

# Legislating equity in opportunity that will make our money work

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The power of the consumer is on full display during the holiday season. But ads targeting holiday shoppers hardly ever focus on price alone, because gift-givers and deal-finders alike are increasingly picky. Buyers recognize that each purchase is not just an exchange of dollars for products, but also an affirmation of the businesses selling or producing the items. As elected officials, we believe that government must similarly make good in its role as spender to invest in the businesses that we want to see succeed. We are proud that Boston City Hall—through the efforts of the Mayor’s Office of Small Business Development and the Boston City Council—has taken steps to codify equity with legislation opening up City contracting to businesses owned by people of color and women.

At the last meeting of the year, the Council voted to pass the ordinance we introduced to align public spending with the City’s goals to reduce income inequality and build wealth in our neighborhoods.

Local government has a tremendous opportunity to harness its discretionary spending as a force for community economic development. In 2016, Boston’s city departments spent \$379 million on goods such as office supplies, and another \$318 million on services such as shoveling snow around city buildings. That’s nearly \$700 million per year that should be put to work strengthening local businesses. And it’s entirely within our control.

The wealth gap continues to grow across our country, but Boston feels inequality particularly sharply. Our disparities are deeply and shamefully concentrated by race and zip code. As the Boston Globe recently detailed in its Spotlight series on racism, each of Boston’s power centers falls short of representing the city’s diversity. We can’t live up to our potential as a community or an economy when we are systematically putting up barriers to talent retention and employment in certain communities.

Boston’s new Ordinance on Equity in Opportunity for City Contracting aims to harness city spending so that all communities can benefit from and contribute to the prosperity of our city. It works to codify our values, strengthen our policy tools, and measure our progress.

First, it mandates active outreach to businesses owned by people of color and women regarding City departments' needs and contracting processes, requiring solicitation of bids from at least one women- or minority-owned business for all professional services contracts under \$50,000.

Secondly, it requires all requests for proposals (RFPs) issued by the City to specifically include a rating of diversity and inclusion plans as key evaluation criteria. As much as every business wants to do the right thing, giving points for diversity and inclusion (or penalizing those who omit this) is what aligns bidders' financial incentives with values.

Finally, it creates a quarterly reporting requirement so that the Mayor's Office and City Council can track our progress and hold ourselves accountable.

In close partnership with Mayor Walsh's Economic Inclusion & Equity agenda, we must continue to create pipelines for local residents and businesses owned by women and people of color. City government has an economic impact with every purchase and contract we make. We must put our money to work building opportunities and pathways for economic mobility in every neighborhood.

Opening up doors for Boston residents to find out about, and to win, city contracts will help grow local businesses and increase the opportunities for people of color and women to start up successful business ventures in our city.

But the benefits extend far beyond the businesses who win these contracts. We all benefit from greater economic mobility and diversity of perspective. We all win when pathways to prosperity exist in every neighborhood. We all win when Boston will be a city where people from every background feel welcome and empowered. Let's exercise our power as consumers and constituents to shape a more equitable and prosperous future for Boston.

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