



The Letter: A Call to Action to Multnomah County

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**To the Employees
of Multnomah County and
Those We Serve:**

We, the members of the Inclusively Leading with Race (ILWR) Design Team, write this letter to affirm that **Multnomah County is unequivocally committed to leading with race. And a commitment requires ongoing accountability and action.** So we send this letter as a way for us to share what is in our hearts and minds, to paint a picture of what leading with race looks like, so that we can all share the vision of what the County continues to aspire to and work toward.

Multnomah County is the community, and true transformation begins with using our institutional power to create the change we want to see. We will be bold, creative, and radical in how we approach our pursuit of transformation.

We also write this letter as a way to invite everyone who reads this letter to step together into a vision of Multnomah County that is a more just, safe, and equitable place to work and live. That starts with

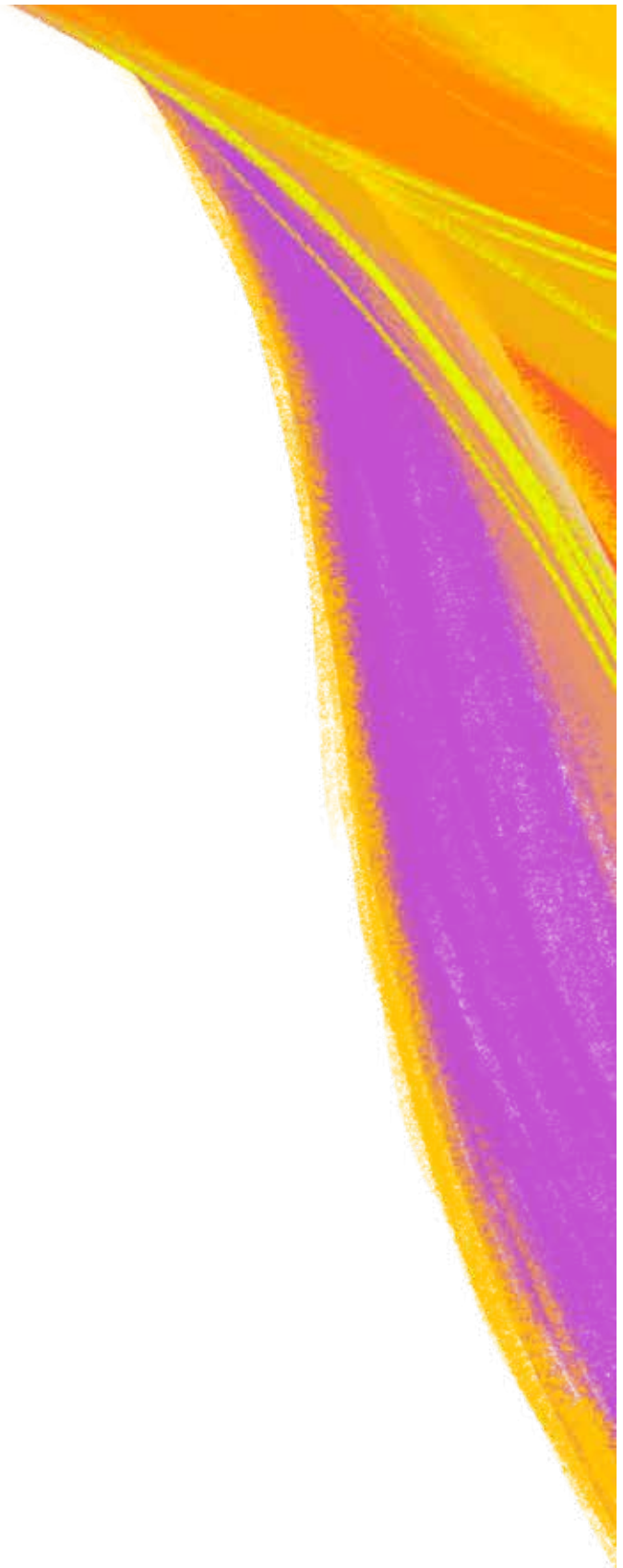
acknowledging and understanding—not ignoring, denying, or minimizing—the ways in which race and systemic racism have shaped institutions, structures, communities, and ourselves. We also recognize that this organization has historically contributed to and upheld the inequalities and harms of systemic racism.

