



June 12, 2020

## UPDATE

### **Racial Justice in Higher Education, Equity Framework for COVID-19 Recovery**

*A message from Ben Cannon, Executive Director of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission*

Dear colleagues,

For the last several weeks, the word on my mind has been: *action*. In processing recent events, I have repeatedly returned to a single question: how will the HECC, Oregon's state leadership entity for higher education, take meaningful action to promote racial justice in postsecondary education and beyond?

Of this I am certain: George Floyd suffered brutally, and his death, following Ahmaud Arbery's, Breonna Taylor's, and an unconscionably long list of other Black Americans, causes extraordinary pain and anger for communities already reeling from manifest and systematic racial injustice. It should pain us all. Most importantly, it should galvanize us to meaningful change.

It is heartbreakingly clear that our postsecondary education system too often perpetuates systemic racial injustice, even as it holds such enormous potential for dismantling it. While the HECC cannot solve these problems alone, it is more important now than ever to directly confront the racial inequities that pervade our postsecondary education and training systems and to take proactive and anti-racist measures. Our [Equity Lens](#) and [interim guiding principles](#) commit us to this endeavor.

As we focus on meaningful action, I want to draw your attention to Governor Brown's recent statements and expectations about this work. Last week the Governor addressed Oregonians in the wake of the protest movement and expressed a [commitment to fundamental change and racial justice](#). This week she issued a new [Oregon Equity Framework in COVID Response and Recovery](#) that she has directed state agencies to employ during and after the pandemic. **We have strongly encouraged Oregon higher education institutions to read, adapt, adopt, and employ the Governor's framework as they undertake their COVID response and recovery efforts.** This morning we released new public health guidelines for resuming in-person activities across Oregon's colleges and

universities, and the Governor's framework provides a critical lens not only for public health decisions but also for budget, finance, and policy decisions during this time.

Recent developments at the HECC put us in a better position than before to strengthen our leadership for racial justice in postsecondary education:

- After years of effort, the Legislature in 2019 created and funded the agency's first permanent position focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Late last year we hired a talented and experienced educator, Rudyane Rivera-Lindstrom, to lead this work.
- With support from a Lumina Foundation "Talent, Innovation, and Equity" ("TIE") partnership grant, we have been in closer conversation than ever with diverse community leaders. They are helping guide work across our agency, including by helping develop a Strategic Roadmap for postsecondary education, hosting community meetings, and serving on HECC's Equity Advisory Group and Leadership Council for Equity to guide and implement equity-focused strategies.

Still, we recognize that the HECC has not fully realized its longstanding commitment to center systemic equity in all decision making. Today, we are doubling down on initiatives and activities underway to drive our equity goals.

Specifically:

- We are prioritizing equity considerations to increase college affordability and reduce barriers to financial aid for underrepresented populations, and to build workforce opportunities and reduce disparities in employment/unemployment.
- We are researching and reporting disaggregated data by race/ethnicity to guide statewide decisions.
- We are refining and continuing our work on the formula for the distribution of state resources to public universities that incentivizes support for underserved populations, and applying the Governor's Equity Framework to our budget development process for 2021-2023.
- We are rolling out an internal equity plan with our HECC staff employees, more deeply embedding the Equity Lens into our goals and work, and supporting ongoing equity-focused professional development for our staff.

This is just the beginning. In coming weeks we will describe additional concrete steps we are taking to strengthen our work and outcomes in this regard.

I look forward to continuing this work with all of you to imagine a new future for Oregon, and I invite you to integrate the Equity Framework into your own work and discussions.

Sincerely,

Ben Cannon  
Executive Director, Higher Education Coordinating Commission

[Governor Kate Brown Shares Oregon’s Equity Guidelines: See the news story in My Oregon News summarizing the Equity Framework here.](#)

[See the full content of the framework here.](#)

