
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee Progress Report

2015–2022



Rural Community Assistance Corporation

RCAC Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

As we enter fiscal year 2023, RCAC looks back at our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) journey, which began in 2015. Here we focus on major milestones, actions, accomplishments, our learning and what comes next.

DEI mission statement

RCAC fosters an inclusive, collaborative workplace environment where colleagues and partners are valued and treated with respect so that the organization and people we serve excel.

2015 – 2017: Crafting our mission, creating a common vocabulary

RCAC’s Board of Directors challenged the organization with advancing Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) in its mission, philosophy and day-to-day operations. A volunteer committee crafted a mission and a charter. Knowing it was important to establish a baseline and common vocabulary, much of the early focus was on surveying our staff’s understanding of diversity, unconscious bias and experience with diverse communities.

Committee volunteers began reviewing job descriptions through a diversity lens to ensure that diverse applicants were not excluded. The committee worked with Human Resources (now Staff Operations) to expand recruitment and circulate job openings to a wider audience. Internally, staff were invited to participate in unconscious bias trainings at the manager and director level and organization-wide, and the committee began sending out monthly “nudges” – brief articles or personal stories about cultural celebrations or experiences.

RCAC added a Diversity & Inclusion page to its website, updated the careers page, developed a brochure, and created five subcommittees: recruitment, communications, inclusion, training and diversity consciousness.

Highlights

- Unconscious bias training
- Staff surveys
- Reviewed job descriptions through a D&I lens
- Expanded recruitment practices to seek more diverse applicants
- Sent D&I “nudges” to all staff– articles or personal stories focused on culture and diverse experiences

- Added a D&I page to website
- Updated the careers page to be more inclusive
- Developed five subcommittees to carry forward committee work: recruitment, communications, inclusion, training, diversity consciousness
- Submitted quarterly reports to the Board of Directors

2017 – 2018: Strategic planning and refinement

The committee launched its first Strategic Plan, based on knowledge gained during the first two years of work. A top takeaway was the need to incorporate D&I throughout RCAC’s work and culture, rather than separating it into a different silo. Additionally, the committee reviewed the diversity mission as aligned with RCAC’s core values – we agreed that if RCAC lives by its core values it will create a D&I culture.

The strategic plan included specific goals:

- *RCAC attracts and retains diverse staff and board members*
- *RCAC staff and board are culturally competent*
- *RCAC serves diverse communities with the highest level of respect for cultural values*
- *RCAC continues to incorporate diversity within business operations*
- *D&I is imbedded within RCAC’s operating frameworks*

And RCAC’s definitions:

- ***Diversity:*** *Diversity is all the ways we are different from one another including in thinking, background, experience, and culture.*
- ***Inclusion:*** *Inclusion embraces the diverse aspects that make each of us unique yet universally human and ensures that everyone has a voice and opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the organization.*

Highlights

- Contracted with a consultant for strategic planning and unconscious bias training
- Participated in unconscious bias training at a Board of Directors/committee workshop
- Drafted the Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion
- Incorporated nudges into an internal newsletter
- Conducted trainings with managers and directors
- Further refined subcommittees to carry out the work: internal culture, recruitment and manager and director training
- Recruited staff to work with committee members in subcommittees
- Created an internal SharePoint site to house committee and staff resources

The Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion

Fundamentally, RCAC provides support to communities that are among the most challenged and underserved places in the country so that the residents of those communities can have the opportunities shared by the rest of the population. Our services are most effective if they are delivered by staff who have an awareness and respect for the cultural values of the communities we serve. We believe that the best decisions are made by inclusively involving all segments of the community in the decision-making process. And we believe that our mission is to create opportunities for improved lives in disadvantaged communities.

For all these reasons, RCAC staff must reflect the diversity of the people we serve. We can only become sensitive to other cultures by regularly engaging our diverse colleagues in discussions about their culture. We can only make the best decisions by making sure that the process inclusively involves people who reflect the diversity of our clients in culture, race, ethnicity, age and gender. And, if we are not creating opportunities for well-paying jobs within our organization, our intentions to create opportunity for the communities we serve seem hypocritical, at best.

