics

As association executives, there is a moral and ethical imperative to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in veterinary associations and the veterinary profession. It's more than hiring one or two BIPOC or promising not to disrespect people who are different. It's about building DEI into every aspect of associations, collective missions, values, and strategy. The membership of each VMA as well as the whole of the profession looks to association executives to lead with integrity. Indeed, a primary goal built into every association is to transform society for the better. Professional ethical standards describe the conduct that individuals strive to uphold and association executives follow the [American Society of Association Executives \(ASAE\) Core Ethical Standards](#):

1. *Respect and uphold public laws that govern one's work;*
2. *Be honest in conducting the member's business;*
3. *Respect the confidentiality of information gained through one's work;*
4. *Act fairly;*
5. *Foster an ethical culture through one's work; and*
6. *Take responsibility for one's conduct.*

In ASAE's Core Ethical Standards Addendum, fostering an ethical culture through one's work includes:

- *Employing practices that exemplify "Social Responsibility" as it pertains to both the human and environmental conditions;*
- *Respecting diversity and fostering inclusion in all aspects of my work; and*
- *Informing myself about the norms and customs of others and avoiding engaging in behaviors they might consider disrespectful.*

There it is. DEI is included within an association executive's ethical standards.



### 1.9: Conclusion

VMA executives and volunteer leaders are the stewards of this great profession and are critical to shaping its future. VMAE is asking for the sincere commitment to end discrimination and to build more diverse, inclusive, and equitable organizations and veterinary profession.

It's important to acknowledge one might feel trepidation when thinking about DEI. It's not uncommon to worry about saying the wrong thing or offending someone and it's understandable to have a fear of being seen as a bad person or being part of the problem. But fear can lead to inaction; DEI can simply no longer be ignored. Not the data, not the healthcare outcomes, nor the successes of so many other businesses and organizations who employ DEI principles. And certainly not the increased wellbeing that comes from making things better for everyone.

Most of all, the people who have been discriminated against and marginalized are asking to be heard. Not taking this journey can bring further hurt when they've already suffered long enough.

Embarking on DEI work is meaningful and brings untold benefits personally, professionally, and organizationally. Join VMAE in this *Journey* and move individuals, veterinary medical associations, and the veterinary profession forward.

**“Everybody has to speak up and take action, or else nothing will change.”**

*Dr. Christina Tran, president, Multicultural VMA*



## Stage 2 – Deepening Our Education

### 2.0: Video Introduction to Stage 2

- [Journey Overview](#)
- [Introduction to Stage 2](#)

### 2.1: What VMAs Most Need to Know

There are various entry points to a DEI learning journey as well as a range of short- and long-term goals. For some VMAs, there may be a wish to explore foundational concepts for common understanding and stronger interpersonal relationships. For others there may be a wish for a deeper dive into allyship and advocacy work by learning about the [history of racist and oppressive systems](#) and how they still impact society today. Journey provides a way to consider the different entry points into learning by establishing Levels 1, 2 and 3. Outlined below are sample goals for each level along with supportive resources to reinforce learning by topic area.

#### Learning Journey Levels

- **Level 1** learners are new to formally learning about DEI concepts. They are interested in understanding definitions and core concepts to improve interpersonal interactions. They care about the repercussions the lack of diversity, equity and inclusion have on veterinary medicine and the communities we serve.
- **Level 2** learners have a foundational understanding of core concepts and desire a deeper understanding about historical context for structural racism, forms of oppression and lack of diversity in the veterinary profession. They are interested in engaging in strategies for dismantling racist and oppressive structures within the profession through advocacy and allyship.
- **Level 3** learners are very familiar with core concepts and frameworks and want to learn more about best practices and find ways to pilot and lead others meaningfully in DEI work. They are interested in robust partnerships that amplify the voices and perspectives of BIPOC and other marginalized identity groups.





Learning Journey Level	Sample DEI Goals	Supportive Resources
<b>Level 1</b>	Demonstrate greater awareness and skill to interact across identity differences  Develop new “rules of the road” (foundational norms/practices) around DEI	2.2 Definitions  2.3 Inclusive Language  2.4 Addressing Bias and Microaggressions
<b>Level 2</b>	Identify authentic actions one can take to dismantle racist and oppressive practices  Create brave spaces for learning and practice on issues of inclusion and racial equity	2.5 Allyship  2.6 Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression
<b>Level 3</b>	Enlist others to embark on a learning journey  Share promising practices  Go deeper in learning at the individual level (self-mastery/sharing with others)	2.7 DEI Resources

### 2.2: Definitions

Becoming familiar with the lexicon of the DEI field is an important starting place in the journey. DEI definitions and [terminology](#) serve two important purposes:

- Creating a shared understanding supported by common language; and
- Providing clarity of words and ideas and help to ensure clarity of solutions.