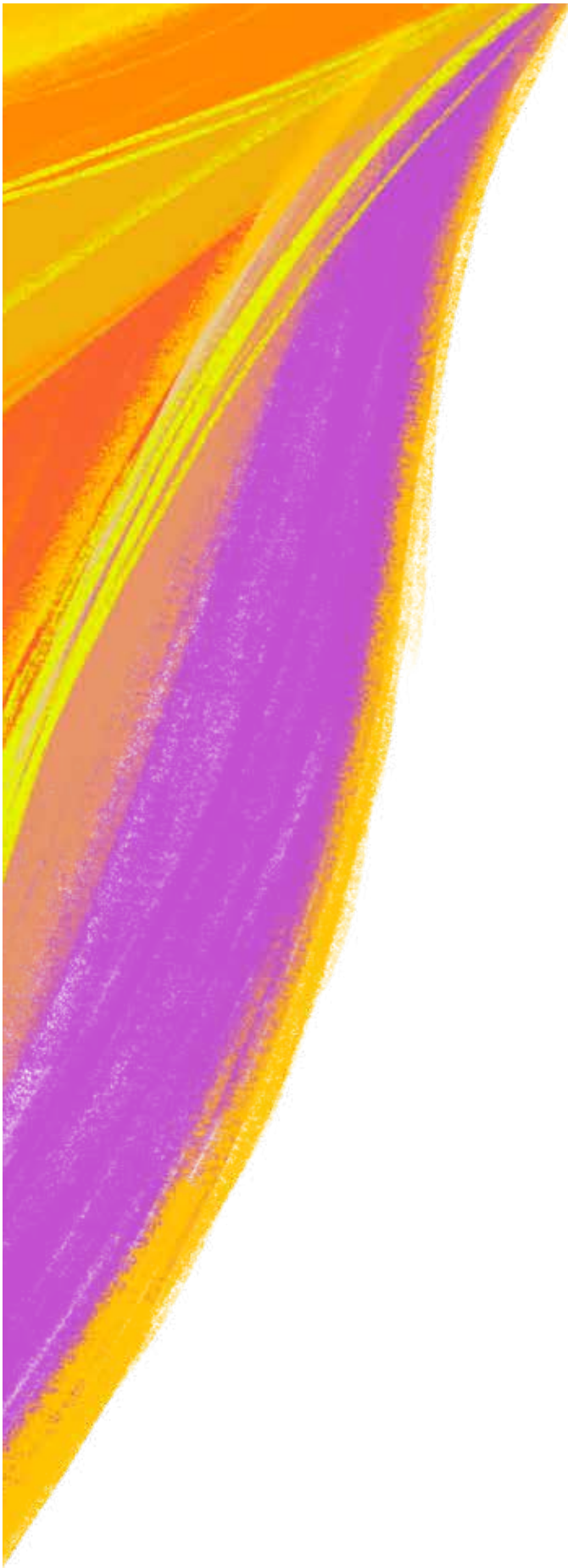
We do this not to focus on the past, but to move forward in pursuit of restoration and healing. **We do this out of a deep love: for ourselves, our colleagues, the meaningful work we do together, this organization and the communities we serve.**

Right now, the County, along with communities, jurisdictions, and organizations across the country, are facing racial reckonings. The years of racism; anti-Black, anti-indigenous, and anti-immigrant bias and discrimination; microaggressions; and police brutality, are all being named and called out for the harm they bring to people of color and the entire community.

But **today's calls for justice are resounding echoes of the work, progress, and change that have been made by so many Black, Indigenous, and other County employees of color who have come before us who pushed Multnomah County to be better.**

They did so because they knew the County could be better for themselves and the countless marginalized people who have been left out of the conversations and left behind by systems over and over again.





And they did so in spite of daunting barriers and active resistance from the institution that prevented further progress toward a version of the County they knew we could be.

