

2016

# A Vision and Agenda for Racial Equity in OUR DULUTH



Education equity for our children • Safe and affordable housing • Respect and accountability in policing • Political representation • Leadership in schools, government, and business • Living wage jobs • Respect of our cultures in public spaces • Access to health care • Recreation opportunities for all of us • Access to healthy food for everyone



**VOICES FOR  
RACIAL JUSTICE**

ORGANIZING | ADVOCACY | POLICY

This is the vision for OUR DULUTH, one where racial and cultural equity resides not just in dreams, but in reality. OUR DULUTH is a community where we all belong and thrive. How can we get there, especially when people of color and Indigenous people in Duluth now face racial disparities in education, employment, housing, health, and safety, as well as severe political and cultural underrepresentation of our communities?

Overcoming these disparities requires a deep and honest conversation about this community's history and its current reality of structural racism. And we must move beyond conversation toward powerful solutions and urgent action to realize the vision for OUR DULUTH. We who experience these disparities know what it will take to move toward this vision.

Together, we are building the power to dismantle the systems that keep our communities from experiencing Duluth as we all should. We call on OUR DULUTH to stand together, allowing for our voices to define the barriers, highlight our assets, and lead for change.

#### **These principles should guide us:**

##### **Acknowledge the truth of structural racism in our community.**

Commit to understanding the impact on American Indians, people of color, and all people in Duluth.

**Recognize the assets of our communities**, including our deep experience and knowledge, our resilience, and our cultures and histories. Honor these as an equal part of the story of Duluth.

**Commit to an explicit racial equity lens on all of our community decisions**, whether in budgeting and investment, policymaking, or changes in practice.

**Make space for our voices at decision making tables**, especially where decisions are being made that affect our communities, whether in education, housing, employment, or other opportunities. We are experts in the barriers that we face, and we have the solutions for breaking them down.

## Levels of Racism

Racial justice strategies recognize that racism is present in all aspects of our society, that it is embedded in institutions, and that it can often be an unintentional result of policies and practices. Knowing the level of racism we are confronting allows for targeted solutions that can help avoid the unintentional consequences of worsening disparities through colorblind policy making.

**Individual or Internalized Racism:** racism within individuals, through personal attitudes, thoughts, and internalized oppression (feeling inadequate because of your race). Solutions focus on changing individual attitudes through conversation, groups, and other educational opportunities.

**Interpersonal Racism:** racism between individuals resulting in bigotry and bias. Solutions should include diversity training, building cultural awareness, and developing relationships.

**Institutional Racism:** racism within and between institutions which results in discriminatory treatment, unequal treatment, and disparate outcomes. Solutions to mitigate institutional racism must focus on change in policies and practices focused on equity, as well as demanding accountability for disparities.

**Structural Racism:** racism that permeates through society through history, culture, and systemic inequality. Solutions must expose historical roots, assumptions, and biases and lead to racial justice movement building that connects issues and systems that are part of the fabric of structural racism.

## Education Equity

High school graduation rates for students of color have gone up just slightly in the last year to 47 percent and dropped dramatically from 49 to 32 percent for American Indian students. We know education is vital to stopping cycles of incarceration and poverty. We believe that all of our students must be able to succeed in and graduate high school. OUR DULUTH must:

### **Offer education for all of us.**

- Provide culturally informed third party advocacy, mediation, and conflict resolution.
- Re-assess the role of school resource officers.
- Improve access to driver's education.
- Take action to improve parent and community involvement in schools.
- Work with our communities to improve cultural relevance of learning.

### **Reflect our communities in its teachers and school board members.**

- The school board should be made up of members who reflect our families.
- Schools must commit to recruiting and retaining teachers who reflect the populations they serve.
- To move toward teachers and board members reflecting our communities fully, create a process that allows communities to be involved in hiring teachers.

### **Expand opportunities for continuing education.**

- Students of color, American Indian and under-resourced high school graduates should qualify for higher education application fee waivers.
- All schools in the area should be working directly with admissions units to recruit underrepresented students.
- Post-secondary institutions should create avenues to more affordable education, such as off-campus work study options.

## Political Representation and Power

In our last election more people of color and American Indians ran for elected office than ever before, but none won their race. Neighborhoods with the highest poverty rates in Duluth have some of the lowest voter turnout, not reaching over 55 percent. OUR DULUTH must foster leadership at all levels.

### **Appoint members of boards and commissions to better reflect all of Duluth.**

- Meetings should be held at accessible times and locations, and facilitation must be culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Training, incentives, or possible compensation should be provided to make participation possible.
- Make appointments of people of color and American Indians to the nine vacant seats on the human rights commission a priority.

**Represent us in elected offices.**

- Develop more equitable endorsement processes for people running for election.
- Explore supporting underrepresented leaders in running for public office through alternative campaign finance strategies at the local level, including public finance and democracy vouchers that allow voters to contribute public dollars to candidates of their choosing.
- Elected officials and leaders should develop deep relationships with our community, and have ongoing dialogue on how they will commit to closing gaps and advancing racial equity.

**Overcome barriers to voting.**

- Work in partnership with community organizations to build stronger civic engagement and overcome the barriers to voting.
- The city of Duluth should commit to get out the vote campaigns specific to communities of color and low-wealth communities.

