**Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Selection Panel Final Report**

To: Chair Tom Stevens, Vermont House General and Housing Committee

From: TRC Selection Panel

RE: TRC Final Report

Date: April 27, 2023

Dear Chair Stevens,

On behalf of the members of the TRC Selection Panel, please accept this final report as well as our gratitude for affording us the opportunity to be a part of this historic effort.

**Overview**

The TRC Selection Panel was charged under Act 128 to develop a process for recruiting three Commissioners who would oversee the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We successfully hired three Commissioners who began their work on April 1, 2023. They are:

1. Mia Schultz
2. Melody Mackin
3. Patrick Standen

**Timeline of our work**

The members of the TRC Selection Panel coalesced at the beginning of November 2022. The members of the Selection Panel are:

Vanessa Santos Eugenio, Co-Chair

Nina Ridhibhinyo

Judith Chalmer

N. Bruce Duthu

Etan Nasreddin-Longo

Jennifer Morton Dow

Karen Tronsgard-Scott, Co-Chair

In **November 2022** we spent some time building relationships with each other and agreeing that it would be important to maintain the values of truth and reconciliation for our work together. We agreed to meet weekly, and we developed a work plan that would help us move through the steps required to achieve our goals.

In **December 2022** we worked on background documents including a job description and position prospectus. We also established a relationship with the Agency of Administration which is where the budget for our work was located. We were heartened by the support we received specifically from Holly Anderson and Suzette Greaves. Holly Anderson alerted us to the need to submit a budget for the TRC to the state to ensure that the budget established for 2022 would carry forward into 2023. We developed a detailed budget and submitted it prior to the deadline.

In **January, 2023** our work involved creating the notice of acceptance of applications for the Commissioner positions, a matrix for evaluating applications to determine whom we would interview, establishing a specific email account for accepting applications (TRCVT@vtnetwork.org), creating lists of groups, individuals and publications for outreach with our notice of acceptance of applications, and we began working on interview questions. Bill Miers from the Human Resources Department supported us to publicly post the role on the State’s job posting website and share the opportunity within their standard list of community partners.

In **February 2023** we pushed out the notice of acceptance of applications through the state employment website; various list serves; paid advertising in several publications; and word of mouth. We finalized our interview questions and answered many questions from people who were interested in the positions. At first the response seemed to be limited, however by the 5th of March, we had accepted over 90 applications. People of all identities, ages, and from across our state applied.

In **March 2023**, all members of the Selection Panel read each application package. We used a matrix to determine whom we would interview. We came together to review our top candidates and quickly discovered that we were of similar minds regarding who we might interview. We acknowledged that one of the challenges at hand was that we had to not only find the best candidates, but we also had to create a community of Commissioners whose strengths were complementary. We interviewed 10 candidates, each of whom could have fulfilled the Commissioner role. We decided on the three candidates based on their interviews, on their ability to complete the work of the Commissioner, on their ability to represent not only the community to which they belong, but also to represent all the communities named in Act 128, and on their vision for the impact of truth telling in Vermont.

On March 31 we held a public forum to introduce the Commissioners to the state. Around 30 members of the public attended the forum and asked important and engaging questions.

Candidates who were not selected were asked they would be interested in allowing us to share their names and contact information with the Commissioners for service on committees. Around 80% of those applicants answered this call with enthusiasm and commitment to serving the Commission.

The Commissioners started their work on April 1, 2023. Margaret Loftus from the Human Resources Department collaborated closely with us to ensure a smooth onboarding experience for our commissioners. Currently they are seeking candidates for the Executive Director position.

**Reflections on the Process**

Members of the Selection Committee recognized the importance of moving through the hiring process with alacrity. We did note that hiring three Commissioners within the span of five months was intensive and we worried that the fast pace may have left some potential applicants, particularly from the disabilities community, behind. We agreed that in future recruitment efforts, it could be beneficial to give the selectors flexibility in creating FTE's rather than designating only full-time positions in order to create eligibility for more applicants whose disabilities might prevent them from working full-time but whose skills and expertise would be valuable.

Our work was made possible thanks to a group of leaders who spent the summer of 2022 combing through Act 128 and other resources, and creating foundational documents that supported us as we moved through the process. These leaders included Sarah Launderville, Kerin Durfee, Xusana Davis and Virginie Ladisch. Once they handed the process over to the Selection Panel, they continued to offer real support and advisement to us.

Since we hired the Commissioners, there have been some questions by members of the media about how we considered identities in our hiring process. Our work was grounded in the values of truth and reconciliation which include acceptance of origin stories as the truth. Of course, we researched the current conversation in Vermont that questions the origin stories of some members of the Abenaki community. Our selection process gave us the opportunity to get to know the applicants we interviewed, and we chose to believe what applicants told us about themselves and their origins. In the end, membership in one group or another was not the only criteria for hiring. We stand firm in our belief that we hired the best of an incredibly rich group of applicants.

We are also grateful to the House Committee on General and Housing for your support and flexibility. We share your vision for a Vermont that recognizes harm the state has caused and, in that recognition, begins to chart a pathway to healing and reconciliation.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Tronsgard-Scott on behalf of:

Vanessa Santos-Eugenio

Jennifer Morton Dow

N. Bruce Duthu

Judith Chalmers

Nina Ridhibhinyo

Etan Nassredin-Longo

SP/Documents/Strategic Plan & goals/Commissioner Onboarding/TRC Selection Panel Final Report