Through the use of more precise language and meaning, identifying the strategies that will best achieve goals becomes easier.

Definitions as provided in the article [“An anti-racist's dictionary: 16 words on race, gender, and diversity you should know”](#) by Margeurite Ward can promote impactful conversations around DEI by offering a common framework for dialogue and [culturally competent care](#). Definitions can also prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Additionally, a shared lexicon can help create shared understanding and allows for people to enter conversations mindfully.



### 2.3: Inclusive Language

The use of [inclusive language](#) is critical in creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, included and respected. Inclusive language helps build a sense of community and trust by ensuring everyone is treated with dignity and impartiality. Inclusive language means making a conscious and empathetic effort to communicate in ways that put people first, avoid inflammatory phrases, use gender-neutral terminology, recognize the importance of mental health language and avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes. Resources like the [Gender Alphabet](#) can be helpful for teams and VMAs in written and oral communication. Another resource is [PrideVMC's Gender Identity Bill of Rights](#), which serves as a minimum foundation to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices against transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals in the veterinary profession.

It's important to remember that habits don't change overnight. Practice and intention are needed to become more aware and accountable in all facets of life. Finally, know that it's okay to ask questions if something is unclear.

### 2.4: Addressing Bias and Microaggressions

Unconscious or implicit bias refers to the "associations that are made between different qualities and social categories such as race, gender or disability and are judgments that are made without conscious awareness." Intentional or unintentional, bias and [microaggressions](#) hurt people from underrepresented and marginalized groups. The cumulative impact in the workplace can result in a toxic environment where people feel unheard and disrespected.

Addressing bias and [working to eliminate microaggressions](#) are critical steps towards creating a more equitable and inclusive workplace. The video clips below can prompt discussion and a deeper understanding of how bias is present in the lens through which the world is seen and experienced.

- [Color Blind or Color Brave, Mellody Hobson](#)
- [How to overcome our biases – walk boldly toward them, Verna Myers](#)
- [The Danger of a Single Story, Chimamanda Adichie](#)
- [Heineken "Worlds apart" by Publicis London, bridging between people](#)
- [Peanut Butter, Jelly and Racism](#) What is implicit bias? NYT/POV's Saleem Reshamwala unscrews the lid on the unfair effects of our subconscious.
- [How to let go of being a "good person" – and become a better person, Dolly Chugh](#)

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) developed by social scientists at the University of Washington, Harvard University and the University of Virginia provides a range of cognitive response tests to raise awareness to the public about hidden biases. The IAT offers 14 tests that aim at assessing bias related to race, ability, skin tone, age, gender, sexuality, weight, religion, etc. The tests provide both valid and reliable data for a deeper understanding of the way biases may show up in both thought and behavior. These illuminating tests are free and available [here](#).



### 2.5: Allyship

Step into the work of allyship through meaningful action. Allyship is not a noun; one can't proclaim one's self an ally. Consider it a verb, meaning that allyship is something that is practiced. [Being an ally](#) means taking action to benefit someone else rather than focusing on the good one does by helping. Consider what it might mean to be an ally and follow examples of actions other allies have taken:

- Take on the struggle on behalf of the oppressed.
- Transfer the benefits of privilege to those who lack it.
- Amplify voices of the oppressed, removing the focus from one's self.
- Acknowledge that even though being an ally can be painful, the conversation is about them.
- Stand up, even when feeling scared.
- Own mistakes while keeping the focus on them.
- Understand that education is the responsibility of the individual and not of the oppressed.

All the actions described above are examples of allyship. Consider which actions might feel challenging. Where are there opportunities for growth?

Amélie Lamont provides an open source starter guide to assist in becoming a more thoughtful and effective ally in her [Guide to Allyship](#). She makes an important distinction between allyship that is "optical," meaning for public acknowledgement versus truly supportive and authentic allyship.

### 2.6: Anti-racism and Anti-oppression

To create an equal society, it's important to understand how racism has affected BIPOC. Begin by exploring the historical content of [racism](#) and other systems of [oppression](#) present in the U.S. Notice and question the surrounding stories and systems that may have been foundational up until now, and consider how racism affects the [lived experience of BIPOC communities](#). Interrupt, resist, and dismantle beliefs, norms, practices, and structures that sustain racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism and other systems of oppression. Advocate for those who are most marginalized and participate in [designing new practices](#), structures, and systems that create greater equity.

### 2.7: DEI Resources

There are myriad resources that build understanding in DEI, which can be accessed individually or within a group. Learning from and inviting discussion from BIPOC and other marginalized identity groups, including from within the veterinary medical community, further advances understanding by hearing personal experiences and perspectives.



