



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion  
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

# Sustaining the Black Lives Matter movement in the workplace

A toolkit for employers

May 2021



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## Executive summary

Anti-Black racism has always existed in Canadian workplaces. Today, employers have an unprecedented opportunity to change this status quo. Anti-Black racism, born out of historical systems that devalued Black lives, continues to this day in hiring practices, HR policies and workplace biases that make it very difficult for Black Canadians to succeed and advance in the workplace. This report addresses the increasing demand for guidance on how employers can support Black employees by sustaining the ideals behind the Black Lives Matter movement.

In the summer of 2020, the deaths of Black individuals within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed a wide range of racism against Black communities. This brought together a broad spectrum of Canadians who said, “Enough is enough. We need to address anti-Black racism at work.” Anti-Black racism has a detrimental effect on the one who instigates it and the recipient of these actions and negatively impacts the workplace. One of its many effects is how it fosters a toxic work environment for Black employees, which in turn stifles their voices, sense of safety and belonging, innovation, and creativity.

Employers can benefit if everyone is meaningfully, and not performatively, engaged in the process of creating an inclusive workplace. The first step is in understanding three key points. First, Black people are diverse and are not a monolith in and of themselves. Secondly, a diversity of Black voices is needed at the table to tackle systemic racism. Finally, Black people should not be counted on to provide all the answers – there must be organizational accountability. Depending solely on them to respond to such a historic, sensitive, and systematic issue can be emotionally overwhelming and inequitable.

One of the critical components of creating an anti-racist workplace (a place where employees actively seek to eliminate racism through continuous learning, collaboration and change of policies and culture) is understanding the cycle of bias and how it affects Black people:

- Biases about Black people, emanating from inaccurate representations, are internalized and re-enacted in the workplace, perpetuating a vicious cycle of prejudice and discrimination.
- They negatively impact the consideration of Black employees for leadership positions and diminishes the chances of their ascent or entry into other roles.
- Other consequences of anti-Black racism such as micro-aggressions, shadeism, and code-switching are explored as part of this cycle that reinforces stereotypes and biases.

Anti-Black racism can be a catalyst for addressing other forms of discrimination within the workplace. This calls for allyship from non-Black employees who will fully support creating an anti-racist organizational culture with the full confidence that eliminating anti-Black racism will create a more just and equitable workplace. Being anti-racist means making “frequent, consistent, and equitable choices to be conscious about race and racism.” It also means taking actions to “end racial inequities in our daily lives.”<sup>1</sup> By building the capabilities needed to be an

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<sup>1</sup> National Museum of African American History & Culture, “Being Antiracist.”  
“<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>.”

ally, employees are equipped with the skills to ensure that everyone can bring all aspects of their identities to work. For members of the leadership team, this has wide-ranging implications. Diverse workplaces:

- become a workplace of choice and can attract and retain talent,
- are more productive and create greater impact (e.g. produce more revenue and/or social outcomes aligned with the organization's vision), and
- attract business and markets from previously unexplored segments of the population.

Using the LEAD strategy (Deloitte) as a baseline, this toolkit recommends four strategies to keep the momentum going to address anti-Black racism in the workplace. They are to **Listen**, **Engage**, **Acknowledge** and **Do**. The framework engages the following core practices:

- **Listening** to Black employees and allies to establish short- and long-term goals
- **Engaging** Employee resource groups (ERG's) to support changes implemented
- **Acknowledging** where pitfalls may lie and actively addressing them
- **Doing** what you say you will do, especially as it pertains to leaders who set the tone and demonstrate accountability.

Strategies: re-evaluating the values, vision, leadership, and structure of the organization to assess the status of where you are. For example:

- To what extent do the organization's value and vision encompass inclusion as key to its success?
- Does the leadership and structure of the organization represent the employees?
- Are there Black leaders within the organization?
- How does the organization evaluate its status? Through focus groups, surveys and exit interviews? These can help clarify its relationship with its employees.

