



An Interview with Jonathan Zur, President & CEO, Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC)

At the beginning of this year, RMHF and VCIC partnered to offer the RVA Equity Grant. Funded by RMHF and run by VCIC, the grant provided an opportunity for previous RMHF grantees to apply for and receive customized services from VCIC to integrate diversity, equity and inclusion in their culture, policies and practices. A community review committee staffed by VCIC and made up of a small number of RMHF former Equity + Health Fellows reviewed applications and selected organizations to participate in this program. We asked Jonathan to provide an update on the initiative and share his perspectives with our broader audience.

### **In what ways are organizations tapping into VCIC's expertise as part of RMHF's grant?**

The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities is providing support for each participating nonprofit organization in one or more of three areas:

1. Data Collection – Our team is administering customized surveys and/or conducting interviews and focus groups with employees, clients, and other stakeholders to understand the diverse perspectives, needs, and opportunities that exist related to equity.
2. Professional Development – We are facilitating learning sessions for employees, board members, and other identified stakeholders on topics including unconscious bias, racial equity, intersectionality, equity audits, and more.
3. Policy Review - VCIC has customized an instrument to support nonprofit organizations by analyzing their current policies with an equity lens, considering what practices exist without policies, and identifying policies that are not being practiced.

Every organization brings unique history, context, relationships, and needs. A truly equitable response, therefore, must be customized to reflect those realities. As a result, RMHF and VCIC designed this opportunity to support nonprofits with broad possible areas of work that are prioritized and tailored in partnership with the participating organizations.

### **How are you seeing leaders and organizations respond to the calls for racial justice over the past several months?**

I observe a genuine sense of interest and urgency. In early June, a lot of leaders and organizations were making statements to proclaim or reinforce their commitment to racial equity and justice. Since that time, there has been a period that I would characterize as introspective, messy, and action-oriented. Leaders and organizations have been reflecting on their past practices and identifying opportunities to do better. Some have named that they feel new tension within their organizations

as issues are surfaced, while others have shared that they are glad to finally have issues out in the open. All of the people that I have spoken to have said that they do not want this to be a passing moment, but instead hope that this time is a catalyst for meaningful and sustained change.

### **What counsel/perspective would you like to share about approaching that work?**

I think it is really critical to center those most impacted, which in this case are Black colleagues, clients, board members, and other stakeholders. One of the many challenges of doing the work we do in the nonprofit sector is that we are combatting injustices as we ourselves may be feeling deeply the pain associated with those injustices. It is hard to do the work and personally feel it too. I believe strongly that those of us who are white have a responsibility to not add to the burden experienced by Black people. That means accurately crediting and compensating for work being done, not putting the responsibility of educating entirely on the shoulders of our Black colleagues, not requiring Black people to caretake or console, and providing flexibility and grace whenever possible. At the same time, we must resist the urge to take on a “savior” mentality that does for instead of doing with others.

Overall, we must also remember that this work is not simple. The systemic issues that are now in the news are generations and centuries in the making. While there are a few immediate actions that organizations can take, it is naïve to expect quick results. Instead, organizations need to make long-term commitments that involve deep review of their work, analysis regarding how different populations are impacted by their practices, and the co-creation of new approaches that truly advance inclusion and equity.

**Jonathan C. Zur** is President & CEO of the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC), an organization that works with schools, business, and communities to achieve success through inclusion. Under Jonathan’s leadership, VCIC has increased the number of programs delivered annually by 1,500%, more than tripled the size of the staff, nearly tripled the size of the budget, and the organization has been recognized locally and nationally for its effectiveness. An experienced facilitator and consultant on issues of diversity and inclusion, Jonathan was appointed by the Governor of Virginia to the Commonwealth Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, formed in the aftermath of the tragedy in Charlottesville in August 2017. Jonathan earned his B.A. from the University of Richmond and he received a Certificate in Nonprofit Executive Leadership from the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University.