The following are resources to access and ideas to engage in the learning journey:

- **Reading**  
Use this [book list](#) to start a board of director's book club on how to become a stronger ally for marginalized voices.
- **Challenge yourself and your organization**  
Invest in a Racial Equity Education Challenge (modeled after the Debby Irving [21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](#)). Sign up for and set aside time to listen to enlightening podcasts, such as:
  - [AAVMC Diversity & Inclusion on Air](#)
  - [About Race](#)
  - [Code Switch \(NPR\)](#)
  - [Intersectionality Matters! hosted by Kimberlé Crenshaw](#)
  - [Momentum: A Race Forward Podcast](#)
- **Videos**  
Learn about the DEI crisis in veterinary medicine from these [testimonies](#).
- **Webinars**  
Have the team do this self-paced [LinkedIn DEI webinar series](#) and then regroup to discuss learning and application points.
- **Professional organizations**  
Invite a speaker from a [veterinary medicine DEI affinity organization](#) to do a presentation to and/or host a board discussion.
- **Curated Resources**  
Here is a list of curated resources on [allyship](#), [generational difference](#), and [anti-racism](#) that can be used for one of the following actions:
  - Add them to a DEI topic area on the association's website.
  - Feature a resource in a monthly newsletter.
  - Host a journal or book club (e.g. feature a [HBR article](#), or *So You want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo, or *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson).



# Stage 3 – Making the Commitment

## 3.0: Video Introductions to Stage 3

- [Journey Overview](#)
- [Introduction to Stage 3](#)

## 3.1: The Board's Role

Any good association initiative needs to start with support from the Board of Directors. And when it comes to DEI, it's one thing to talk the talk – but it's another to walk the walk. The board needs to not just provide lip service to the initiative, it needs to back it up with actions. In this section, the board's role will be explored and how it can set the tone for the journey.

## 3.2: Set Guidelines for Safe Dialog

Setting community guidelines is crucial for establishing a safe space for conversation and exploration. A few tips to get started – acknowledge personal biases, be open to feedback, provide context in communication, be aware of tendencies to interrupt, uphold confidentiality, and don't stress over unplanned guests. It's important to create a safe place to foster open, honest and transparent communication. To explore these tips in more detail, [click here](#).

During these initial discussions, one may encounter a board member who is resistant to change when it comes to DEI. This is common and it shouldn't be feared. These board members will represent at least a portion of an association's overall membership, so plan to talk about their resistance, their concerns and any alternative ideas they may have. Techniques and tools for getting everyone on board with DEI changes include:

- Avoid coercion and control tactics, instead frame efforts more positively by engaging resistant board members to help solve DEI challenges within the organization, increasing their on-the-job contact with underrepresented members and constituents, and promoting social accountability.
- When utilizing resources, avoid negative messaging ("company pays price for discrimination" as threats and coercion won't help your case). Listen to the concerns of the board and/or members and try to address them. Oftentimes, members just want to be heard and have a say in the process.
- Ask for and listen to feedback from all board members; emphasize that there is room for everyone and develop an organizational mindset of learning. It's important in this case to not take "silence as agreement." Be sure everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard. Everyone's opinion, thoughts, and ideas matter when it comes to DEI, so be sure to ask for those if not voluntarily offered.



### 3.3: Convene Dialog to Inform Strategy

Having DEI discussions with the board can be uncomfortable if one is not prepared and the board doesn't know what to expect. It's important to create a space where the dialog can help to inform strategy. What are the current issues facing the association when it comes to DEI? Does the board represent the diversity of the membership? How does the board plan to address power and privilege?

To answer these questions, it's important to understand the problems and where the potential gaps may exist. In addition to the prior questions, additional dialogue with the board can be undertaken. Some questions to consider include:

- What is our VMA's role in tackling the DEI crisis in veterinary medicine?
- If we don't act, who will?
- Where does DEI best fit in our strategic framework?
- How might we apply and embrace DEI into our daily operations?
- How can we make our board more diverse and inclusive?
- How can we most effectively help turn awareness of the problem into concrete actions?
- What opportunities will we miss if we remain homogenous?
- How might we engage VMA volunteers in our DEI plan?
- How many resources should our VMA allocate to this crisis?

The resources below will help to facilitate a meaningful conversation with the board as the assessment of the association is conducted.

- [Five Questions for Board Diversity](#)
- [Discussion Questions](#)
- [Diversity Toolkit – A Guide to Discussing Identity Power and Privilege](#)

How the association executive and the board answer these questions will determine how best to proceed. Every journey is different, so choose the path that works best for the association and the membership.

### 3.4: Create an Authorizing Environment

To take the next step and get the board to authorize a DEI initiative, it's important to build capacity and get buy-in from board members. So how does one build the case? The following resources should be shared with the board so everyone in the association understands the



problem and begins to work toward solutions. The board should review all materials and then have an open and honest discussion about them.