**Introductory Message from Governor Brown:**

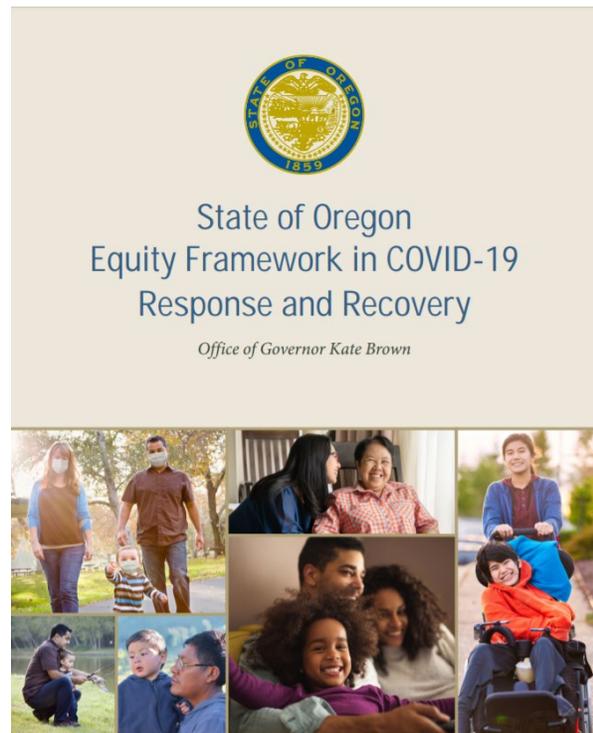
Oregon is at yet another turning point. The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed and disrupted the lives of every Oregonian with unprecedented levels of economic and health impacts. The effects of this global health crisis deeply exacerbate the existing and persisting inequities experienced by families, children, rural Oregonians, and communities of color. We have made great strides in keeping Oregonians safe and healthy, as we have worked to flatten the COVID-19 curve. However, our state is at a juncture that demands our state government take proactive and anti-racist measures to build a more equitable Oregon while reflecting the state’s values of accountability, equity, excellence, and integrity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated racial disparities. As we work to reopen the economy and build a safe and strong Oregon, I am committed to putting our marginalized communities at the forefront of our recovery plan. Likewise, building a more equitable Oregon requires every part of state government to work diligently to ensure that equity is integrated into every aspect of the state’s COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and beyond. The *State of Oregon Equity Framework in COVID-19 Response and Recovery* is designed to be a roadmap and tool to support state agencies, boards, and commissions in our state government’s continued efforts to center equity.

The equity framework illustrates the core elements to protect and engage with communities; collect data and promote inclusive workplaces; and build economic resiliency. To support and protect our vulnerable and underserved populations, we need to collect, analyze, and report disaggregated data to deepen our understanding of the communities that are impacted the most. Additionally, community voices need to be uplifted to inform how we target investments in the places that need it most.

I expect all state agencies to fully commit to applying the *State of Oregon Equity Framework* in developing agency-specific strategies and concrete actions to address racial and economic disparities due to COVID-19 as we plan and ready the state for recovery. Through these equity strategies, we can move the metrics to improve equity outcomes and advance racial justice for all Oregonians for years to come.

Your unwavering dedication fuels my commitment to put this work into practice. What truly defines us as Oregonians is our tradition of coming together and working collaboratively toward the shared vision of a thriving Oregon where we all have opportunities to fulfill our greatest potential. It is a great pleasure and privilege to work with you during this critical time in the history of our state. I am thankful for all the agency directors and employees who have been working tirelessly to serve Oregonians.



We stand united and strong during a historic moment to put Oregon on a better path forward. Together, we can build a more equitable Oregon.

Sincerely,

Governor Kate Brown

### **Interim Guiding Principles for Postsecondary Education**

In addition to the Governor's Equity Framework, since late 2019 the Higher Education Coordinating Commission has worked with partners on developing a Strategic Roadmap for the future of postsecondary education in Oregon. HECC and our partners in this work have issued [interim guiding principles](#) which have emerged from this initial work. We are asking all stakeholders to keep these guiding principles in mind as they take steps towards navigating the current crisis.

- 1. Postsecondary education and training are central to Oregon's return to strength and prosperity**
- 2. Affordability and access to postsecondary education and training require investments of the state funding**
- 3. Equity must be central to all we do**
- 4. To achieve our shared goals, we must all commit to collaborate and work together in new ways**

We look forward to continuing this work to imagine a new future for higher education in Oregon, and we invite you to integrate these guiding principles into your own work and discussions.

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*The State of Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) envisions a future in which all Oregonians—and especially those whom our systems have underserved and marginalized—benefit from the transformational power of high-quality postsecondary education and training. For more information, go to [www.Oregon.gov/HigherEd](http://www.Oregon.gov/HigherEd)*