



Along with the rest of the world, the Columbia Chamber of Commerce is heartbroken to see the recent tragic deaths and violent treatment of black Americans. We want to make it clear to our community, membership, and region that we stand against injustice. As these events continue to impact our community and the country at large, we must stop and realize how we got to a place of systemic racism in our nation and actualize how we can finally move forward.

As an organization representing the business community, the Chamber works to stand as an ally with those creating inclusive spaces. The black business community, which includes all black business owners and black employees, is vital in making Columbia the vibrant place it is today. We must support and protect the people who make those businesses what they are.

Working as a convener of inclusive collaboration, the Chamber strives to foster an environment that welcomes diverse voices on initiatives to serve our entire community best. In September of 2017, our Board adopted the Principles of Community. The principles are as follows:

“We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect of an understanding.

*We affirm* the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression with civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

*We affirm* the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and our organizations. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.

*We reject* all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, diverse ability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and or increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.

*We pledge* our collective commitment to incorporate these principles into our goal of creating a community dedicated to inclusive excellence, where all citizens can live and thrive.”

This is the time where our mission and Principles of Community are put to the test. To stop moving in reverse and propel Columbia and our country forward, we will continue to open ourselves to listen and learn. By listening to our community partners and fellow citizens, we are able to learn and grow, not just our organization, but as individuals.

To best educate our team and membership, the Chamber is engaging the Inclusive Impact Institute to provide programming to teach businesses how to incorporate diversity, equality, and inclusion as a priority in their everyday operations, not only during a crisis. If seeking additional local education, training, and resources, we urge businesses interested in growing their perspective to contact Inclusive Impact Institute.

The road to lasting change will be difficult, filled with conversations, listening, and thoughtful action. We pledge to continue to do the work to improve our organization to serve all our community best.