- **Identifying systemic racism in the veterinary profession.** Just because someone hasn't personally experienced racial discrimination in veterinary medicine, it doesn't mean it didn't occur. [This seven-minute video](#) contains real stories and experiences from those who have been discriminated against in the veterinary profession based upon their race.
- **Demand for DEI initiatives continues to grow in the profession.** As a board and as an organization, it's important to [listen to voices of those who have experienced systemic racism](#) in veterinary medicine and how everyone can work together to combat it.
- **What are other associations in veterinary medicine doing to address the issue?** Where have they seen success and where are there opportunities to grow? Are there opportunities to partner with similar organizations to make a greater impact? [Find out how others are taking action.](#)

### 3.5: Develop Policy and Position Statements

Every association should have an anti-discrimination policy as well as a proactive DEI policy to share with all members and staff. The staff policy should be given to all employees, signed by each employee, and returned to human resources. The policy should also extend to members and all staff interactions with them. Every member should feel valued and included in all the work of the organization.

- [Example of an anti-discrimination policy for staff](#)
- [Example of DEI policy for staff and members](#)

### 3.6: Empanel a DEI Committee

Developing and implementing DEI goals should be the work of a DEI committee. This section will highlight how to get started with a committee and how to ensure its success. The DEI committee should regularly report on progress to the Board of Directors, and should also be given authority to set goals and make decisions.

The first step is to **adopt a DEI committee charge**. What is the point of the DEI committee? Why does it exist? These questions need to be answered and more as the DEI committee charge is developed. Review the examples below to aid in the creation of a charge that works best for the association.

- [Veterinary Medical Association Executives](#)
- [Council on Foundations](#)
- [Association for Fire Ecology](#)





It's important on this journey to start wherever the VMA is with regard to DEI. Every association is different and the best way to gauge the starting point is to **survey the membership**. The survey should be comprehensive and allow participants to share comments and experiences. The survey should also collect demographic information so there's a clearer idea of the makeup of the membership. The Michigan Veterinary Medical Association has a [sample survey](#) that can assist in putting one together.

### 3.7: Conduct the Organizational Assessment

It's crucial to monitor goals as the association continues the journey. The VMAE DEI Committee has developed an assessment specifically for VMAs to use. It allows executives and their associations to easily monitor progress, identify potential gaps in the plan, and identify barriers along the journey. The [assessment can be found here](#); see sections 4.1-4.4 for context.

Another example to explore is from [The National Alliance of Mental Health](#). NAMH developed a self-assessment that will not only help the executive and the association determine where the association is, but how to chart a path forward. Other examples are also included below:

- [AAVMC](#)
- [Justice Funders](#)

### 3.8: Develop the Action Plan

Now that goals have been determined, it's time to figure out how to achieve them. Putting together an action plan will help everyone to stay on task, measure and evaluate success, and ensure the right people are in the right positions to move the association forward. Throughout the journey, it may be discovered that different people are needed at different phases of the initiative. To optimize output, it may be necessary to adjust committee composition through the transition from strategy to implementation.

As the action plan is considered, VMAE has developed a menu of action plan goals and tactics to help generate ideas; [see section 4.7 for background and the action plan menu](#). The American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine has a [sample strategic plan](#) that may also be of benefit when putting a plan together.

### 3.9: Approve the Action Plan and Allocate Resources

Once the plan is finalized, it's necessary to strategically allocate resources in order to make it a reality. Budgeting for monetary expenses as well as staff time will build understanding about the scope of the work and the resources that are necessary for success. When building dialog with the board, the executive will need to have an honest conversation about the resources needed for implementation. If a solid plan is developed but there are not any resources behind it, it's nothing more than a wish list.



Allocating resources is crucial to making progress and ensuring the plan is implemented as intended. The [Minnesota Society of Association Executives](#) plan lays out the organization's DEI goals and the resources needed, and may serve as a model for articulating resource requirements within the organization.

### 3.10: Define Expected Outcomes and Measures

How will success be evaluated and measured? Are there key metrics in place? Do the board and the organization's staff agree on those metrics? Are they easily defined and measurable? The plan should include these items and both the board and staff should understand the expectations of the project. Below are some examples to measure outcomes in a way that brings about real change.

- [Four Ways to Meaningfully Measure your DEI Efforts](#)
- [Measure What Matters: DEI Impact](#)
- [Measuring & Inclusion](#)



## Stage 4 – Taking Action

### 4.0: Video Introductions to Stage 4

- [Journey Overview](#)
- [Introduction to Stage 4](#)

### 4.1: Assessment

An early step on any journey of growth is self-assessment and establishment of a baseline. After the current landscape is understood, then desired outcomes can be created with an accompanying plan and budget. Due to member demand and expectations, many associations fall into the trap of starting their DEI journey by providing DEI-related content in a variety of forms including webinars and podcasts. Everyone is encouraged to create the space and time to pause from those efforts and commit to doing the important, hard, foundational work of understanding the association's current DEI-related realities so that future decisions can be strategic and informed.

