



## Anti-Racism Commitment and Accountability Statement

November 2021

### Introduction

The NW Energy Coalition is committed to advancing Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI). As part of this commitment, we have adopted this anti-racism statement to acknowledge the harm that Black, Brown, and Indigenous (BBI) communities have endured due to the energy system, policies, and practices in the Northwest. Our use of the term *Brown* is inclusive of cultures and ethnicities within the Pacific Islander, Asian and Latin communities. We understand that there are many forms of oppression that affect people in our region beyond racism, including those that impact individuals with disabilities, lower incomes, sexual orientation, and gender identity. We are mindful of the intersectional nature of race, economic wellbeing, and geography (urban/rural), and recognize that our commitment to racial justice will help us with energy justice more broadly.

By focusing on the energy system impacts on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people we call out the harms that are universal to all communities. Racial inequities persist in the energy system and underlie other forms of oppression.

The Coalition acknowledges that we, as an organization, have a role in demanding energy justice for Black, Brown and Indigenous communities and that we have not been explicit in our advocacy or in our organizational commitments. This commitment and accountability statement is intended to guide internal operations within the organization (e.g. hiring, how we conduct meetings, board make-up, culture, communications and language use) as well as provide a sharper lens and frame as we develop and implement our programmatic and policy work.

### Work To-Date

The Coalition's founding principles are to ensure affordable and clean energy services for all communities and restoration of Columbia Basin salmon impacted by the federal hydropower system. Over the Coalition's 40+ year history, we have worked closely with communities experiencing lower incomes and economic insecurity to expand and support delivery of renewable energy, weatherization and energy efficiency services as well as energy bill payment assistance and utility rate structures that acknowledge the energy burden these communities face. This work remains a foundational component of our advocacy efforts. However, we acknowledge that we have not explicitly considered racial justice as a component of this work.

In addition, addressing the impact of the federal hydrosystem on fish and wildlife, particularly salmon and steelhead, has been and remains a core pillar of the organization. Through this work we have

collaborated closely with Tribal organizations to address energy strategies that take pressure off the hydrosystem, demand accountability from federal agencies, and target investments in the river system that restore salmon in the Columbia and Snake River basins.

## **Recognizing Harm Done**

### **Internal NWEC Operations**

The Coalition has been a primarily white-led organization, with a staff, board and membership that, although broad, does not fully reflect the racial diversity of our region. We recognize that the make-up of our staff, board and membership needs to be more racially diverse, and how we communicate and engage internally and with our membership are as important as our policy positions. In this document, we outline how we will strive to incorporate anti-racism principles in our operations and through our organizational culture.

Given the racial make-up of the staff and membership, individuals and organizations representing racially diverse communities and perspectives have seldom had a seat at the Coalition's decision-making table. We have not always created the space to name who is missing from internal decision-making tables and policy conversations, and have thus failed to interrupt the power dynamics that reinforce marginalization.

All of our staff members are dedicated to building bridges to, and relationships with, the communities not reflected in our membership and those most affected by the transition to clean energy, as well as translating inaccessible utility and regulatory language that supports more dialogue between community-based organizations and the Coalition. This work is also focused on preparing decision-making tables so that they're ready for Black, Brown, and Indigenous community input. Since 2018, we have also had a staff person specifically dedicated to this work. While we have been slow to bridge-build the lessons learned from this work into the rest of our organization, we strive to include these perspectives more centrally in our decision-making.

### **Energy System as a Whole**

**Hydropower & Indigenous Communities:** The Northwest hydropower system has contributed to cultural and economic harm inflicted on Indigenous communities and ecological collapse of many native and wild fisheries. The Coalition's advocacy for salmon recovery in the Columbia and Snake River basins and for removal of the four lower Snake River dams has been important in addressing this harm, yet more direct calls for Tribal justice and work to build energy resilience in Tribal communities have not been explicit commitments of the Coalition.