Armed with reliable data, leaders need to commit to, incorporate and report on different strategies to increase Black representation in the organization, such as:

- Developing structures to eliminating bias in hiring practices
- Training HR and hiring managers to hire people based on qualifications
- Reviewing employee representation and set clear hiring goals and accountability for the organization
- Creating mentorship and sponsorship programs for Black employees
- Ensuring professional development opportunities are equitably offered
- Offering diversity and inclusion training for all staff

Additionally, leveraging employee resource groups becomes a vital part of promoting spaces where conversations can take place about workplace needs. Providing training for staff and volunteers and ensuring that people are encouraged to attend shows a commitment to change.

Beyond these strategies, it must be understood that this is not a one-time effort, but that human and financial resources must be allocated to analyze and measure results and communicate changes along the way.

Measuring impact then becomes a way of showing not only to staff but also to the industry that a structured approach works. Setting clear goals, engaging experts in the field, and communicating results can show that anti-Black racism has no place at work.

# Understanding the Black Lives Matter movement

## Introduction

On Wednesday, March 11<sup>th</sup> 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic.<sup>2</sup> This declaration negatively impacted the lives of people, and in particular minority communities by unearthing the existing inequalities within our social fabric. These sentiments were intensified by incidents of police brutality against Black and Indigenous people. On Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, D'Andre Campbell, a 26-year-old, was shot and killed in his home by police in Brampton, Ontario. A couple of months later, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, George Floyd was killed by the police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Shortly after, on Wednesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the police-involved death of an Indigenous and Black woman named Regis Korchinski-Paquet was reported in Toronto. Three years earlier, on June 27 2017, Pierre Coriolan was also shot in Montreal, Quebec and died while in police custody.<sup>3</sup> Again on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2019, the shooting of Machaur Madut, a Somalian immigrant who struggled with mental health issues sparked fury within the Winnipeg community.<sup>4</sup> According to the CBC report on police violence published in 2018, between 2017 and 2000, 18 Black men and one Black boy were among the 52 people killed in encounters with Toronto police officers.<sup>5</sup>

The compacted timeline of these deaths and the trauma they caused, exacerbated by COVID-19, became a catalyst for change in the workplace. Anti-Black racism protests took place across Canada with tens of thousands of attendees. Their demands reverberated in the vastly changed workplaces in corporate Canada. Calls have been and continue to be made to create and strengthen anti-racist places of work.

## The Black Lives Matter movement

It is essential to understand the difference between the Black Lives Matter organization from the movement referred to in this toolkit.<sup>6</sup> The Black Lives Matter organization started in the United States in 2013 in response to the acquittal of the man who shot and killed Trayvon Martin. There are chapters in many other countries, including five in Canada as of May 2021. According to this organization, its mandate is to ensure justice and liberation for Black people worldwide. The movement referred to in this toolkit is the collective response across Canada to end systemic racism that puts Black employees at a disadvantage in the workplace.

In the wake of these social developments, business leaders have made numerous statements acknowledging systemic racism as an issue. The Black North Initiative (BNI), led by the Canadian Council of Business Leaders Against Anti-Black Systemic Racism, uses a business mindset to end anti-Black systemic racism. More than 500 companies collectively have pledged to work with the BNI to address anti-Black racism in their companies<sup>7</sup> and share learning across industries. Such an effort shows the collaborative nature of this movement.

## Black identity is diverse

Black Canadians are not a monolith, and they possess rich and diverse heritages and identities. Afro-Canadians have various origins, and their lived experiences in this country will differ

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.canadianhealthcarenetwork.ca/covid-19-a-canadian-timeline>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/montreal-video-police-shooting-rcmp-coriolan-1.4523348>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.themanitoban.com/2019/03/community-rallies-for-justice-after-man-shot-and-killed-by-police/36957/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/police-deaths-blacks-data-1.4599215>

<sup>6</sup> To learn more about the Black Lives Matter organization and its chapters across Canada, please visit