### 4.2: Association DEI Self-assessment Process

**Step 1** Utilize the results from the [member survey](#) described in section 3.6 to inform the creation of a strategic-minded and diverse DEI committee (DEIC), task force, or working group that includes at least one member of the association Board of Directors (BOD).

**Step 2** The DEICs initial activity is to agree to a process for completing an internal DEI self-assessment utilizing the provided veterinary medical association [DEI self-assessment tool](#). This tool was created and customized for veterinary associations by referencing a variety of input resources including the AAVMC association self-assessment tool that can be found in the references section. Notice that the first tab is referenced as a 'short form' and the second is the 'expanded form.' Smaller associations and those with minimal or no paid staff support will want to focus on the items in the short form. The VMA

DEI-self-assessment spreadsheet may be downloaded or copied to the respective VMA's shared drive to customize as the association wishes. One approach utilized by the Pride Veterinary Medical Community DEI working group was to add columns to the assessment for each DEI working group member to document their notes as they worked through the assessment. After ample time was given for individual analysis, the working group met to discuss their findings and incorporate their recommendations into one set of ratings.

"Using a self-assessment tool is really key for us at PrideVMC to make sure our priorities align with our actions on antiracism and working towards a diverse, equitable and inclusive veterinary profession."

*Dr. Dane Whitaker, President,  
PrideVMC*



**Step 2.5** Within the same spreadsheet that contains the DEI self-assessment tool, there is a third tab with an [event assessment tool](#). This tool should be utilized during the early stages of planning for conferences, symposia, large meetings, and any other association event.

**Step 3** The DEIC presents their DEI self-assessment ratings to the Board of Directors (BOD).

**Step 4** The BOD and DEIC iterate on the ratings until the BOD is satisfied that the ratings are a fair and true representation of the association.

**Step 5** The DEIC member make-up is reconfigured as the committee moves from a strategic to a more tactical mindset. For example, the committee may be more staff-focused versus volunteer-leader focused based on the association structure.

**Step 6** The newly restructured DEIC utilizes the self-assessment ratings to create a recommended action plan with accompanying success metrics and budget, which is presented to the Board of Directors. See section [4.7: Opportunities for Action – A Menu of Operational Plan Goals and Tactics](#) for ideas.

**Step 7** The DEIC and BOD iterate on the plan, success metrics, and budget until a board-approved plan with accompanying budget is finalized.

**Step 8** The DEIC continues to meet regularly to oversee the implementation of the DEI plan. Regular progress updates are shared with the BOD and membership.

**Step 9** In concert with the association planning and budget cycle, the DEIC conducts a full review and audit of the DEI plan annually to inform the following year action plan and budget.

### 4.3: We Need More Help!

For executives that have read this far and are thinking “All of this sounds great, but we need more help and guidance to launch our DEI efforts” – never fear! Bringing in expert consultants to support the internal staff and volunteer leaders in the association self-assessment will ensure long-term success; they can help your organization in ways including these:

- Facilitate discussion of difficult topics
- Avoid mis-steps and common mistakes
- Personalize programming for your organization
- Provide expertise in areas missing in your organization
- Independent evaluation for assessment

There are many highly talented and qualified [DEI subject matter experts](#) who can be engaged as consultants to support an association’s efforts. It’s important to understand that some consultants may be generalists and others may have expertise in specific areas (e.g. intersectionality) or with specific groups (e.g. BIPOC or LGBTQ+). Consider having prospective



consultants share their strengths with you so your organization can determine how to best address specific or comprehensive needs.

### 4.4: Assessment Resources

- [AAVMC Conference and Symposium DEI Assessment](#)
- [AAVMC Organizational DEI Assessment](#)
- [ASAE Association Inclusion Index](#)
- [DEI Subject Matter Experts](#)
- [MVMA DEI Survey Draft](#)
- [VMA DEI Assessment Tool](#)

### 4.5: Valuing Demographic Data

Collecting and using demographic data responds to the fundamental need to understand the demographics of an association – and provides an essential tool for understanding the impact of its work to advance diversity, equity and inclusion. In general, the more an association knows about its members the better it can serve them.