So while we have a lot further to go on our journey to becoming an organization that models the kind of community we must become, we can't forget that we have only come this far because of the conviction and perseverance of these individuals. Our work now is grounded in the foundation that they created, and it's on their shoulders that we continue to challenge Multnomah County to urgently and fervently pursue racial justice and equity.

Of course, leading with race to build a more equitable organization doesn't mean disregarding other forms of marginalization.

There is more than enough room for us to hold to account and address inequities based in identity, like gender, sexual orientation, ability, and age. But white supremacy culture amplifies the inequities in nearly every system and institution that touches our lives and shapes our experiences.

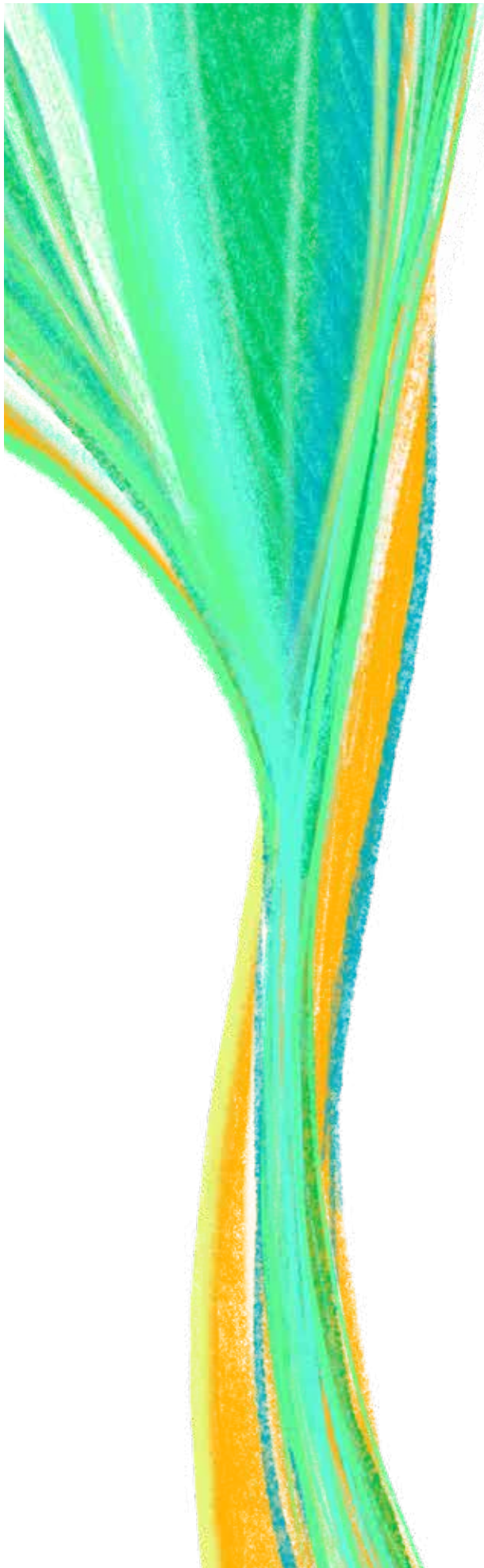
Centering our work around race creates the space we need in order to talk authentically and accurately about all types of oppression. Centering our work around race also acknowledges that individuals hold multiple, overlapping, and sometimes even contradictory identities — some of which carry privilege and protection, and others that add compounding layers of oppression and discrimination. Inclusively leading with race, then, offers us an approach that opens up

a way to confront and address the marginalization of numerous identities, while recognizing the outsized and foundational role that race plays in people's lives.

As a community, we haven't fully processed the ways that the ideology and practices of white supremacy fueled the colonization, genocide, and slavery of Black and Indigenous peoples, or how the legacies of that violence contribute to the white-dominant social, economic, cultural, environmental, and even workplace systems that we participate in every day. Across these systems, whiteness has been built up as the baseline against which the identities of people of color are defined as "other." The ability for people of color to define themselves, rather than to be defined in contrast to whiteness, has been stolen, leading to real harm and continued marginalization. When we inclusively lead with race, we give people of color the room to identify themselves on their own terms.