<https://blacklivesmatter.ca/>

<sup>7</sup> Visit the Black North Initiative website to learn more: <https://blacknorth.ca/>

depending on whom you speak to. Africans have been present in Canada since the beginning of the transatlantic settlements. The first African arrived in 1629 as a slave. Slavery was a common practice among early European settlers. It brought thousands of Black people and inducted them into various kinds of labour. During the American wars of independence, Black Loyalists, fleeing the United States accompanied other White Loyalists who owned Black slaves and eventually settled in different Canadian provinces. On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1834, the slave trade was abolished in the British Empire, 31 years earlier than in the United States (Walker). This made Canada a haven for Black slaves escaping slavery south of the border. Although Canadians should be proud of this history, it in no way erases the legacy of discrimination against Black Canadians. For more than 200 years, slavery and all the injustices within this system bequeathed cultural and legislative setbacks that negatively impacted Canadians of Black origin. Between 1800 and 1900, black communities grew exponentially and were concentrated in major cities such as Montreal, Africville (Nova Scotia), Toronto and Vancouver.

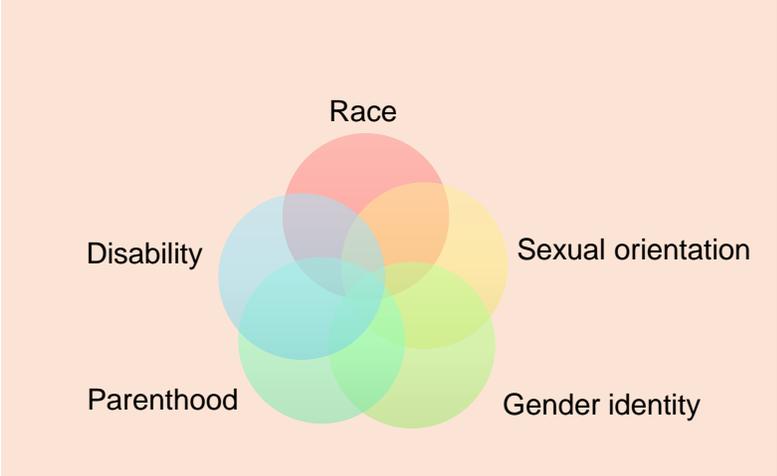
Decades after America's Civil War, the enactment of discriminative Jim Crow laws once again drove African Americans to migrate to Canada in search of a better life (Williams and Walker). Again in 1955, after the second World War, the demand for domestic labour led to legislation that encouraged migration from the West Indies into Canada (Oyeniran). Subsequently, various groups of Black migrants have settled in Canada since the 1960s. In essence, the waves of migration of people of African origin into Canada is interminable as diverse Black people have made Canada their home from the earliest days to the present. According to a Statistics Canada report in 2016, Black Canadians have diverse origins making up about 3.5% of Canada's population. This number is projected to rise to between 5.0% and 5.6% of Canada's overall population by 2036 (Statistics Canada).

As such, the lived experience of one Black person is not representative of all Black people. Therefore, employers must fully engage Black employees, community members, leaders, and experts to learn their perspectives and understand how they can sustain the BLM movement at work to ensure that policies and strategies developed are based on factual and reliable information.

## Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality (first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw) helps understand the Canadian Black experience. This concept examines how different types of discrimination interact and are compounded within the lives of racialized people. For instance, Black women experience the workplace differently than Black men because of their gender and race. A Black woman may experience a combination of racism, gender discrimination or sexism within the same context. In contrast, her Black male counterpart can only identify negative racial sentiments within the same interaction. Similarly, a dark-skinned Black woman's experience of discrimination will be complex, invoking various systems of oppression within a context where other lighter-skinned racialized employees would not feel negatively impacted by the same interaction.

As such, within organizational settings, other aspects of the identities of Black employees must be considered when thinking of creating an equitable workplace. These may include gender, parenthood, sexual orientation, disability and more.