As a result of an association creating an authorizing environment (see section 3.4) for engaging in DEI work, and knowing that data bring value to the organization, it's time to put commitment into practice. Here are tips and action steps to get started with collecting and utilizing demographic data:

- Take the time to develop the message about why demographic data matters to the association, then use that message in both internal and external communications. Asking for personal information naturally raises questions about why an organization is seeking the data and how it will be used. Be sure to answer the question, “Why do you want to know this about me?” Here’s an example of messaging for this purpose:

*We are committed to diversity, equity and inclusion and we view data as an essential tool to practice this commitment. The data collected will help us to understand how we reflect the society we serve, equip our staff with critical data to better serve the needs of our members, and track our progress as an organization and as a profession.*

- Update association management software to include demographic data fields. See the suggested nomenclature below for comprehensive and sensitive descriptors to use when referencing gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.
- Decide how to put data collection into practice. Will there be an online survey, an emailed questionnaire, or distributed paper copies? The system the association uses may change



over time as it's learned which approach generates the highest response from the members and which system is most efficient and sustainable. Collecting demographic data is not a one-time undertaking; persistence is crucial.

- Build a process that extracts insights from the data and applies those insights to the association's efforts. The process should include communicating the impact of the data collection (e.g. what was developed as a result) back to members and, if appropriate, to collaborators across the profession. This process won't happen overnight because it requires planning, patience, and a willingness to be agile and learn from testing. Start, refine, repeat!

### 4.6: Utilizing Universal Demographic Nomenclature

Most VMAs have been slow to collect demographic data for a variety of reasons. Associations have appeared reluctant to address the complexity and sensitivities that surround demographic data – and thus have been disinclined to develop appropriate terminology and make corresponding database and process changes, to articulate policy about demographic data privacy, and to develop organizational messaging around the need for and use of demographic data.

Additionally, institutional research in the veterinary sector often bridges to the demographic descriptors defined and used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and those descriptors have been slow to change. As Jorge Gonzalez and Robert Santos comment in an [article on race and ethnicity in surveys](#) published by the Urban Institute, "Racial and ethnic categories are social constructs, defined and designed by those who have historically held positions of influence." They note that data collection around race and ethnic constructs is lagging as society evolves with new labels and categories that better reflect people's views and lived experiences.

Recognizing society's evolving views, and appreciating the value that the use of consistent nomenclature can bring to creating a more informed and granular picture of demographic diversity in the veterinary profession, new nomenclature has emerged. VMAE wishes to recognize the important work done by Lisa Greenhill, EdD (Senior Director for Institutional Research and Diversity at the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges) and Christina Tran, DVM (Associate Professor at the University of Arizona College of Veterinary Medicine and Immediate Past President of the Multicultural Veterinary Medical Association) in advancing the development of contemporary nomenclature. VMAE recognizes that widespread use of universal nomenclature and subsequent data collection will benefit both the individual association and the collective profession.

**VMAE encourages veterinary medical associations to adopt the universal demographic nomenclature [presented here](#), adjust database structures accordingly, and routinely collect, analyze, and report the aggregate data.**



When collecting demographic data, recommended practices include giving the participant an “I prefer not to answer” option and not forcing a response on any demographic question. When preparing communications, a valuable resource on bias-free language is the [APA Style Guide](#), which notes:

“The American Psychological Association emphasizes the need to talk about all people with inclusivity and respect. Writers using APA Style must strive to use language that is free of bias and avoid perpetuating prejudicial beliefs or demeaning attitudes in their writing. Just as you have learned to check what you write for spelling, grammar, and wordiness, practice reading your work for bias. The guidelines for bias-free language contain both general guidelines for writing about people without bias across a range of topics and specific guidelines that address the individual characteristics of age, disability, gender, participation in research, racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and intersectionality. These guidelines and recommendations were crafted by panels of experts on APA’s bias-free language committees.”

Model language for universal demographic nomenclature is available in [this document](#) for utilization by veterinary medical associations.

### 4.7: Opportunities for Action – A Menu of Operational Plan Goals and Tactics

Preceding sections of this *Journey* guide were designed to help association leaders build context around DEI and its benefits, undertake foundational work such as conducting an organizational DEI assessment and empaneling a DEI committee, and then commit the association to advancing DEI. That commitment requires that every knowledge domain and operational facet of the organization be examined through the DEI lens. It also requires that ideas for advancing DEI be organized into the organization’s strategic framework and operational plan to provide clarity of direction, effective communication, alignment of resources, and accountability.

For common understanding, the terminology being used in this section is defined as follows:

- Goals are descriptive statements of the high-level outcome(s) one wishes to create
- Strategy is the approach taken to achieve a goal
- Objectives are the concrete, specific deliverables that make the goal come to life
- Tactics are specific actions that will be taken to achieve an objective

The operational plans presented below are organized by relevant domains of association management:

- Organizational Strategy
- Governance
- Education





- Membership
- Marketing and Communications

In each domain a sample goal statement is provided and accompanied by an objective(s) and tactics. The menu of ideas provided for consideration is extensive, so it's important to:

