



**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL:  
EQUITY CONSULTANT**

**RELEASE DATE: February 3, 2025**

## **Organizational Background**

The Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) partners with communities and clients throughout Virginia to fight for racial, social, and economic justice. We understand that the legal problems of our clients are inextricably linked to overarching systems of injustice and oppression. Together we are dismantling the systems that create and perpetuate poverty through a combination of community organizing, litigation, policy advocacy, communications, and direct legal services.

Although LAJC has a long tradition of working with and on behalf of communities of color, the organization did not make an explicit organizational commitment to dismantling racial injustice and oppression for the first 50 years of its existence. In our 2019 strategic plan, our Board explicitly embraced racial justice as an animating principle of our work. The Board also embraced a commitment to continuously examining whether we and the organizations we work with operate in ways that align with the race equity and justice values and goals we support. This commitment includes ensuring that race equity is reflected in policies and practices for recruitment and hiring, work acceptance, priority-setting, governance, organizational culture, communications, and community partnerships and accountability, particularly with low-income communities of color.

The composition of our staff and Board reflect that commitment. Once a mostly white organization, LAJC's Board and staff are majority Black and Brown, including many who have been directly impacted by poverty, discrimination, and systemic oppression. Since at least 2015, LAJC staff have also been engaged in intentional internal equity work, including establishment of an Internal Change Team (ICT). ICT has been the spark and the engine for many conversations and initiatives that have been adopted and implemented by LAJC leadership, including making key recommendations for hiring and recruiting, improving professional development, conducting a race equity assessment, formulating a staff-driven race equity plan, and initiating LAJC's first (now annual) staff engagement and culture survey, among many other notable projects and trainings.

In 2024, we enacted a radical change in our organizational leadership structure, forming five leadership committees composed of department heads, program directors, and staff, including the Equity and Culture Committee, whose mission is to uphold LAJC's commitment to building a whole-human culture that is welcoming to people of all identities, communities, and experiences, and to operating in ways that align with the race equity and justice values we support.

## **Purpose and Goals**

### **Purpose**

LAJC is committed to transforming our organization into a space that actively fosters equity, inclusion, and belonging for all individuals. Recognizing the historical and systemic impact of white dominant culture, we aim to build a foundation where Black, Brown, and other marginalized leaders are empowered, supported, and celebrated.

### **Goals**

To achieve this purpose, we seek to partner and engage with an equity consulting firm that will guide us in attaining these overarching organizational goals:

- **Exposing and Deconstructing White Dominant Culture**
  - Identifying and addressing behaviors, norms, and systems that perpetuate inequities within our organization.
- **Exploring and Cultivating an Inclusive Culture**
  - Creating a workplace where Black, Brown, and other marginalized individuals thrive as leaders, with their voices centered, uplifted, and prioritized.
- **Assessing and Designing Anti-Racist Organizational Processes**
  - Examining our structures, policies, and practices to ensure they are equitable, transparent, and rooted in anti-racist principles.
- **Building Trust Through Restorative Practices**
  - Strengthening relationships and fostering unity across a diverse team by embracing trust-building practices and navigating change together.
- **Developing Norms for Effective Communication and Conflict Resolution**
  - Establishing clear guidelines for direct communication, constructive feedback, and conflict negotiation to ensure accountability, growth, and collaboration.

Through this engagement, we hope to create a thriving, anti-racist organization that reflects our values and equips our team to lead courageously toward systemic change.

## **Scope of Work**

### **Phase 1 – Information Gathering**

LAJC expects that the first phase of our internal work will involve an assessment, led by the consultant. LAJC anticipates the consultant will engage staff, leadership, and other stakeholders, as well as conduct a review of program materials, policies and procedures, position announcements, hiring processes, professional development activities, marketing

materials, and other pertinent documents necessary to develop a comprehensive picture of the organizational climate in relation to its goal of racial equity.

The goals of the assessment are to:

- Identify areas of concern, opportunity, and strength within the diversity, equity, and inclusion practices of the organization;
- Create a shared understanding and language around what a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment would look like;
- Welcome discussion of how racism, white dominant culture, and other forms of exclusion are perpetuated within LAJC's organizational structures, norms, and expectations, as well as individual beliefs and interactions among staff; and
- Improve the ability to recruit, support, advance and retain Black and Brown staff members or other marginalized individuals.