Inclusively leading with race means using these acknowledgments to enact change that leads to more equitable, just, and dignified treatment of people of color among our workforce and in the community. To achieve that change, we will be bold, creative, and radical in our approaches. And County decision makers and those in leadership have communicated to us that they understand that they have made a commitment to inclusively leading with race.



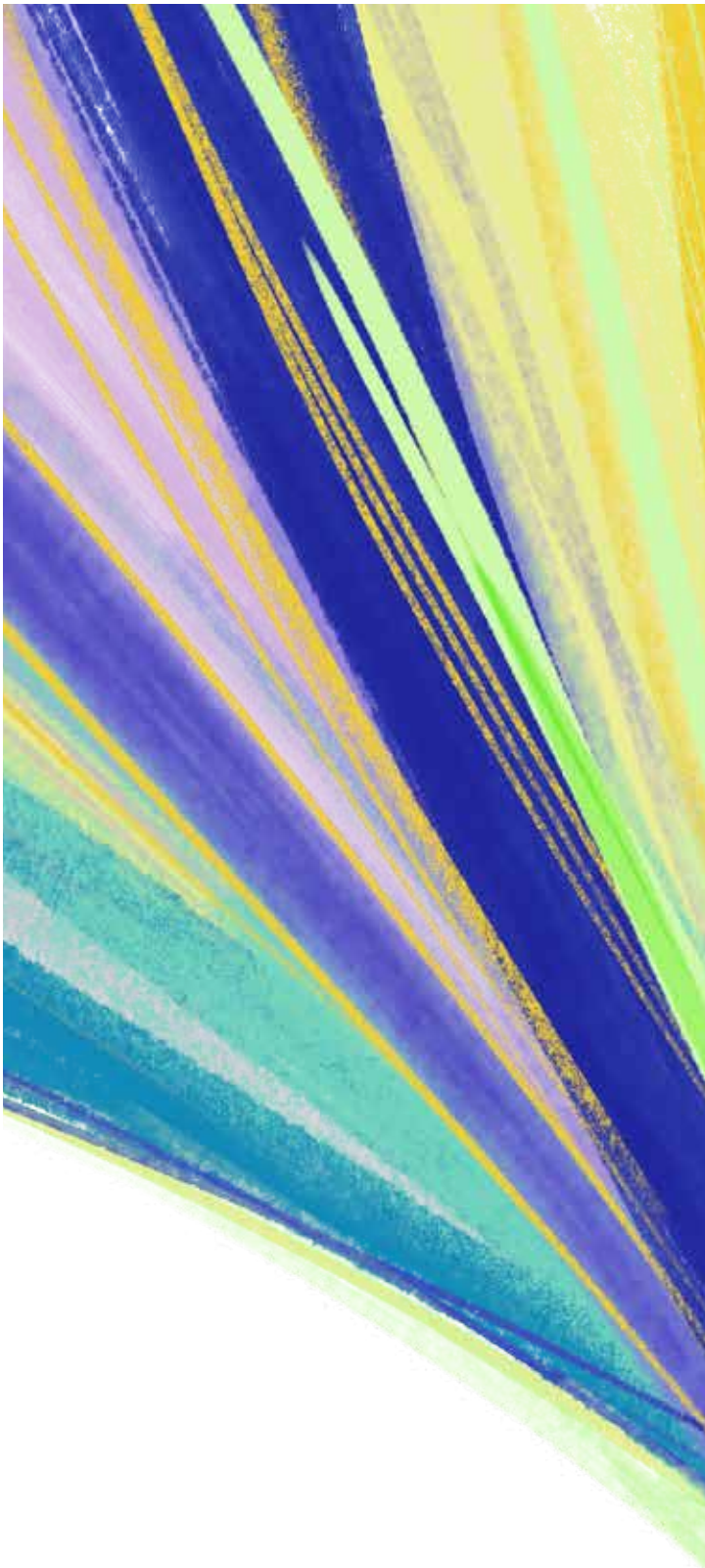


So when Multnomah County says that we are committed to inclusively leading with race, we will do that by changing our practices and policies to ensure that the voices of those who are most affected by racial inequity have a seat at the table to shape, influence, and lead decision making around racial justice + equity work. Black, Indigenous, and other people of color have often said “nothing about us without us” for a reason. The County will continually work to honor that goal.