We are not hypocrites, we are a diverse community, and it is our intent to create an organization that is a model of inclusion. We are not resting on our past successes, we recognize that much work still needs to be done, and we are looking for individuals who will help us challenge ourselves to fulfill this commitment.

2019: Refined directions

The committee updated its strategic plan and developed objectives for each subcommittee to drive toward goals. We also added Equity to the committee's name, expanding our vision for the DEI work.

Committee members welcomed new staff during orientation meetings, and reviewed the DEI mission and vision, and an overview of committee activities and goals. The committee also defined equity.

Equity: *RCAC recognizes that individuals have unique talents and needs and RCAC is committed to identify, provide and support opportunities for individuals to grow, thrive and advance to meet their goals within the organization.*

Work expanded to include periodic manager and director and all-staff trainings; presentations and trainings for department retreats; regular articles in the internal newsletter Green Space; continued job description revisions to ensure inclusivity; posting resources on the organization's internal SharePoint site; and adding a DEI element to the organization's on-boarding process.

Further expanding on inclusive hiring practices, the organization developed a trainee position to provide opportunities for applicants interested in on-the-job training, especially for field positions.

RCAC also developed a recruitment video that demonstrated the organization's commitment to diverse rural communities and its staff.

The committee changed its name from Diversity & Inclusion to Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee in 2020. Additionally, in late 2020, RCAC's Senior Leadership Team and Board of Directors approved a floating cultural holiday to give staff time to observe activities specific to their culture and/or religion.

The team began to act as a resource, providing training for partner organizations and internal departments.

Highlights

- Reviewed RCAC core values and identified training opportunities based on or expanding those values
- Developed a core value training session for managers
- Evaluations were incorporated in staff modeling of core values
- Added resources to the internal SharePoint site
- Incorporated DEI into new staff orientations and developed talking points
- Expanded advertising for job openings
- Trained managers to follow a hiring protocol that mitigates unconscious bias
- Developed a trainee program for select positions
- Provided training and resources for partner organizations and internal departments

2020: Strategic directions and engagement

The Board of Directors approved a Strategic Framework to guide RCAC's work during the pandemic's turbulence. A key strategic direction centers on DEI.

- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** Grow inclusive practices by improving organizational awareness, positioning, and approaches, which embrace Indigenous knowledge and are mindful of historical contexts, to better serve internal stakeholders and external partners and communities.

With the transition to remote work, the committee began to engage with RCAC's team using all-staff listening sessions. Board members and staff shared their personal lived experiences, and DEI Committee members led sessions on topics such as: microaggressions, giving and receiving critical feedback, cultural appropriation and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Anxious to provide more safe spaces for staff to ask questions, express concerns and share experiences privately, the committee worked with RCAC's Information Technology Department to develop a comment form in SharePoint. This anonymous form is directed to the committee chair and co-chair and has proven successful. There is a consistent uptick in its use after each listening session.

Over time, staff became more comfortable sharing their own cultural backgrounds and sent emails to all staff explaining cultural events and history that are meaningful to them – not relying on the committee to carry the message.

Additional activities included continued training, working with the Communications team to provide a DEI focus on the website homepage, developing guidelines to review training materials and including outside presenters with a DEI lens. The committee created a process to develop public statements to respond to critical events, including the George Floyd murder and the violence against Asian Americans that erupted during the pandemic.

Highlights

- Held one listening session per quarter using remote work platforms including Zoom, GoToMeeting and Teams. On average more than 50 percent, and up to 70 percent, of staff attended the sessions, which are voluntary
- Developed an anonymous contact form for staff to share comments and concerns with committee
- Continued nudges in the internal newsletter
- Wrote public statements in response to the George Floyd murder and violence against Asian Americans
- Approved a cultural holiday for staff to observe personal cultural, traditional or religious activities
- Provided training and resources for partner organizations and internal departments

2021: New goals and focus areas

In 2021 the committee held a virtual retreat and Board workshop to review its accomplishments over the last six years and align goals more closely to RCAC’s strategic framework.

