

Town of Arlington DEI Workshops Report

This report offers an overview of a series of workshops recently undertaken by the Town of Arlington. This process was meant to engage the Town workforce in planning and competency building to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in all areas of town operations.

An Overview of The Process

Like so many municipalities, the Town of Arlington works continuously to examine its practices, policies and programs to ensure maximum service delivery and management on behalf of the residents and businesses it exists to serve. In 2022, the Town Select Board authorized a process that would deliver on three key goals:

1. Build relationships across departments
2. Bring together all areas of the Town's DEI work
3. Create a forum to discuss, explore, and learn about DEI, specifically in regards to advancing racial equity

The Arlington Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Jillian Harvey, MPA, led the selection of a consulting team. The consulting team would be tasked with leading the process design to engage the majority of the Town's workforce. This included Department heads and staff at all levels from public works, police, fire, library, human services, and others. A total of nearly 400 employees took part.

Working in mixed departmental groups, Town employees participated in a series of four workshops (participants had the option of joining one of four sessions) as well as a single closing session. Each session was 3 hours and was attended by 75-110 people. The final session was 2 hours and was attended by approximately 250 people. The workshops combined the presentation of data, opportunity for self-reflection, work in small groups, the presentation of helpful theories and frameworks, and the development of plans.

Below is an overview of the workshops and final session.



Workshop 1: Bias + The History of Structural Racism

Welcome + Introductions

Arlington’s DEI Work to Date: Where have we been? How did we get here? What does this work look like? What do you think?

Overview of Participant Agreements: This set of agreements, put together by the consultant team, reflect best practices that support diverse groups in working through change processes.

Bias: What is bias and what are the forms of it? How does bias operate in all of us for both good and bad outcomes?

History of Structural Racism: What is structural racism? How does it look across systems? How do we explain that (the Groundwater Approach)?

Workshop 2: Where Are We, With Respect to DEI In Our Work And In Our Lives?

History of Structural Racism, A Deeper Dive: Revisiting some of the history from the first session, this segment was a deeper exploration of structural racism and how it is perpetuated.

Where are we, as a town, and as teams working for the town, today?: Exploring some of the most salient features of our current shared reality with respect to diversity, equity (especially racial equity), and inclusion in our work and lives.

A self-assessment: Who am I in relation to all of these issues? What are my personal commitments, challenges, and questions?

Closing Exercise: As a closing exercise, participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- a. One thing you (personally or your department) does really well
- b. One thing you (personally or your department) could do better / needs help or support with

Workshop 3: Collaboratively Setting Goals For The Future

The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) Analysis: Before teams decide where they are going to go they must have a shared idea of where they are currently. While the earlier explorations of history and current conditions were presented by the consultant team, the SWOT analysis was compiled from participants' answers to the prompts provided at the end of workshop 2.

Goal Setting: Following review of the SWOT, participants were asked to use their understanding of the current environment (What are we doing well? What do we need to do better? What's going on around us that we need to pay attention to?) to plan for the future. Participants did this through a structured, facilitated exercise called a consensus workshop. The results of the consensus workshop were derived from participants' answers to the following question: "What commitments should we, town employees, make to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion?".

Both the SWOT and the goal setting were focused on examining systems, policies, and practices. This exercise (specifically and more broadly) was not meant to implicate any one individual or department but to explore structures and the possibility to make change at that level.

During each session, the group emerged with a set of goals they co-created. After all four sessions, the consulting team synthesized the four sets of goals into one set of goals for all town staff.

Workshop 4: Skills Development: Healthy Conflict + Decision Making

Having developed a set of goals, this workshop focused on building skills and gaining tools to support implementation, building an inclusive culture, and excellence in management. The workshop focused on two specific areas:

- a. Healthy conflict: How to navigate conflict in a way that is respectful, honest, and productive as well as noticing and naming when it has veered into unhealthy/unproductive territory.
- b. Decision making: Using process tools to improve decision making and ensure positive impact. Both the process and the outcomes should be fair. What constitutes fairness? Transparency, communication, consistent application of the decision, and that the people affected were consulted or at least considered.

Closing Session: Looking Back, Looking Forward

Looking Back: A retrospective on the concepts participants explored, what they accomplished, and the feedback gathered.

Looking Forward: Considerations and suggestions on how to move the goals forward in implementation and what to focus on.

