



## **United Way of Kennebec Valley**

### **Anti-Racism/Ethnic Discrimination Statement**

**We unequivocally denounce racism and ethnic discrimination as an organization and a community.**

Racial and ethnic discrimination demoralizes the target and undermines the welfare and vitality of the entire community. We identify as an anti-racist and anti-ethnic discrimination organization and community and publicly denounce all barriers to progress that make this aspiration difficult to achieve. We oppose all forms of oppression, specifically racial and ethnic discrimination, that impedes the health, education, and financial well-being of Black and Indigenous People and People of Color (BIPOC).

**We acknowledge the historical context of racism and ethnic discrimination in our communities throughout Kennebec County and the state of Maine.**

We understand that what is now known as Kennebec County belonged to the Wabanaki tribes who continue to endure a different, more restrictive status than all 574 other federally recognized tribes in the United States. We recognize that the families of early European colonists benefited from enslavement of peoples from Africa and Asia in direct and indirect ways. We acknowledge that Maine settlers excluded people of color from certain jobs, forbade interracial marriage, destroyed the homes of Black people, and introduced the Ku Klux Klan into the political climate. We acknowledge that these forms of racial and ethnic discrimination have existed in the past and persist in the present as active forces and realities in our communities. Waves of immigrants seeking refuge, homes, and jobs historically and presently continue to face prejudice and hardships related to their real or perceived differences.

**We recognize that policies, systems, and institutional patterns perpetuate racism and ethnic discrimination in our organization and community.**

Systemic racial and ethnic discrimination occurs when the practices of an institution benefit one group of individuals at the expense of another, often without the realization of those on the receiving end. Many institutions have no concrete policies, procedures or trainings to counter biases or move to correct systems, leaving the racial and ethnic discrimination to persist without any awareness or corrective actions.

As we work to improve life outcomes for every person in our community, we acknowledge that structural racism, ethnic discrimination, and other forms of oppression have contributed to disparities. We recognize those inequities are the result of policies, systems, and institutional patterns that work to marginalize entire populations of people. Racial and ethnic discrimination exists across health, education, and financial stability sectors throughout the country, inside our communities, and even within local organizations.

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Specific examples of institutional racial and ethnic discrimination can be found in socio-economic and health outcomes disparities, including infant mortality rates, income inequality, pay gaps, generational wealth, and doctors spending less time with black patients than with white ones; in education through the inequity of pay for black versus white teachers; and in financial stability through real estate in the form of redlining, in which racial steering creates “black” or “white” neighborhoods.

Local instances of institutional racial and ethnic discrimination include more people of color without health insurance coverage than white people, lower math and reading proficiency and lower graduation rates for students of color versus white students, and over double the unemployment and poverty rates for people of color than for white people in Kennebec County. In addition, immigrants face unnecessary barriers to accessing healthcare and education and to resuming their prior professions in their new communities. These types of barriers make it less likely that diverse populations will call this place home—at least not for long.

Even within our organization, we identified instances of racial and ethnic discriminatory practices that we have since addressed through calculated action steps. We recognized that we were not engaging enough members of our community whose voices have been traditionally marginalized, so we are deliberately inviting others into the discussion and decision-making processes. We realized that we were not holding our partner programs accountable for making diversity, equity, and inclusion a focus at their organization, so we have incorporated these concepts into our investment process and offering training on this topic.

**We commit to thoughtful and deliberate action to end racism and ethnic discrimination in our organization and community.**

We propose to build a culture reflective of our identity as anti-racist and anti-ethnic discrimination. We are working toward creating inclusive, safe, and welcoming communities that foster belonging and offer an opportunity to thrive for individuals of all identities. A community centered in belonging allows individuals to engage in customs that celebrate their unique identities and promotes opportunities for others to engage with and learn about the cultural norms and practices that are different from their own. A community focused on providing equitable opportunities to thrive allows and supports individuals in achieving their own versions of success.

Our action steps include:

- We will dismantle disparities and remove structural forms of oppression that uphold discrimination and create barriers to adequate healthcare, education, and financial stability.
- We will address differences that others use to justify the lack of equitable resources and respect in our communities in all future efforts.
- We will remain committed to continuously auditing policies, practices, and procedures using an anti-racist and anti-ethnic discrimination lens.
- We will engage community members, especially those whose voices have been traditionally marginalized, in the shared work of strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- We will create pathways to engage diverse community members as partners, donors, and volunteers in a shared effort to understand barriers and co-create solutions that ensure everyone has the needed resources, support, opportunities, and networks.

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- We will recognize, raise up and support leaders from our underrepresented neighbors and include them in our own organization and among our partners, ensuring diversity in the circles of decision makers.
- We will commit to anti-racism and anti-ethnic discrimination through our organizational culture, values, norms, and behaviors and those of our partners.
- We will intentionally make decisions that provide fair treatment, access, and opportunity for all.
- We will leverage all our assets to create more equitable communities, including convening stakeholders, making strategic investments, building awareness, and providing advocacy.
- We will collaborate with community partners to serve as a center of education and to promote awareness of anti-racism and anti-ethnic discrimination.
- We will focus anti-racism and anti-ethnic discrimination efforts internally and expand out to our broader communities, county, and state as a whole.

**We pledge to continuously examine our own understanding of racism, ethnic discrimination, and all other forms of oppression that exist as a result of real or perceived differences.**

We know that ending racism and ethnic discrimination will require a lifelong commitment to learning through traditional and experiential education and everyday practices. Therefore, we continue to enter these discussions with humility and a willingness to learn and grow as our awareness deepens and our consciousness develops around racial and ethnic discrimination.

We acknowledge that discrimination exists for others based on different aspects of their identity, including age, class, cognitive style, ethnicity, gender identity, generational poverty or privilege, physical ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and all other real or perceived differences. Therefore, we widen our embrace and extend these sentiments to all other socially constructed forms of discrimination.

*“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”*

—Maya Angelou