The three subcommittees reorganized into focus areas: inclusion, empowerment and continuous improvement.

The organization adopted a Compensation Philosophy, which included a Salary and Benefits Assessment, all reviewed through an equity lens, collectively and by department, to include gender, manager and director status, age, longevity and ethnicity. DEI trends or anomalies were noted and discussed with department directors and tracked year by year to ensure DEI mission and visions are achieved.

Goal 1: Secure resources to preserve and grow the DEI Mission

Goal 2: Inspire self-empowerment among RCAC team/staff members

Goal 3: Continue/improve integration of DEI into organizational processes and practices

Highlights

- Salary and Benefits assessment – determined job market values and reviewed through a DEI lens
- Worked with the Communications team to develop new website homepage with DEI focus
- Continued to host listening sessions
- Provided DEI training for outside organizations and partners

2022

As we began to emerge into a new normal, the DEI committee met in person for the first time in more than two years. During an intense, two-day workshop, the committee paused to celebrate successes, refocus energy and consider the future. Activities included reviewing the committee’s history, sharing personal highlights and conducting a SWOT Analysis.

Committee team members shared personal highlights, including:

- Building relationships to have conversations about challenging topics
- Broad attendance and deep staff engagement with listening sessions
- Positive responses to lived experiences shared in the internal newsletter
- Being trusted resources to support others
- Embedding DEI in the job survey, and compensation and salaries that led to equitable corrections in structures
- Adopting a Job Market Value approach to salaries, ensuring equity across RCAC
- Empowering shifts from where the organization has been to, where it is and where it’s going
- Acknowledging challenges
- Having more open conversations
- Living into potential, guided by a moral compass
- How the committee navigates difficult conversations and supports each other
- Watching how staff respond with grace and openness

Committee members created several outcomes they would like to see within the next year. High-level themes included: make DEI a part of RCAC’s DNA; establish an outcome-based measurement to determine progress; develop concrete action plans with budgets; create a Crisis Communication Plan; and integrate DEI into other committees and meetings.

Listening sessions continue. The committee agreed to incorporate how historic injustice contributes to the work RCAC does in community and environmental services, housing, economic development and lending. The June session focused on colonia communities.

The committee launched a new survey after the June listening session:

- Do you feel that DEI has an impact on your wellbeing? 100% of attendees (77) said yes
- Do you feel like you can share experiences and have your voice heard during these sessions? 86% percent of attendees (66) said yes

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sessions

Highlights

- Drafted Crisis Communications Plan and flow chart
- Presented training at the manager/director meeting “Lifting voices not often heard”
- Worked on Employee Resource Group guidelines
- Committee members developed a 20-week challenge adapted from the Michigan League for Public Policy’s (MLPP) 21 Day Racial Equity Challenge

The committee is looking ahead to share leadership, power and responsibility; be more intentional and collaborative; engage staff who are not currently interacting with the committee or DEI activities; develop succession plans; and welcome new committee members.

In October, RCAC welcomed its new Culture Resource Coordinator, who will help guide and structure the committee’s work, help inform clear decision-making processes and embed the processes in the committee charter, especially as the committee shifts to outcome-based measurement and implements Key Performance Indicators.