Most immediately, the team is looking forward to sharing the Community Equity Audit report and the recommendations therein. This segment was an overview of how these two processes are connective and mutually supportive.

Closing Remarks: Jillian Harvey and Sandy Pooler closed out the final session with a question for participants: *“What are the most important things we can do to make good on our DEI goals?”*

Town of Arlington DEI Goals

The process resulted in a set of high level goals (Workshop 3) to support the Town and each of its departments in becoming more diverse, equitable and inclusive in the years ahead.

- Goal 1** We will create an inclusive town culture, in + out of town hall.
- Goal 2** We will examine and improve our organizational structures and processes to align with and advance DEI in our town.
- Goal 3** We will explore and test / reassess ways to increase DEI in all areas of town operations.
- Goal 4** We will provide excellent and equitable town services.
- Goal 5** We will learn with each other and from each other in service to the Arlington community and continuous improvement.

Implementing the Goals

In the final session, Sandy (Town Manager) asked participants “What are the most important things we can do to make good on our DEI goals? Each column represents a theme of the responses we received with specific suggestions below:

<p>Focus on making measurable change and improvements <i>We can accomplish this by doing the following:</i></p>	<p>Support Town staff <i>We can accomplish this by doing the following:</i></p>	<p>Support + Serve Our Public <i>We can accomplish this by doing the following:</i></p>	<p>Continue to Foster a Culture That Will Support Your DEI Goals <i>We can accomplish this by doing the following:</i></p>
<p>Integrate efforts that will have material impacts for residents into our existing structures and programs.</p> <p>Town leadership should identify priorities, track progress toward our goals, and communicate progress reports to staff.</p> <p>Develop and publish SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound) goals that hold ourselves and the Town accountable.</p> <p>Each department should undertake a process of evaluating department policies and processes in service to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.</p>	<p>Support the overall health and well-being of town employees.</p> <p>Work to improve the morale of the Arlington Police Dept. through public support and appreciation.</p> <p>Make sure any future initiatives/meetings are inclusive and physically safe to attend.</p> <p>Providing more opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration</p> <p>Institute employee resource groups (ERG)</p>	<p>Work to implement practices to assist people with language barriers.</p> <p>Change our zoning so that it is actively anti-racist.</p> <p>Conduct assessments in all neighborhoods to plan for maintenance and capital improvements.</p>	<p>Before implementing changes, be sure to talk to those who will be impacted.</p> <p>Listen, respect, and be kind to one another.</p>

What's Next?

This process was designed to be a companion to the Community Equity Audit conducted by Opportunity Consulting. In their report you will find data and recommendations based on that data. The process described above was meant to be a capacity building engagement; equipping participants with the tools to make meaning of the findings and understand how the recommendations might support the goals they created.

The goals developed in this process represent *what* town staff want to do and are committed to. The recommendations in the Community Equity Audit are potential answers to *how* they might go about doing that.

For instance, goal 1 is to create an inclusive town culture, in and out of town hall. One way to go about doing that might be to establish a community engagement team - which is one of the recommendations in the Community Equity Audit report.

Our hope is that the goals developed in this process will provide guidance, clarity, and a sense of direction as town staff consider the many investments they may make in service to increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion. While the goals are high-level, any action that the town takes on should clearly support one or more of the goals.

As town staff and leadership are considering what recommendations to implement, and any additional proposed action, we hope that the goals will support alignment and coherence. In addition, we hope that the language, skills, and relationships cultivated in the workshops will further bolster the work ahead.

DEI Resources

[Unsolicited Advice For Team Leaders](#)

[Fostering a Culture of Healthy Conflict](#)

[What is White Supremacy Culture?](#)

[Monuments to the Unthinkable, Clint Smith](#) (article)

[Brené Brown with Dr. Clint Smith on How the Word Is Passed](#) (podcast)

[The House We Live In](#) (video)

[Explained | Racial Wealth Gap](#) (video)

[The Groundwater Approach](#) (document)

Community Equity Audit

- [Executive Summary](#)
- [Final Report](#)

Appendices

- A. Responses: [How do you feel about a town-wide project to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\)?](#)
- B. [Self-Assessment](#)
- C. [Participant Agreements](#)
- D. [Town of Arlington DEI SWOT](#)
- E. [Town of Arlington Tools + Tactics for Healthy Conflict](#)
- F. [Workshop Slides](#)