- Recognize that no organization can tackle every tactical element simultaneously – digest the apple one bite at a time.
- Identify those ideas that can best help to build out how it's been chosen to reflect DEI in the association's strategy.
- Remember that the important thing is to get started! And then to celebrate successes. Then undertake additional action plan elements to broaden effort and impact over time.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY	
<i><b>Goal – Undertake continuous and deliberate efforts that lead to profound and enduring progress on DEI</b></i>	
Objective	Tactics
Embed the commitment to DEI in the association’s controlling documents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Define diversity, equity and inclusion for clarity and for advancing these conversations within the association.</li><li>● Include clear language regarding DEI in xVMA’s mission and vision statements, organization core values, policies, procedures, strategic framework, action plan, and performance indicators.</li></ul>
Assess the association’s DEI landscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Utilize the organizational assessment tool to undertake a baseline assessment of DEI efforts at xVMA.</li><li>● Annually review and update the organizational assessment.</li><li>● <a href="#">Survey members</a> to understand what association members are experiencing and expecting in regard to DEI.</li></ul>
Empanel a DEI Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Adopt a committee charge (see 3.6 above).</li><li>● Utilize the committee to develop the association’s strategic approach to DEI.</li></ul>
Articulate DEI policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Create or review staff diversity policy.</li><li>● Create or review general antidiscrimination policy.</li></ul>
Get people talking about DEI and encourage discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Host “Viewing Parties” for screenings of a DEI-related video or webinar, then have small group discussions about what they watched, what stood out, and what they want to know more about.</li><li>● Share DEI-related content such as articles and videos in the association’s social media channels and encourage topical discussion.</li></ul>
Improve organizational effectiveness around DEI.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Improve xVMA’s ranking on the Diversity and Inclusion Continuum from current position to a solid ranking of strategic inclusion:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Unacquainted</b> – Diversity and difference are not on the radar of the association. Discussions on the value</li></ol></li></ul>



	<p>that diversity and inclusion bring to the organization have not taken place.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. <b>Realization</b> – There is an understanding of the importance of diversity and inclusion and the association is fostering conversations about how to better create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all veterinary professionals.</li><li>3. <b>Intentional Inclusion</b> – The association and its leadership have made a formal commitment to DEI and structural efforts are in place to advance efforts.</li><li>4. <b>Strategic Inclusion</b> – Long-term, broad-reaching diversity and inclusion strategic measures are in place and align with the association’s overall goals and objectives.</li><li>5. <b>Culture of Inclusion</b> – All layers of DEI are considered and supported, and systematic processes for maintaining inclusion are woven into the association’s culture and operations.</li></ol>
Recognize DEI champions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Celebrate DEI contributions through awards, communications channel feature stories, invited comments and/or presentations, etc.</li></ul>
Activate on allyship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the key elements of allyship, and commit the organization to activating those elements (see 2.6 above).</li></ul>



GOVERNANCE	
<i><b>Goal – Dismantle systemic barriers to dramatically improve DEI in governance and leadership</b></i>	
Objective	Tactics
Advance equity through systems change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Assess decisions through the equity lens for benefit, burden, and unintended consequences for historically marginalized communities.</li><li>● Purposefully foster meaningful, open and constructive dialog with diverse constituencies, and persist when these conversations and collaborations are challenging.</li><li>● Embrace differences and celebrate diversity.</li></ul>
Offer DEI education and tools for the xVMA team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Utilize outside training consultants to raise DEI awareness of elected leaders, volunteers, and staff.</li><li>● Annually conduct DEI training for elected leaders, volunteers, and staff.</li></ul>
Create opportunities for more diverse members to participate in xVMA leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Utilize a board profile with current and prospective board members to more deeply understand the board's composition, complementarity, and diversity.</li><li>● Proactively promote diversity in xVMA leadership.</li><li>● Work with committees to institute DEI plans throughout the organization.</li></ul>
Partner with other organizations on DEI efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Create a leadership roundtable as a resource for addressing DEI opportunities.</li><li>● Share best practices, training programs, digital resources, etc. between partners to amplify DEI outputs and outcomes.</li><li>● Share effective practices on engaging and recruiting pre-college youth into STEM professions.</li></ul>