Lessons

We asked ourselves some questions about lessons learned:

What has been the biggest and hardest challenge in our DEI journey? *One of our biggest challenges was acknowledging that this is hard work and is a journey, not a destination. Each individual within RCAC is on their own journey and meeting folks where they are is critical, but difficult.*

Have we met that challenge and if not, what’s left to do to address that challenge? *This challenge is also a journey. As new staff enter our community, some of them will be new to DEI and some will be more advanced than we are collectively. Continually considering how we support the spectrum and ensuring new members of our community are given an opportunity to understand what DEI at RCAC looks like is critical. We are working at integration of a DEI module into the onboarding experience.*

Is this a challenge we can “finish” or something we have to keep chipping away at? *It is an ongoing journey! We acknowledge that we have had, and will continue to have, setbacks. We’ll have to repeat ourselves, try different approaches and keep going. We remind ourselves at our committee meetings that this work will never be finished.*

What was the hardest moment? *Our first listening session ... terrifying! We have made great progress with the listening sessions over the past two years. Listening sessions have been a great success and the topics have been engaging during and after the sessions. We receive valuable feedback and suggestions for future sessions from staff participating in the sessions.*

What have we done well? *Our committee has exhibited commitment time and again ... so knowledgeable and committed!*

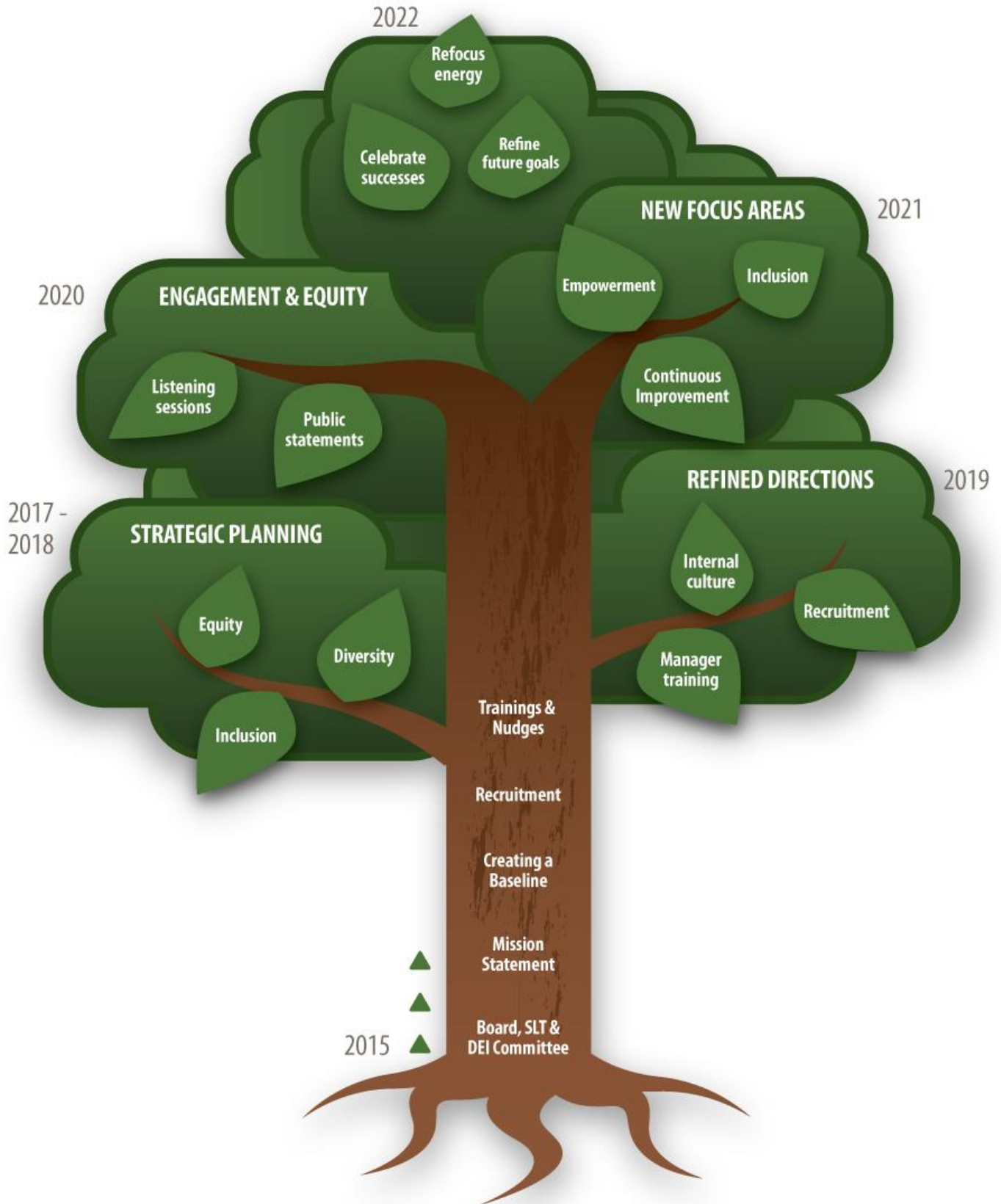
What have we NOT done well? *We are all doing this above and beyond our other duties. We are hopeful that the Culture Resource Coordinator will make us more consistent in communication, meeting and listening session planning. She has been great at sending reminders and keeping track of the work in progress, staying and keeping the committee motivated.*

