June 5, 2020

We see the historical and ongoing systemic barriers to social, economic, and legal equity for Black and Indigenous Americans, and all people of color. To our collective detriment, Black lives have not mattered as much as others in our American system.

The economic development system is reflective of — and contributed to — these barriers and inequity. The legacy of slavery and segregation led to ensuing racist housing policies and impacted access to property ownership, lending practices, access to education, employment, and on.

Over generations, wealth, education, experience, and personal/professional networks are built up in family and social circles. Unsurprisingly, that has ended up looking very different between Whites who started with privilege, and access to wealth and education from day one, and Blacks who did not.

Words are good and important. Action is better.

That is why prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color as we work towards our vision of "Prosperity for All Oregonians" is a part of our agency strategic plan. We are the first to say we wish we have made more progress. We will do better, we will do more.

When we launched our COVID small business fund at the beginning of May, we structured it so that applicants (cities, counties, Economic Development Districts) must develop partnerships and marketing plans to promote the funds into minority communities first, before more broadly promoting the program.

We are now incorporating public benefit agreements with many of the companies we work with to ensure they have diversity plans, provide advancement opportunities, and support community organizations.

We are working on how we can expand support and partnership with local community organizations that demonstrate a commitment to an economy that empowers all Oregonians.

We continue to work towards increasing our own diversity, being equitable in our programs, and inclusive in our strategies. We stand with the Black community. We are here to listen, to see you, and support you.

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