



WINTER 2020

Emerging best practices to operationalize racial equity in affordable housing

The regional affordable housing bond, the first of its kind in the country, offers greater Portland an important opportunity to advance racial equity. Months of deep engagement with partners and community members led to the development of a framework adopted by Metro Council to support the housing bond. Because people of color are among those most deeply impacted by housing discrimination and lack of access to safe, stable, affordable housing, racial equity is central to the values in that framework. By explicitly focusing policies and investments to benefit communities of color, we can reduce racial disparities while benefiting all disadvantaged members of our community.

The bond funding of \$652.8 million dollars will create affordable homes to serve 12,000 people, including those who:

- cannot afford market rate housing,
- have not had opportunities to access other public investments in affordable housing,
- live in communities at risk of displacement, and/or
- are or have been houseless.

The housing bond program will address historic barriers by focusing investments toward serving families and people with very low incomes. Of the 3,900 homes that will be produced through bond investments, at least 1,950 must have two or more bedrooms, and at least 1,600 will be affordable to households making just 30% or below of area median income (AMI). Program implementation will advance racial equity through: intentional engagement with communities of color and other



historically marginalized groups; increasing economic opportunity by hiring minority and women-owned contractors; planning and partnering for culturally specific programming and supportive services to meet the needs and increase success of tenants; affirmative outreach, marketing and referrals from culturally specific organizations to support access for those who most need this housing; and reducing barriers at application.

Metro seeks to support our colleagues, partners and the broader community as we work together to implement the regional affordable housing bond program, and to demonstrate accountability to the racial equity focus emphasized in the framework. This document offers emerging best practices and strategies to design and implement programs that advance racial equity. We consider this a living document and welcome feedback to improve it (you can contact housing@oregonmetro.gov).

1. Addressing structural racism

Structural racism refers to the complex system of public policies, institutional practices, and cultural norms by which racial discrimination becomes embedded in the social fabric of our lives, deeply affecting entire groups of people. Acknowledging and dismantling these systems is essential to eliminating racial disparities. We recommend multiple approaches and intentional consideration at every level of affordable housing development and program implementation.

Suggested practices

- **Make decisions with community:** Integrally involve people of color and organizations that represent communities of color in policy and funding decisions (e.g., ensure diverse representation on advisory groups). Actively remove barriers for organizations and communities to ensure full participation by providing stipends, scheduling events at accessible times and locations, and other supportive engagement tactics.

- **Activate public support:** Provide proactive community education and engagement opportunities to inform neighbors about specific projects and build broad support for affordable housing. Be a ‘good neighbor’ by proactively sharing information on goals and intentions of the project, property management practices, available services and supports, etc. Engage and align with those who wish to see more affordable housing in the community.
- **Teach equity:** Provide ongoing/continuing education and equity training opportunities that include anti-racist curricula for all project partners, including building owner and management staff, resident services staff, and partners that support residents.
- **Measure and evaluate outcomes:** Set measurable goals for advancing racial equity and identify metrics for monitoring outcomes. Establish meaningful and ongoing communication with community-based organizations to review metrics and methods used to evaluate program impact. Partner with community-based organizations in evaluating program outcomes to ensure program is effectively meeting the needs of their communities; identify challenges and opportunities for further progress; improve program implementation to achieve identified outcomes; and celebrate accomplishments and successes.

2. Increase access for people of color

Common application screening practices disproportionately screen out people of color and are incongruous with Fair Housing regulations. Practices that “screen in” rather than “screen out” applicants and affirmative marketing strategies will increase access to affordable housing opportunities for communities of color.

Suggested practices

- **Clear application information:** Make screening criteria readily available on housing websites, social media, and in marketing materials. Provide information in multiple languages.
- **Accommodate credit scores:** Allow applicant to demonstrate financial soundness with alternate documentation. Make exceptions for medical and education debt, and when the applicant is on a feasible repayment plan. Coordinate with nonprofits that specialize in housing counseling.
- **Allow alternative documentation:** People who have had unstable housing situations or have been houseless may not have retained documents. Consider alternate forms of ID or documentation to satisfy application requirements. Accept references from professional contacts, a case manager, faith leader, or other personal contact if applicants cannot provide landlord references. Hold the

apartment while allowing applicants additional time to secure necessary documentation.

