

**Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc.
Racial Equity Policy DRAFT November 16, 2015**

Subject: Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. (SWNI) Racial Equity Policy	Effective Date:
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Approved by SWNI Board (date):	Pages: 3

1. Vision

Racial equity: When people in a society have equal chances to reach their full potential and are no more likely to encounter life’s burdens or benefits just because of the color of their skin. Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. (SWNI) identifies addresses and eliminates racial and ethnic inequities. We have people of color as leaders. We advocate and work to improve the livability of SW Portland neighborhoods for people of every race and ethnicity. We learn to recognize and end conscious and unconscious bias, systemic racism, social exclusion and other oppression, and build tools for social change in order to promote equity. We ensure that every resident, property owner, and business within our defined geographic area has access to, and feels welcome at SWNI events and meetings. We listen and value everyone’s participation and voice in our decision making processes. We develop partnerships with other organizations and relationships with individuals that inform and guide how we work for equity.

2. Need

Our organizations’ actions and policies reflect the experiences of its members and leaders. We recognize that current participation does not proportionately reflect Southwest Portland (SWNI) demographics. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, approximately 15.4% of SW Portland residents identify themselves as non-White, Hispanic, or of mixed race. As of 2015 very few people of color participate in SWNI events and activities. Of 32 total SWNI Board and staff members, one identifies as a person of color. According to the Coalition of Communities of Color document, “Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile,” people of color face significant disparities in every social arena, including access to stable housing, employment, income, poverty rates, health, birth outcomes, and education attainment, with results up to one-half that of Whites. More than a mere change in numbers or data, we value the need for change in the culture, functioning, priorities and outcomes of our organization in order to improve livability for people of color.

3. Leading with race and resource allocation

Portland’s long standing history of systemic racism drives our choice to address equity through the lens of race first. SW Portland residents inhabit land taken from indigenous Multnomah Chinookan and Atfalati Kalapuyan people. The territorial and state governments of Oregon maintained Black exclusion laws in the Bill of Rights from 1844-1926. There were three

unsuccessful attempts to repeal bans on Black suffrage, prior to Oregon amendment in 1927—even though the 15th Amendment had been ratified federally without Oregon approval in 1870.

We need to hear the experiences of people of color who have been disproportionately impacted by gentrification, incarceration rates, public health outcomes, income and housing stability. Advancement of equity requires that SWNI identify and name disparities, reassess current projects, reallocate funding, and shift staff and volunteer priorities with firm timelines, policy commitments and resources. Significant and informed change can bring true racial equity to event and meeting participation, volunteer involvement, and organizational leadership.

4. Partnerships

SWNI gains access to expertise and guidance from communities most impacted by racial inequities through collaboration with our partners, including SWNI neighborhood associations, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement's Diversity and Civic Leadership (DCL) groups and the African Youth and Community Organization (AYCO). We also partner with communities of faith, schools, and social service organizations in our area. Our work is to listen, pay attention, learn and take action in support of our partners to resolve inequities and livability concerns, knowing that our work will never be finished.

5. Action and accountability

SWNI will identify and eliminate barriers to participation and leadership for people of color, and increase understanding of racial inequity throughout our organization. Recognizing the day-to-day and cumulative effects of systemic racism on people of color, SWNI's programs and actions will promote responsibility for learning and competency among people who identify as White, with the goal of developing cultural humility and normalizing meaningful conversations about race and racism, rather than placing the additional burden of teaching or correcting misinformation on people of color. Our vision for change will only be accomplished through the participation and leadership of, and accountability to people of color.

6. Action Plan

The Equity and Inclusion Action Team will lead SWNI through the Action Plan at all levels of our organization.

SWNI Racial Equity Policy Appendix 1: Definitions

- *Geographic area.* Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. member associations cover the land area incorporated with Portland city limits, roughly south of Highway 26 and 405/downtown Portland, and west from the Willamette River to the city boundary. For details, see <http://swni.org/map>.
- *Currently preferred terminology.* We recognize and appreciate the changing nature of language and the power of naming ourselves and our identity groups. SWNI will do its best to address people and organizations according to their stated preferred identities.

We reference the definitions from Appendix #4 of the 2010 report by Coalition of Communities of Color, Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile (appended). These will be supplemented as needed.

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