EDUCATION	
<i>Goal – Utilize multiple pathways to help members move from DEI awareness to action</i>	
Objective	Tactics
Offer DEI educational opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Provide training opportunities on DEI topics such as unconscious bias, cultural competence, marginalization, microaggressions, allies/allyship, and intersectionality.</li><li>● Highlight profession-wide educational resources in xVMA communications.</li></ul>
Increase the diversity of event attendees and presenters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Offer DEI sessions at xVMA events.</li><li>● Work with members and outside organizations to identify potential diverse speakers.</li><li>● Create a scholarship for underrepresented demographic groups to participate in xVMA events.</li></ul>
Advance DEI through association events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Utilize the DEI <a href="#">event assessment tool</a>.</li><li>● Examine whether conference locations are unsafe for some people due to discriminatory laws or policing practices.</li><li>● Ensure accessibility for people with disabilities including impaired hearing or vision.</li><li>● Add personal pronouns to nametags.</li><li>● Invite a moment of silent meditation or personal reflection at association events rather than a prayer or invocation, which may cause discomfort and feel exclusionary.</li><li>● Include ethnic options in food selections.</li><li>● Book musicians who are able to play various genres of music that appeal to diverse listeners.</li><li>● Provide gender-neutral restrooms.</li><li>● Offer quality and assorted non-alcoholic beverage options at social gatherings and meal events.</li><li>● Have and enforce a code of conduct that includes consequences for harassment or bullying behavior.</li></ul>



## *Journey*

A guide for advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in veterinary medicine

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Train session chairs and moderators in inclusive facilitation.</li></ul>
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MEMBERSHIP	
<i><b>Goal – Strengthen membership through outreach efforts to those who are underrepresented within the association</b></i>	
Objective	Tactics
Grow membership and the quality of engagement through increased diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Outreach to identity-based groups.</li><li>● Survey members and nonmembers.</li></ul>
Create visibility around diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Recruit and feature diverse populations in association materials and programming.</li></ul>
Gather, utilize and share aggregate demographic data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Adopt best practice demographic descriptors for data collection.</li><li>● Revise association management software data fields to align with demographic descriptors.</li><li>● Develop and communicate privacy policy and rationale for collecting demographic data.</li><li>● Encourage members to provide demographic data voluntarily and routinely.</li><li>● Analyze aggregate demographic data for insights to identify issues and themes and to inform strategies that reduce disparities.</li></ul>





MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS	
<i>Goal – Utilize all communication channels to advance DEI with multiple audiences</i>	
Objective	Tactics
Communicate the benefits of a diverse workforce and leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Present the case for DEI to multiple audiences through xVMA communications to gain buy-in, to publicize professional development resources, and to disseminate best practices to members.</li><li>● Offer “how to” DEI resources that xVMA members can utilize in recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce.</li></ul>
Create visibility for DEI in all communication channels and with all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Use photographs throughout all media that embrace diversity and illustrate inclusiveness.</li><li>● Share information about the xVMA DEI plan with members, nonmembers, service providers, vendors, volunteer leaders, and staff.</li><li>● Represent as full a range of perspective as possible in xVMA communications and content.</li></ul>
Actively promote careers in veterinary medicine to historically underrepresented groups to ensure a diversity of experience and breadth of perspective among the membership and throughout the profession.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Develop messages and resources for member use at career fairs and related presentations to introduce youth to careers in veterinary medicine and recruit new professionals from under-represented groups.</li></ul>



OPERATIONS	
<i>Goal – Infuse diversity and inclusion into the entirety of the association’s operations</i>	
Objective	Tactics
Actively seek diverse applicants to create an inclusive, diverse workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Develop a DEI strategy that encompasses recruiting, hiring, on-boarding, retaining, developing, and promoting employees.</li><li>● Broadcast job openings through web sites targeting colleges with high percentages of minority seniors.</li><li>● Leverage local Black and Latinx Chambers of Commerce for xVMA staff job postings.</li></ul>
Offer DEI training to staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Provide training opportunities for staff on unconscious bias, cultural competence, building inclusive relationships, and becoming inclusive leaders.</li></ul>
Identify DEI responsibilities in staff portfolios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Articulate DEI responsibilities in the position description of each staff member.</li></ul>
Create an inclusive work environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Review human resources guidelines to ensure policies are based on equity (providing people with what they need) rather than equality (treating everyone the same).</li><li>● Structure performance reviews to address how a staff embrace, integrate and adapt to different cultural styles; deal with conflict due to cultural differences and the dynamics of inequality; and engage effectively in dialogue about social identities, diversity, and oppression issues.</li><li>● Include pronouns in your email signature.</li></ul>



### Afterword

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” according to Lao Tzu. We invite and encourage you to consider the first step you will take, and begin.

Guy Gavriel Kay reminds us “There are no wrong turnings – only paths we had not known we were meant to walk.” Fitzhugh Mullan encourages us to “Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and celebrate the journey.” Miriam Beard observes that “Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of the living.”

We hope that *Journey* inspires thought, connection and action that advances diversity, equity and inclusion in veterinary medicine. After all, the world is a reflection of our collective journey. May we all exhibit determination and courage as we navigate, and extend kindness and grace to fellow travelers on the path.



**VETERINARY  
MEDICAL  
ASSOCIATION**  
EXECUTIVES

# ***Journey***

A guide for advancing diversity, equity  
and inclusion in veterinary medicine

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Veterinary Medical Association Executives

[www.vmae.org](http://www.vmae.org)