#### Phase 2 – Dialogue, Training, and Policy

The assessment will serve as the foundation for action. LAJC expects that a consultant will develop and help us implement a sustainable plan for continuing our ongoing DEI work. While it is impossible to identify all appropriate areas of work prior to completing Phase 1, LAJC anticipates that Phase 2 will include the following at a minimum:

- Developing and implementing a training strategy to increase staff DEI competencies, skills, and capacity based on gaps identified during Phase 1;
- Creating an intentional space for the recognition of gaps in LAJC-led efforts toward racial equity and providing support to address those gaps;
- Identifying areas where LAJC can create explicit policies and practices that are not anti-racist and devising a plan for their creation and implementation;
- Developing a strategy and associated roadmap aligned with LAJC's mission and core values that will ensure barriers to inclusion continue to decrease, while internal awareness, knowledge, and skills continue to increase. This strategy/roadmap, which may include updating our race equity plan, should include methods of long-term monitoring and evaluation that consider several areas, including but not limited to: internal staffing practices, policies and procedures, community partnerships and engagement, and ongoing staff education;
- Assisting with the creation of strategies to improve LAJC's ability to recruit, support the professional development of, and retain staff of color; and
- Creating and implementing of any additional trainings, dialogues, policies, or other recommendations by the consultant as a result of the information gathering in Phase 1.

## **Qualifications/Requirements**

### **QUALIFICATIONS**

Baseline and preferred qualifications for the Legal Aid Justice Center's equity consultant include the following:

- **Work Experience:** Experience providing race equity training and/or DEI consultancy services in the nonprofit sector, preferably in Virginia but not exclusive.
  - **Required:** At least three (3), and preferably five (5), years of experience in DEI assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and facilitation.
  - **Required:** At least three (3), and preferably five (5), nonprofit race equity training/DEI consultancy clients in the prior 18 months.
  - **Required:** Demonstrated experience working with and reflecting the aims of diverse constituencies, including executive and board leadership, staff members, and community members, in hybrid nonprofit settings.
  - **Preferred:** Exposure to, and understanding of, community-driven advocacy and the anti-poverty advocacy and community organizing landscape in Virginia.
  - **Preferred:** Previously worked with an organization with 50+ employees and/or operations across multiple locations.
- **Nonprofit Sector Knowledge:** Deep knowledge of organizational change management principles and an intersectional approach to implementing those principles in a wide range of settings.
  - **Required:** Demonstrated experience with guiding nonprofits through information-gathering, planning, implementation, and successful completion of organization-wide DEI learning and management.
  - **Required:** Demonstrated experience with introducing, facilitating, and synthesizing DEI conversations and learnings across a broad spectrum of constituent knowledge bases, levels of understanding, and expectations.
  - **Required:** Proficiency in assessing and analyzing data, communicating effectively with a diverse body of constituents, strategic planning, and task management.
  - **Preferred:** Trauma-informed training and experience and ability to integrate this knowledge with consultancy practices or the ability to include consultant team members with such experience.
- 2. **Team Composition:** Preference for consultants/organizations whose composition is reflective of race equity and diversity and inclusion principles.

PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK (Up to 15 pages maximum): The proposed scope of work plan must include the following sections and answer these questions:

1. Executive Summary: Brief overview of proposed services, background and qualifications, and outcomes.
2. Scope of Work: Description of services rendered, team members involved, and final deliverables.
3. Approach: Description of race equity principles, methodologies, tools, resources, and experience, as well as strategies for engagement of various stakeholder groups.
  - a. Please provide details about your overall approach, methodologies, tools, and strategies that you would propose in carrying out the scope of work.
  - b. In this description, please include your staffing, work phases, and any requirements of LAJC.
  - c. What experience do you have in facilitating strategic planning processes that center racial and economic equity, as well as training in microaggressions and allyship?
  - d. Please also describe participatory stakeholder engagement strategies you have used that effectively navigate conflict and social identity and language diversity.
  - e. How would you approach this process to assess DEI needs, gather data, and engage stakeholders (which would include the full staff across the organization in multiple locations)?
  - f. How would you work with your timeline?
  - g. What products could LAJC expect to get at the end of this engagement?
  - h. How would you measure or assess the DEI competence of our organization and staff at the beginning of the engagement?
  - i. How would you measure or assess improvement and learning throughout the project?
4. Timeline: Provide a timeline for a potential engagement that is both rigorous and realistic.
  - a. Please include proposed project start and end dates with key milestones and phased planning stages across the contract term.
  - b. The consultant timeline should include but is not limited to the following:
    - i. A discussion of how the project will be managed and scheduled and potential ways to phase this work aligned to the approach.
    - ii. A focus especially on details of the first 3 to 4 months of the engagement, with higher level plans for subsequent months.
    - iii. An accounting for any work that needs to be phased in and at what level (executive, managers, staff, etc.).
    - iv. A description of how and when data and materials will be delivered to LAJC.