We will be intentional and deliberate about who is in the room when decisions are made, and exceedingly thoughtful about how those decisions will affect employees of color. **We will ensure that racial justice + equity is embedded in our policies, practices, and training across our systems. We commit to pursuing what’s needed to make all this happen from County decision makers and those in leadership, including funding and mechanisms for accountability.**

Multnomah County will inclusively lead with race not just because it is the right thing to do, but because doing so is the best and only way to achieve a vision of inclusive racial justice. For our organization, that looks like becoming a workplace and an organization:

Where each and every employee experiences the liberation to show up as their true, authentic selves at work.



Where the professional tools and opportunities that people need to reach their full potential are readily available to everyone.

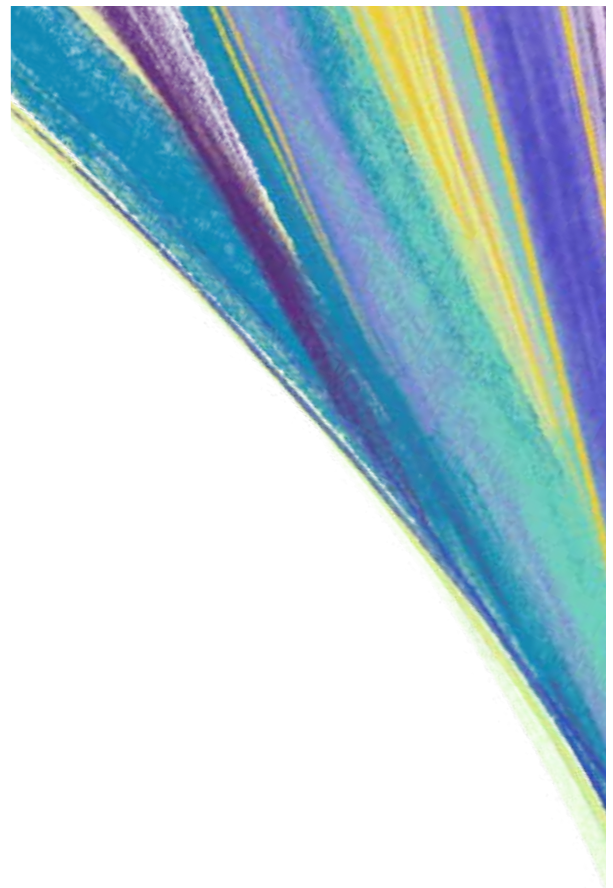
Where people of color can work free of fear, retaliation, microaggressions, and the pressure to assimilate into white supremacy culture.

Where the full diversity of the County workforce is reflected in every level of the organization, from direct service delivery to top leadership.

Where white colleagues and leaders see that their liberation is bound together with the liberation of all people, and are willing to be true allies and accomplices in our quest for equity by refusing to stand in front of their colleagues of color any longer, but rather next to them.

Because we have far to go to truly inclusively lead with race, this feels like an ambitious undertaking. At the same time, it's what we must do if Multnomah County is serious about using our position as an institution — as a local government, one of the region's largest employers, and the state's largest service provider — to spur change within ourselves and in the community.

And finally, to our Black, Indigenous, and other brothers, sisters, and siblings of color: We know that change feels slow to materialize. We know that many of you have been promised change before and



have felt let down and underwhelmed by the results. So has every member of this ILWR Design Team. But we encourage you to hold on to the hope and the promise of this vision for the County. We are in a critical moment of our organization's story. We have worked fiercely to gain momentum. And together, we are building a movement of radical love for each other, our colleagues, and our community that pushes us toward racial justice. We will not let the urgency of transformation pass us by.

Multnomah County, we've got the commitment. For it to mean anything, we must, and we will, see it through.

In revolutionary love, hope, and radical imagination,

The Inclusively Leading with Race Design Team

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