- **Look beyond histories:** Recognize that people of color have been and continue to be disproportionately impacted by structural racism within the criminal justice system. Consider only recent or serious crimes that directly relate to the safety of other tenants. Screen for criminal background only after applicant has met all other qualifications.
- **Offer remedy and appeal options:** If an application is denied, provide clear and direct information to applicant about the nature of the denial and options to remedy or appeal. Allow the applicant to work directly with building owner and management without having to go through the screening company. Consider allowing a second appeal process.
- **Get the word out:** Work with community-based organizations that have direct and frequent contact with specific cultural communities to solicit housing applications from people of color and other historically marginalized groups. Use advertising messages that explicitly convey that culturally specific and historically marginalized communities are encouraged to apply, and include information about opportunities and amenities in the neighborhood. Plan to accommodate differing literacy levels, languages, and varied media use when advertising. Collect data to determine if affirmative marketing strategies have been effective.
- **Provide accessibility:** Rates of disability are similar among white people and people of color; however, people of color are five times more likely than the general population to report experiencing discrimination based on disability. Set production targets for physically accessible and adaptable units and ensure that accessible units are available at the lowest tiers of affordability. Partner with service agencies to provide supportive housing – housing paired with ongoing, intensive services that can address the spectrum of needs of the community.
- **Ensure supportive staffing:** Intentional staffing and programming can help ensure success for tenants of color. Conduct tenant meetings to gather feedback and engage tenants to foster communicative and trusting relationships between tenants and property managers. Hire staff of color and culturally specific service providers. Fund peer support programs that employ staff with lived experience to support residents.

3. Intentionally locate housing opportunities

Creating affordable housing in areas with access to frequent public transit, jobs, quality schools and mixed-



income communities improves outcomes for people with low incomes, especially families with children. Additionally, creating affordable housing in communities at risk of displacement often means more affordable housing where communities of color live. When people have affordable housing options in the areas where they have history, family, friends, community institutions and gathering places, communities are stronger, more resilient, and more likely to remain intact.

Suggested practices

- **Connect communities to higher opportunity:** Allow for higher costs of affordable housing investments in high-opportunity areas. Understand that ideas about opportunity may vary between dominant culture and marginalized groups. Engage culturally specific and historically marginalized communities to understand their location preferences as well as supports needed to thrive in new neighborhoods. Use marketing strategies that explicitly convey that people of color are welcome to apply.
- **Acquire and improve:** Invest in affordable housing opportunities where people of color already live by acquiring unregulated affordable housing to protect existing tenants, improve housing conditions, and ensure that programming is culturally responsive to the community.
- **Invest in the community:** Work with transit providers and transportation network companies to ensure adequate transportation options for people who live in lower-income communities. Partner with community programs to support access to opportunity, economic mobility, and quality of life in conjunction with affordable housing investments.



4. Creating workforce opportunities

People of color are not equitably represented in construction and other professional opportunities created by affordable housing development and operations. Women represent just four percent of the construction workforce. The development, construction, and management of affordable housing presents opportunities to increase representation of people of color and women in this field.

Suggested practices

- **Improve contracting diversity:** Set goals and competitive criteria to increase diversity in contracting for projects. Use “good faith effort” requirements for outreach to MWESB (Minority, Women-owned, and Emerging Small Business) contractors. Recognize contractors who exceed the hiring requirements and award them additional points on future bids. Make a plan to increase MWESB goals over time. Make particular efforts to contract with minority and women-owned businesses, in addition to more readily available Emerging Small Businesses.
- **Set goals for apprenticeship and workforce:** Set goals for apprenticeship and labor participation by women and people of color. Use a certified payroll and workforce reporting software program to monitor compliance with workforce diversity goals and prevailing wage compliance management. Offer administrative support with reporting requirements to small firms who may not have the in-house capacity to complete required monitoring and reporting.
- **Create new capacity:** Jurisdictions can help build and support a diverse workforce by joining Metro’s Construction Careers Pathways Project (C2P2), a project aimed at building capacity in the construction workforce in public investments.
- **Support living wages:** Work with the labor community to create community benefits agreements that define workforce goals and commitments to wages in each project, including ongoing operations jobs.

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Metro brings people together to shape the future of greater Portland and provides places, services and tools that work best at a regional scale. Led by an elected council, this unique government gives Oregonians a voice in their community.

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Land and transportation

Metro plans for new homes, jobs, transportation options and access to local businesses and parks.

Garbage and recycling

Metro manages the garbage and recycling system and is a resource for information about safe disposal and ways to reduce waste.

Arts and events

Metro runs the Oregon Convention Center, Portland Expo Center and Portland’s 5 Centers for the Arts.

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