How have we met resistance and how did we handle it? *We are sure there are those that are not “fans” of the DEI work, but the virtual meetings are actually a great benefit in letting folks “monitor” our sessions with some anonymity. So even those that are not comfortable in this space can join and listen in safely while pondering the topics and information shared.*

A watershed moment

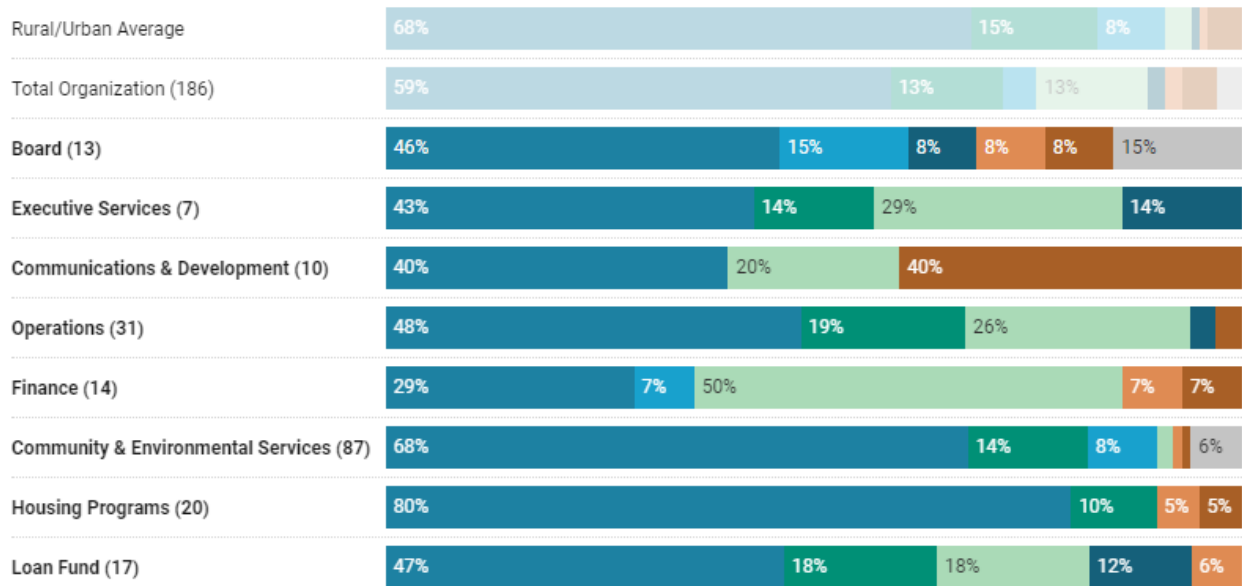
*It is so important to take one step forward, even when it might be a misstep. I always learn something when I engage with our DEI Committee and work. I may even learn more when I stumble. One of my watershed moments was when I received two emails in a week with concerns over a photo that was published in our internal newsletter Green Space. Both of the individuals said (in differing ways) that because of DEI they had thought through their reaction to make sure they were not being biased ... both were white males. That was an ah-ha! moment because they had not only been listening in but changed their reaction to something by pausing to contemplate that reaction. They actually heard the message and took it to heart. They still felt the same, but they took a moment to pause! - **Suzanne Anarde-Devenport, CEO***

