Strategic Equity Plan
November 2022

After a year of board and staff trainings on diversity and inclusion issues, the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Justice (DEIJ) Task Force worked with the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC) to craft a Strategic Equity Plan for incorporating DEIJ initiatives and principles into our work.

The Plan is organized around three priorities – **People, Partnerships and Programs** – with corresponding goals and action plans for each priority that JRA can carry out over the next three years. This initial Plan, and the processes we put into place as a result, can hopefully act as the groundwork and springboard to future goals and initiatives as well.

- **People**: Ensure that JRA's staff and board reflect the surrounding community, and create an inclusive and equitable working environment

- **Partnerships**: Engage a wide-range of stakeholders to inform and guide JRA's work and pursue shared goals

- **Programs**: Increase inclusivity and equity among programming and organizational activities

In order to receive input from throughout the organization for the Action Plan, ideas for initiatives under each priority were solicited through facilitated brainstorming sessions for the Board and each of JRA's six programs areas – **Action, Administration, Advocacy, Appreciation, Assets, and Awareness**. This process generated dozens of ideas which VCIC consolidated to remove duplication, and then the DEIJ Task Force prioritized which initiatives made the most sense to address in the next three years and which ones to put into the "Dream Garden" for future consideration.

Priority 1: People

Ensure that JRA's staff and board reflect the surrounding community, and create an inclusive and equitable working environment

Communications:
- Conduct a communications audit to ensure inclusive, non-gendered language, diverse images and stories, examine how we speak about specific communities (is it language this community would appreciate?) on our website, appeals, publications, and outreach materials.

- Develop and disseminate a clear, easy to share statement of JRA's commitment to DEIJ. Modify for program use as necessary.

- Research and ensure JRA communicates clearly and consistently about the full history of the watershed, including land acknowledgements, history of different communities that used to live near the river, and how those communities have impacted it/been impacted by it.

Definitions:
- Define JRA's "surrounding community" and set ambitious but achievable goals for staff and board diversity.

Hiring:
- Develop and regularly evaluate a consistent list of where jobs should be posted, and people/organizations to send postings.

- Look at job descriptions and associated forms to make sure the job only asks for the actual skills needed, and that the language is as inclusive as possible, encouraging diverse candidates.

- Assess current interview and hiring process to illuminate potential areas of bias, and implement best practices to mitigate these (ie diverse interviewers, external partners, interview panels, application process, etc.).

Internships:
- Formalize a paid internship program that focuses on recruiting minority students, equal opportunity and access, and includes assessment of resources to retain all qualified candidates (technology needs, transportation, educational credit, etc.)

Professional Development:

- Develop a plan and cadence for continued staff education and training, including formal workshops, resource sharing, and event sharing. *Particularly focus on competency working with non-english speaking participants, and ensure staff are educated on the full history of the river.*

Structures/Policies:
- Assess accessibility of JRA offices, clearly communicate gaps in accessibility, and research best practices to provide alternative accessibility or meeting space.

- Develop a clear path for continuous staff feedback, including an option for anonymous reporting, and protocol for follow-up with the staff person/people if appropriate.

Workplace Culture:
- Develop continued opportunities for staff to reflect and grow in their personal DEIJ perspective, including intentional reflection time, connection and relationship building, ability to make and discuss DEIJ-related mistakes, etc.

- Provide increased opportunities to bring staff, or staff and board, together to build relationships and ensure a deeper understanding of what each other does.

- Determine when/where a high level of staff feedback on JRA programs and initiatives is appropriate, and a mechanism for collecting that input in a timely, effective manner.

- Increase internal recognition, intentionality, and communication about diverse communities, including acknowledgements and celebrations (ex: Hispanic Heritage Month), holidays, events, and educational opportunities.

Priority 2: Partnerships

*Engage a wide range of stakeholders to inform and guide
JRA's work and pursue shared goals*

Who:
- Undergo a community mapping process to identify JRA's priorities in developing partnerships, where potential partners exist, and build a strategy of "where to start". Mapping process should be sure to look at skill, geographic area, community, and mission of potential partners/gaps for JRA.

- Reach out to potential partners for listening sessions—ensure JRA has a strong understanding of community concerns, that relationships will be mutually beneficial, and there is a clear alignment/agreement on goals and vision.

How:
- Build out a list of options for what JRA could potentially offer a partner (time, compensation, mentorship, a platform, storytelling opportunity, etc).

- Build out internal understanding of different types of partnerships to engage in (formal, informal, mutual project work, learning-based, mini grants, etc). Ensure relationships are based in respectful learning and mutual goals, not for the optics. Ensure relationships don't only focus on what JRA receives.

Structures & Procedures:
- Research best practices and develop a check-list for engaging contractors and vendor procurement that will prioritize supporting minority-owned, local businesses.

- Determine when/where additional consultants and speakers should be brought in to ensure diverse, expert voices in programming, internal strategy, and community engagement events. Compensate speakers/consultants equitably as appropriate.

- Establish a community advisory committee for each office, developing a clear role and goal for how these committees will be used. This should include formalizing diverse, local voices, knowledge of local issues, and connections to local communities for JRA's work across the watershed.

Priority 3: Programs

Increase inclusivity and equity among programming
and organizational activities

DEIJ Intentionality in Programming:
- Identify opportunities in programming to communicate more about the long history of the James, share diverse cultures along the river, and explain the impact this history currently has on the economic, cultural and environmental landscape of the watershed.

- Assess policy work and advocacy priorities to ensure consideration of environmental and community justice, and underline equity-based outcomes when evaluating the intended and unintended consequences of policies.

- Develop structures to create consistent communication between community-based JRA staff and the Richmond-based advocacy team to inform advocacy priorities.

Equitable Prioritization of Resources:
- Purposefully look for opportunities to engage JRA's resources in communities that are underserved, with schools that have inequitable access, or with other communities that are consistently under-resourced regarding their environmental needs.

- Consider ways to collaborate between different programs teams at JRA to ensure intentional focus of resources , and build upon current relationships to increase the breadth and depth of support that JRA can offer.

Events:
- Research best practices and develop a clear checklist for ensuring a DEIJ lens while planning and executing events and programming.

Language Access:
- Conduct a language accessibility audit to identify all materials, handouts, forms, trainings, website areas, etc., that should be prioritized for translation.

- Beginning with Spanish, engage a contractor to develop appropriate translated materials for outreach, programs, etc. Additional funds will likely need to be identified for this project.

Physical & Economic Accessibility:

- Ensure clear and transparent communication through staff and from written/online materials about the accessibility limitations of specific events, programs and activities.

- Evaluate all programs/locations for physical ability/disability, economic, and circumstantial accessibility, and identify where JRA can provide more accessibility to current programs. Use this audit to prioritize purchasing/funding of resources.

- Identify best practices and corresponding needs to make the website and digital resources accessible and clear.

Promotion & Outreach:
- Use outdoor programming (field days, river trips, etc.) to intentionally invite more diverse stakeholders from local communities to engage with JRA.

- Ensure messaging is appropriately focused and caters to local communities and audiences (regional v. watershed wide issues, emphasizing different issues for specific communities).

- Develop an outreach and participant recruitment strategy that specifically includes school districts that are underserved and areas that are low income for summer programs, James River Leadership Expeditions, RiverRats, RiverReps, James River Watch, etc.

- Grow awareness efforts by capturing and uplifting diverse stories from previous program participants, and identifying intersectional group voices that JRA can help to amplify.