

July 20, 2020

Our Commitment to Become a Better Ally, and to Drive Action and Sustainable Change Against Racial Injustice, Hatred and Prejudice

On behalf of our team at Invest Ottawa and Bayview Yards, I would like to acknowledge and condemn the numerous appalling acts of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism that have occurred over the past eight weeks. I acknowledge the prevalence of systemic racism and hatred against marginalized communities in our region, across Canada and throughout the world. Although we have become more aware of these acts of racial injustice and violence in recent times, it's vital to acknowledge that this is nothing new and has been occurring for centuries.



Change is needed – hate and discrimination of any form have no place in our society. It is our collective duty and civic responsibility to become better allies for those who suffer injustice daily. Racism is a public health crisis, and Invest Ottawa and Bayview Yards are committed to driving change together with our community to help create a truly inclusive society where every person is valued.

It begins with our values as individuals, as colleagues and as an organization. Our team stands united with all members of our local and global Black and Indigenous communities, firmly against all racism, hatred and prejudice. Like many around the world, we believe that it is critical to work together to collectively dismantle all systemic racism and oppression, and drive reform. We know that actions speak louder than words and that we must consistently do better at translating our values into action.

As an economic development agency, we are committed to empowering the richly diverse communities that drive our economic growth. We are very grateful to the individuals and organizations from marginalized communities that are generously collaborating with us in support of these critical goals. We know there is still much work to do, and this is our responsibility. Over the last several weeks, we have paused to look inward and assess the critical changes we need to make with focused action.



From further diversifying our team to enabling the growth and success of clients from every walk of life, we commit to creating a culture of belonging for all. This commitment includes fully engaging all members of our community in the programs and services we deliver. All members include racially diversified persons (valued members of our Black, Asian, Indian, Hispanic and many other communities), Indigenous persons, women, people with disabilities, people with diverse sexual orientations, and those who identify with different ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender and religious backgrounds.

We know we have a very long way to go. As we embark on this important journey together, we are committed to taking deliberate action within our organization and across the programs and services we deliver. These are integrated goals that bring together and engage our employees, clients, and stakeholders as a community. In support of these objectives, we will:

- **Recruit a Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategist** from an under-represented community who will join our team and work closely with us to address these critical objectives, and take meaningful, authentic steps within our organization, programs and community.
- **Ensure our diversity, inclusion, and belonging goals and actions engage our governing bodies and are integrated into our governance model.** This includes working closely with our [Female Founders and Women-Owned Business Sub-Committee of the Board](#) to evolve and strengthen our strategy to increase support for marginalized women entrepreneurs who identify with equity-seeking groups.



- **Drive greater action on the development and implementation of ‘Mainstream Diversity Programming’** (a key objective in our strategic and annual operating plans), and systematically and intentionally engaging Black and Indigenous entrepreneurs, small business owners, innovators and firms from equity-seeking groups in our programs and services. This includes programs such as our new Digital Main Street Program, which aims to help small business owners leverage digital tools and strategies to access new markets, clients and revenue during and beyond the pandemic.
- **Identify and address fundamental systemic barriers within our programs, services and broader organization** that limit, inhibit or prevent founders and firms from under-represented groups to fully leverage or benefit from these offerings.
- **Expand our diversity-focused Employee Resource Group Program and Discovery Circles** and engage more clients and partners. Established in collaboration with experts from marginalized communities, these groups aim to create safe space for underrepresented communities on an element of shared identity (such as race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).
- **Elevate more voices, experiences and achievements of under-represented entrepreneurs, business owners, and innovators**, and set them up in a way where they can help guide and contribute to the creation of an inclusive work environment where everyone feels like they belong, and impact business objectives. We know this is critical to take meaningful steps towards equality for all. This includes giving the microphone to under-represented communities through events such as the Black Founders panel hosted by L-Spark, Invest Ottawa, uOttawa and KNBA on July 23 – we hope you will join us. Do you have an idea? Please reach out to me – we want to hear from you.
- **Leverage new expertise to help our team and the clients we serve to foster greater diversity, inclusion and a culture of belonging** and help them to better understand and address systemic racism. This includes implementing new talent development, attraction and retention approaches and creating broader foundational guidelines and policies that support



these goals. We will ensure that the importance of building diverse and inclusive organizations is embedded into our programs and help to build these foundations with businesses across our region.

- **Engage more deeply with employees, clients, mentors, sponsors, partners and investors** to advocate for, and drive impactful change. We will also collaborate with our ecosystem on the collection of demographic data that helps us to support marginalized communities better and advance equality. We need to identify the representation gaps to guide and prioritize our collective action and consistently evolve our efforts to achieve the greatest possible impact.

In closing, it is our responsibility to stay the course. As we work closely with our community to weather the health and economic crisis created by the pandemic, we are equally committed to collaborating on critical anti-racism strategies.

We are very grateful for all feedback and recommendations from all those who collaborate with us in support of our shared goals. We recognize the immense value all employees, clients, partners and investors bring to our organization and our region. And I want to reinforce that we are committed to listening, publishing our plans, and updating you on the steps we are taking together. Collective action against racism, hatred, and prejudice is required to create greater opportunity and impact for all. We are together on this critical journey, and we are here for you – all members of our community.



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