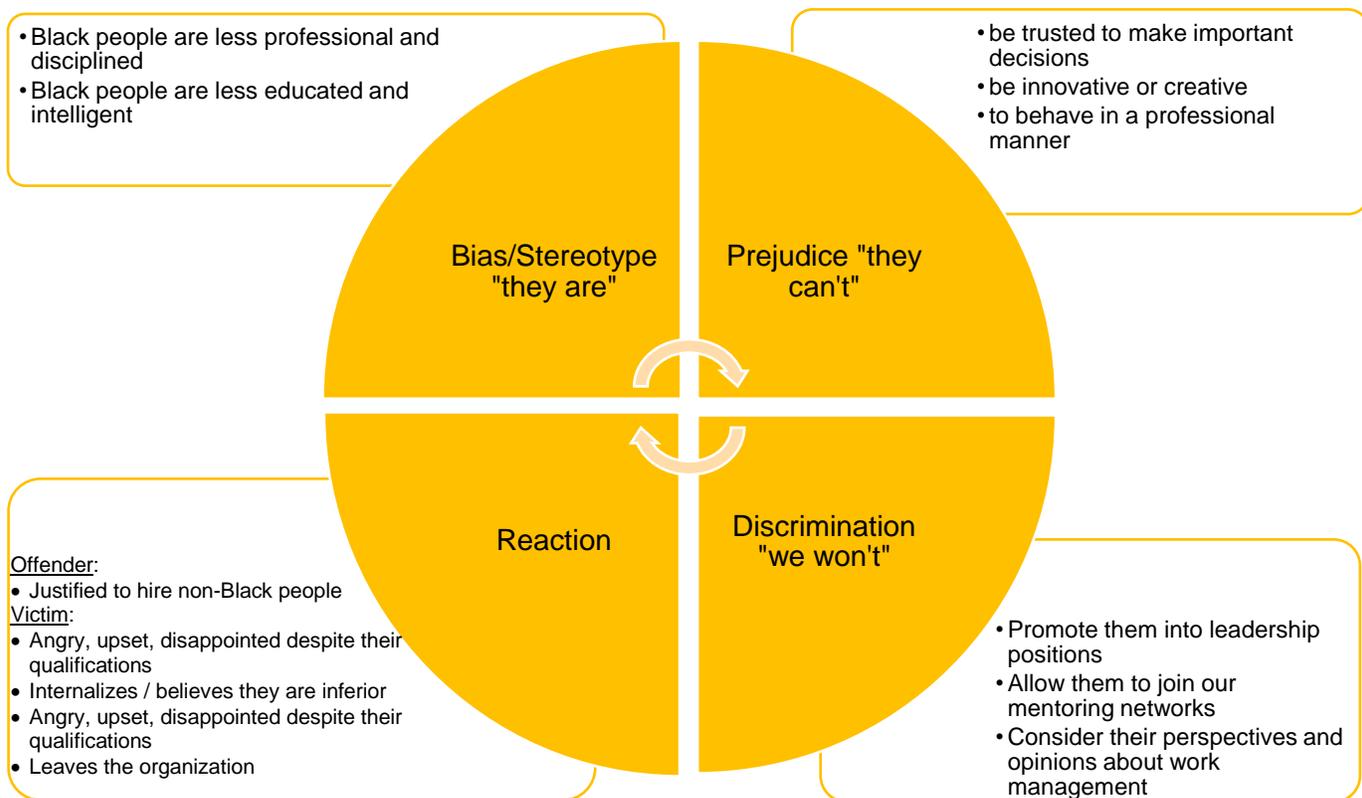
# Workplace implications of anti-Black racism

## Workplace implications of anti-Black racism

Anti-Black racism in the workplace can be observed through biases (conscious and unconscious) that can be classified as discrimination when perpetuated and repeated in a targeted way.

### The cycle of bias

The cycle of bias below helps to understand how bias operates. Biases and stereotypes about Black people are repeated and internalized and carry over into systems and institutions of power. Once internalized, these biases and stereotypes can influence and inform policy in a way that discriminates against Black people.