**Fossil Fuels & Public Health:** Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities are disproportionately located next to fossil fuel infrastructure and other energy-system-dependent sources of pollution, such as highways and industry, affecting their public health. While we have advocated for energy system decarbonization and affordability, as well as the specific closure of fossil fuel power plants, we have failed to prioritize policies that are led by Black, Brown, and Indigenous groups to specifically generate health and wealth in these communities.

**Housing:** Many Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities pay higher energy bills due to substandard housing and also have not fully benefited from weatherization and energy efficiency services. The Coalition has not approached our work for affordable energy services from the housing side and has not partnered with housing advocates or agencies to target energy efficiency and bill assistance to those in substandard housing. In addition, we have not historically focused on the impact of energy codes and efficiency upgrades on gentrification.

**Rural Communities & High Utility Costs:** Rural communities, which are increasingly Black, Brown, Indigenous, and low-income, have not benefited from demand-side resources and other programs in the way that more urban customers have. The Coalition's limited advocacy focused in these rural communities, has inadvertently contributed to less access to energy efficiency and distributed clean energy which has led to poorer housing stock and higher utility bills.

**Clean Energy Jobs:** There have been racial disparities in access to family wage jobs in the clean energy sector and in the energy related trades, this has been particularly true in urban centers. The Coalition's energy policy work has not been centered on the goal of diversifying the clean energy workforce or advocating stronger links between utilities and workforce development.

### **Action We Are Taking/ Our Commitments**

We commit to further diversifying our Coalition to better reflect the racial diversity of the people of the Pacific Northwest, and exploring the barriers to that diversification. The Coalition commits to admitting and leaning into the fear and risk we perceive and experience as we seek to fully own the changes outlined in this document. These changes will build on the legacy of previous work, and will likely change the way we operate as an organization.

To fulfill these commitments, we have goals with associated metrics geared towards:

- Improving staff hiring, promotion, retention, and compensation practices to create a culture that supports our Black, Brown and Indigenous staff and better reflect the diversity of the region.
- Increasing racial diversity in Board and membership recruitment and retention
- Creating a culture that attracts community-serving and environmental justice organizations to the Coalition membership
- Incorporating this commitment statement into our ongoing strategic planning and organizational operation.

Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and communities have disproportionately shouldered the burdens and lacked the benefits of our regional energy system, and have not been at the decision-making table regarding policies that affect them.

As the broadest alliance of clean energy interests in the region, we are in a unique position to influence the stakeholders and decision-makers in the region. In neglecting to fully incorporate anti-racism principles into our program work, we have failed to influence the sector as effectively as possible. With a more explicit acknowledgement of racial justice issues in the energy sector, we can better advocate for

policies and programs that contribute positively to the lives of communities most impacted by pollution, climate, and energy issues. We will ensure that our policy and advocacy work amplifies the voices and leadership of Black, Brown, Indigenous communities.

To fulfill these commitments, we have goals with associated metrics geared towards:

- Ensuring that policy tables are prepared to meaningfully welcome Black, Brown, and Indigenous leadership as we continue to support capacity among these leaders.
- Reevaluating our policy, program, and decision-making processes so that the organization is supporting efforts that create tangible and near-term benefits to the hardest-hit communities.
- Ensuring our program work elevates partnerships and mutual trust with Black, Brown, and Indigenous organizations working in the clean energy sector.

### **Next Steps**

The adoption of this anti-racism commitment and accountability statement and its action steps are part of the Coalition's journey to better advance justice, equity, diversity and inclusion within our organization and our work. As individuals and as an organization, we are always learning and building new and stronger relationships. We are excited to have this work evolve and grow over time. As part of that growth, we are open to and expect feedback on this document and the associated action steps posted and tracked on our website. Our work will also examine how we go beyond anti-racism to more fully address economic justice in our work.

This anti-racism commitment and accountability statement was developed to bring specificity and action to our justice and equity commitments and ensure follow through.

- NWECA executive director and key staff will meet monthly to review actions and ensure progress.
- NWECA Board will conduct a quarterly review of progress.
- NWECA executive director will coordinate an annual review with staff and Board.