



## **Greater Akron Chamber: Economic Inclusion Must Exist to Enable Shared Prosperity**

Systemic racism undermines and depresses the health, wealth, economic mobility and economic contribution of black and other minority communities. Beyond the resulting significant economic losses to our region, the human toll of lost lives, lost opportunity and lost hope is even more profound. The tragic, unnecessary and criminal killing of George Floyd is the most recent incident illustrating the corrosive, insidious effect unresolved [systemic racism](#) has on our nation.

Racial exclusion, while very real for many in our community, has been largely ignored. It is so much a part of our “normal” that, in many cases, we no longer “see” racism, since it doesn’t disrupt those with the privilege of living, working and succeeding in an economy that advantages them. The urgent reaction and quick deployment of resources for the COVID-19 crisis is a reminder that we can move in extraordinary ways when we decide to do so.

As a business membership organization, the Greater Akron Chamber exists to drive economic growth and prosperity for Greater Akron by supporting the success of the business community and convening stakeholders on key issues facing the region. Through our work over the last two years with our Elevate Greater Akron partners, we have been clear that systemic racial exclusion and the lack of access to opportunity, specifically for the region’s black population, is a critical issue that must be addressed to help us accelerate regional growth and shared prosperity.

As a voice for the business community, the Greater Akron Chamber stands with the peaceful protest occurring across our country demanding greater urgency to address the short and long-term effects of systemic racism. As employers, we know our people are our greatest asset. When black people are discriminated against; live in fear due to the color of their skin; or, are not provided an opportunity to succeed at the same level as others with privilege; we will forever come up short on the shared prosperity that must exist to drive long term growth and success.

We recognize the issue of systemic exclusion. We see its effects on our economy and our community. We are working to see it more clearly and address it aggressively when it shows up in our work. To address these issues we are focused on increasing the number of black leaders and members in our organization; driving inclusive hiring and procurement by our businesses; creating more access to capital, support and mentorship for black owned businesses; telling more stories to highlight the success and impact of black businesses in our community and increasing the connection between available jobs and available talent.

While this work has already begun, we are committed to investing in our inclusion efforts more heavily; to put inclusive growth at the top of every conversation; and, to give economic inclusion the urgency and disruptive, crisis-level response that it deserves.

This work is critical and demands the support of the entire business community. We can’t be successful, however, without the direct involvement and participation of black business owners and community leaders in our work and our organization. We welcome and encourage your ideas and involvement to drive a more inclusive economy at [inclusion@greaterakronchamber.org](mailto:inclusion@greaterakronchamber.org).