RCAC Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



Racial and Ethnic Breakdown of All Staff

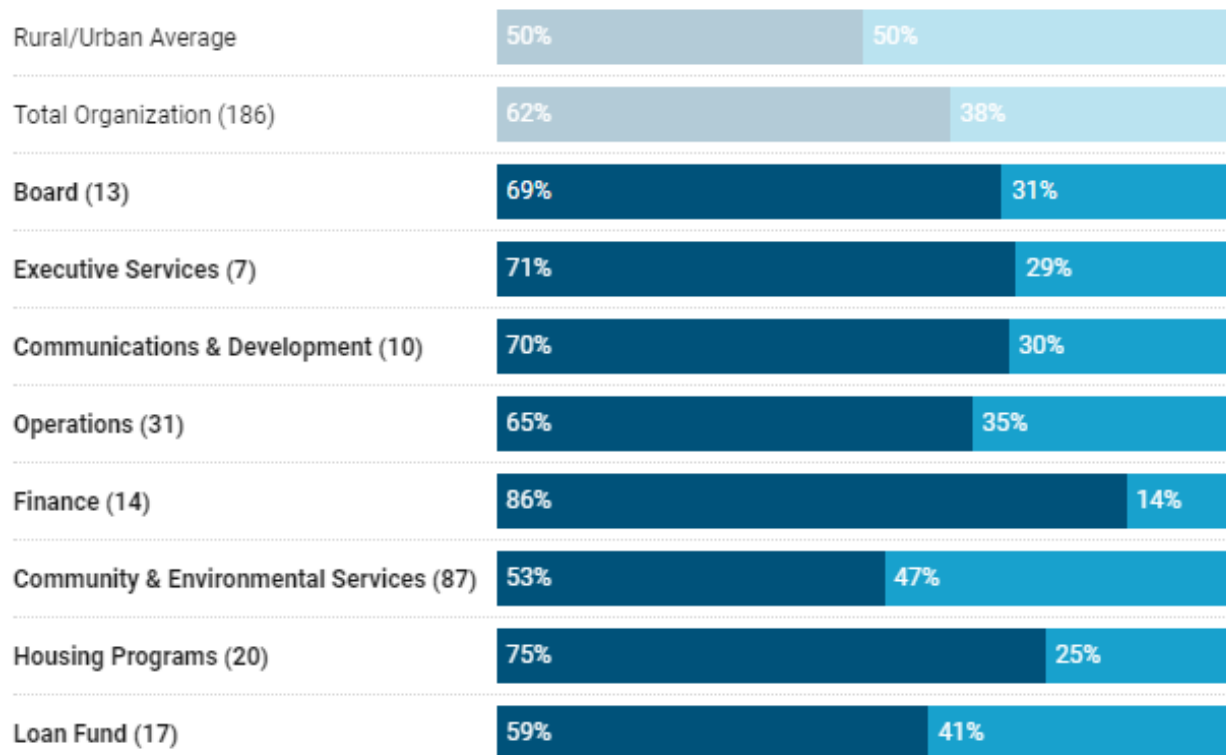
■ White
 ■ Black or African American
 ■ American Indian or Alaska Native
 ■ Asian
 ■ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 ■ Other
 ■ Two or More
 ■ Hispanic Or Latino



Numbers next to each department represent the number of staff in that department.

Gender Breakdown of All RCAC Staff

■ Female
 ■ Male



Numbers next to each department represent the number of staff in that department.