## Employment and Economic Opportunity

The unemployment rate in Duluth is about 20 percent for people of color and American Indian people, much higher than the rate for whites, at about 7.5 percent. The median income for people of color in Duluth is \$19,844. For American Indian households median income is just \$16,875. This compares to a median income of over \$45,000 for white households. OUR DULUTH must:

**Make the connection.**

- Invest in developing Employment Navigators from communities experiencing high unemployment to connect their communities to jobs.
- Commit to reassessing hiring practices within the city and increase hiring of people of color and American Indians for city jobs.
- Work with large employers in the community to increase racial diversity of the workforce.

**Support new ideas.**

- Commit to funding entrepreneurial opportunities that launch new businesses owned by underrepresented communities and that create jobs in those communities.
- Make local government procurement and contracting intentionally inclusive of businesses owned by people of color and American Indians.
- Strengthen local businesses that are an important source of local jobs.

**Offer training that leads to jobs.**

- Co-create the training and education that leads to living wage jobs.
- Diversify the management of the workforce by race.
- Access state and federal funding for workforce development to be run by communities of color and American Indians.
- Increase the presence of workforce job training within communities of color and American Indian communities and in spaces that are welcoming for us.



## Housing and Homelessness

Despite making up about 15 percent of the population, people of color and American Indians are hugely overrepresented in our homeless population. The city and community of Duluth should commit to making sure that everyone has a safe and warm place to sleep each night. Because people of color and American Indians are disproportionately represented in the homeless population, as renters, and are overly rent-burdened, we often have little control over the safety of our homes. OUR DULUTH must:

### **Address homelessness in our communities.**

- Officially adopt a homeless bill of rights and make housing status a protected class.
- Commit city funding to culturally-specific housing and housing services.
- The local Housing Redevelopment Authority should review their exclusion policies to make housing more accessible for people with criminal records.
- Support all initiatives that come out of the St. Louis County annual Homes for All Summit.

### **Increase safe and affordable housing.**

- Continue to support accessible legal services that make tenants aware of their rights.
- Address unsafe, unsanitary housing and the risk of lead poisoning.
- Work to increase housing vacancy rates in Duluth and build affordable housing stock.
- Commit to genuine neighborhood choice for all citizens by identifying and securing affordable housing outside of low income neighborhoods, but also working to address disparities in historically disinvested neighborhoods.
- Work with lenders to develop programs that increase people of color and American Indian homeownership.

## Healthy Communities

In Duluth, life expectancy differs by 10 years between our healthiest and least healthy zip codes. Some Duluth neighborhoods and communities can be considered food deserts, with little access to fresh produce and other nutritious foods. Mental health concerns, and drug use are also problems that plague our communities, as are extremely high rates of Hepatitis C and HIV AIDs among people of color and American Indians. OUR DULUTH must:

### **Increase community-wide health.**

- Commit to ensuring that all Duluth citizens have access to affordable healthcare.
- Decrease zip code health and life expectancy disparities.
- Support earned sick time for all employees.

### **Increase access to healthy foods.**

- Support community-led collaboratives to eliminate food deserts such as the “Grocery Express” project.
- Support community gardens and public orchards.
- Provide education on growing food and healthy eating to minimize dependence on processed foods and commodities.

**Reduce harm.**

- Support harm reduction models such as syringe and needle exchange programs that emphasize treatment and services over incarceration..
- Commit to the creation of an emergency task force including those living with mental health issues, mental health care providers and law enforcement in order to identify and address solutions to gaps in mental health care services.

## Safe Communities

Women of color and American Indian women suffer all kinds of sexual violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking at significantly higher rates than the general population, with one in four women of color and one in three American Indian women experiencing some form of violence. People of color and American Indians also experience police stops and harassment at much higher rates than the general population, and at the same time only 14 people of color and American Indians serve in the Duluth Police Department. OUR DULUTH must:

**End domestic violence, sex trafficking, and other forms of sexual violence.**

- Support the earned safe time initiative.
- Offer culturally specific programming to address domestic violence.
- Trafficked women should be treated as victims, rather than perpetrators, and be offered appropriate services.
- Focus on supporting harsher punishment for sex-buyers.

**Make policing accountable.**

- Candidates for Duluth Police Chief and other positions should meet with people of color and American Indian people at a racial equity forum to hear our concerns and answer our questions.
- Support more community policing in every area of the city to improve police relationships with the communities they serve.
- Provide ongoing implicit bias and cultural training for police throughout their service.
- Encourage community members to take part in the Duluth Police Citizens' Academy.

**Build community.**

- Promote ongoing community events that support peace, camaraderie, and community connections.
- Engage young people and promote youth leadership throughout the city.

## Culture, Art, and Public Spaces

People of color and American Indians in Duluth long for culturally grounded arts centers that allow for authentic elevation of our history, voices, and vision. Opportunities for sculpture, murals, music, theater, and more bring vibrancy to Duluth and create a deeper sense of belonging. All of us will benefit from the richer cultural representation of diverse communities. OUR DULUTH must:

### See Us. Give us space to be us.

- The city of Duluth should only commission artists of color and native artists to produce art that is representative of us.
- The city of Duluth should support and promote an eclectic range of art where ALL the cultures of Duluth are well-represented.
- Commit city funding to develop and encourage cultural centers.
- Allow ceremony and peaceful gathering in all public spaces.
- Support the ongoing efforts by the Duluth Indigenous Commission to rename Gitchi Ode Akiing park in order to honor and acknowledge Indigenous history in Duluth.



OUR DULUTH is part of the Greater Visions MN project, a collaboration between Voices for Racial Justice and organizers living and working in Duluth who are leading their vision for a more equitable community.



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