The Executive Committee of the Task Force on Individual, Institutional and Systemic Bias on April 30, 2019 approved in concept several preliminary recommendations of task force work groups for referral to appropriate administrative units to explore implementation. Specific details of implementing the frameworks set forth in the recommendations will be developed by these units, with in-depth consideration of associated concerns and processes, after which the recommendations will presented to senior leadership for adoption.
COMMUNICATION, DATA SYSTEMS & REPORTING WORK GROUP

QUESTION #6
What is a reasonable expectation for units to host unit-wide forums for faculty, staff and students to engage and share?
Problem/situation
Current VCU policies and practices could provide safe spaces within educational and workplace settings for effective dialogue toward fostering greater diversity, inclusion and equity.
Research
While there is not a comprehensive and robust research literature in this area, much of the research in building inclusive spaces argues that dialogue is an important ingredient to strengthening inclusion. However, it must happen in ways that disrupt power dynamics within the workplace and is connected to additional specific action. While most units at VCU have consistent gatherings within the unit, there are few opportunities for people to gather in ways that are not tied to work roles and/or tasks.
Recommendations

VCU should be more intentional in its provision of contexts, forum or media for students and employees to converse and exchange ideas about their educational and workplace experiences, especially on topics related to diversity and inclusion. Below, three recommendations related to an assessment of our organizational capacity and content are provided.

1. Collect information on what types of discussion and forum opportunities are occurring across units. This information could be collected through a survey that could help inventory the types (and frequency) of meetings already in place.

2. Units have at least two forums or other opportunities for dialogue per semester, and that units have a mechanism in place to report out and follow-up if there are issues or questions discussed that require additional feedback. One way to collect this information would be to incorporate it into the Division for Inclusive Excellence culture survey, which makes up part of its diversity index. This is a way to make the units accountable for demonstrating their efforts to create the space and time needed for these discussions.

3. Units ensure opportunities for bidirectional communications are in place as well — that these forums encourage communications from the students/employees up to the administration, rather than always a top-down approach. Doing so ensures that the students, faculty and staff voices are heard. Again, Inclusive Excellence culture survey could be a means of holding units accountable for this.