5. Estimated Cost: Detailed and itemized cost estimate, including staff rates, travel expenses, and other associated costs. More specifically:
  - a. Describe the costs associated with each piece of the consultation you are proposing, noting any applicable fees and recurring costs and highlighting any line items that may be optional.
  - b. Please include subcontractor costs alongside consultancy costs.
6. Team Bios: Please include bios of one (1) or two (2) paragraphs in the body of the proposed work plan, along with full resumes. Resumes will not be included in the work plan page count. Please include the following:
  - a. Provide key demographic information (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, ability level) and experience of the individual(s) who would be serving on the team for this engagement with LAJC.
  - b. Please be sure to highlight those team members' experience with strategic planning and racial equity work.
  - c. Please describe the experience of those team members with working with and/or reflecting life experience as a self-described member of these communities:
    - i. Virginia nonprofit sector
    - ii. Black, Brown, and/or working-class communities
    - iii. Power-building/systems change/base-building nonprofits
7. References: Please include three (3) references from clients with brief descriptions of relevant projects, especially in the context of developing/strengthening DEI practices and strategic planning processes. Include the organization name, the specific contact's name, email address, and phone number, and note the project(s) which you led for the organization. References will not be included in the work plan page count.

## **Evaluation/Criteria for Selection**

The criteria for Legal Aid Justice Center's selection of a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant include the following:

- Demonstrated experience evaluating the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices – and, in particular, race equity practices – in nonprofit organizations;
- Significant prior anti-bias/race equity training experience, with participants of all professional levels, including staff and board members;
- Demonstrated experience helping nonprofit organizations go beyond theory or interpersonal-level anti-bias/race equity understanding, to developing policies and procedures at an institutional (that is, LAJC at an organizational) level designed to maximize diversity, equity, and inclusion (and, in particular, race equity);
- Demonstrated experience in helping nonprofit organizations work through implementation of said policies and procedures, including thoughtfulness in working through any challenges that arise in implementation, and iterative revision/fine-tuning of said policies and procedures.
- Demonstrated experience in participatory/inclusive approaches (involving staff engagement throughout the full lifecycle of the consultant's work with LAJC) in evaluating practices, developing new policies and procedures, implementing said policies and procedures, and iterative revision of said policies and procedures. This will involve inviting and listening to staff members broadly (i.e. inclusive of both Leadership Team and non-Leadership Team staff), compiling findings in an actionable way, and developing recommendations (including new policies and procedures, and revision thereto) that consider and account for the perspectives of staff members broadly.
- Experience assisting organizations' recruitment, development, and retention of a diverse staff at all levels; and
- A commitment to these values as evidenced by the diversity and inclusiveness of the consultant's own staff, and by evidence of traits such as cultural humility, self-awareness, the willingness to create welcoming and inclusive spaces and to listen, and the ability to follow through.
- Clarity of the consultant's proposal, including clear milestones, outcomes and deliverables, and deadlines.
- Willingness and ability to listen, learn, and adapt to organizational needs around diversity, equity, and inclusion (and, in particular, race equity), versus a one-size-fits-all/"cookie cutter" approach to equity work.



The evaluation process will prioritize proposals that demonstrate the best value for money by providing a competitive total price in relation to the benefits, features, and alignment with project goals offered by each proposal.

### **Proposal Submission Process and Details**

The proposal should include the following:

- A description of how the consultant plans to undertake the work described above, including a brief explanation of any methodologies or approaches relied on;
- Estimated timeline for each step of the work plan identified in the description;
- Estimated costs;
- A summary of the individual/organization's experience providing consulting services, including audits or assessments related to racial equity, diversity, inclusion, intersectionality, and cultural competency;
- A summary of any relevant experience with nonprofit or philanthropic organizations;
- Professional training and short bios of the proposed project team members, including an explanation of the different team members' roles and responsibilities; and
- Contact information for a minimum of three relevant references.

Proposals and questions should be submitted to Nareen Scott at [nareen@justice4all.org](mailto:nareen@justice4all.org) using the subject "RFP Proposal (Company Name)"

*Deadline to submit proposals – March 3, 2025*

*Screening and Interviews with a decision by April 18, 2025*

*Commitment by May 1, 2025*

LAJC will consider the factors outlined – inclusive of experience, approach, cost, and cultural fit – in a holistic evaluation of proposals.

Please note that LAJC may follow up on specific proposals to obtain more information about the above criteria as needed to fully assess the proposals. Shortlisted consultants may be asked to participate in interviews prior to final selection.