Consider the stereotype listed above that Black people are less intelligent, and for that reason, inferior. This bias of inferiority has a long history rooted in social, scientific, and cultural beliefs. Scientific theories of the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward supported the widely held belief that Black people were not equal to white people in intellect and social capacity. These arguments were used to justify their maltreatment and enslavement. Blacks then could be stolen, sold, and brutalized because they were not of equal value to white citizens. According to this logic, the white race was superior. Over the years, this belief has been passed on, and it has been reimaged, internalized and re-enacted. This bias is evident today in inaccurate representations of Black

people in the media, hiring biases, housing discrimination, racial profiling, and other acts. They contribute to the oppressions they face regularly. By acknowledging this cycle and how it works, employers can take the steps necessary to disrupt it.

## For Black employees

Part of creating an inclusive workplace is recognizing the specific challenges that Black employees face in the workplace. Challenges such as representation, shadeism, professionalism, micro-aggressions and code-switching are but a few of the examples shared here to provide context.

To fully explore the complex ways racism and discrimination impact Black employees requires time and consistent effort. As you start learning and having conversations, be sure to use an intersectional lens to understand how these experiences can be layered. For example, the experience of discrimination against Black Canadians who have been in this country for generations is different from newcomers who have come to Canada more recently as immigrants or students. Also, it is also worth understanding how Black people with disabilities that are not often visible are discriminated against in a complex intersection of racism and ableism, and how often they have been subjected to police brutalities or other injustices. Another instance is the tendency for employers to resort to colorism, that is opting for bi-racial members of Black groups as spokespersons of the Black experience, oblivious to the notion that bi-racial Black people also face peculiar discriminations based on their skin colour. Trying to understand these challenges can be extremely useful for the organizational culture and the organization as a whole. It has a twofold effect:

- it helps to understand what Black colleagues go through and;
- shows sincerity in wanting to change the workplace fundamentally. This creates trust, which is essential for this work.

## Representation

The systemic racism that exists in Canada is reflected in the workplace in many ways. Through the lack of representation of Black people in leadership positions and overt racism in the workplace, these actions can alienate Black voices, experiences, and perspectives from decision-making circles. When decisions are made that do not include these perspectives, it tends to take a toll on the mental, physical, and negatively affects the economic well-being of Black employees and their close ones.

In a study conducted by the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University, it was found that Black leaders are absent from leadership positions on agencies, boards, and commissions across Canada. This study analyzed the representation of women, Black people, and other racialized groups in eight different cities in Canada: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Hamilton, London, and Ottawa. Racialized people make up 28.4% of the population but account for only 10.4% of the board positions. Of the 1639 corporate board members in those cities, 13 or 0.8% were Black.<sup>8</sup> These findings reinforce a message to Black employees within such organizations that they may

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<sup>8</sup> Diversity Institute at Ryerson University. "Black Leaders Are Nearly Non-Existent on Canadian Boards According to Ryerson's Diversity Institute's New Study of Canadian Board Diversity." *Cision*, 6 Aug. 2020

never be appointed to such positions. While these can be categorized as micro-aggressions, their impacts can be significant on the well-being and lives of Black employees.

## Shadeism

“Shadeism or colourism is prejudice based on skin tone, usually with a marked preference for lighter-skinned people” (Estrada).<sup>9</sup> Black employees who have lighter skin and less kinky hair (features closer to European beauty standards) receive more preferential treatment than those with less European-like and distinctly African physical features (Awad et al.) At its root, shadeism is internalized white supremacy, the notion that any resemblance to Western cultural standards is non-threatening and safe because of its proximity to white cultural standards. How it manifests in the workplace is varied. However, in peculiar instances, black-skinned employees may get passed over for opportunities that gives the organization visibility based on the unconscious bias that a lighter skinned Black person is more likely to exhibit qualities similar to Western standards than the dark- skinned person.

## Professional hair

Hair discrimination is a variant of racial discrimination. It is the unconscious denial that natural Black hair is professional. It is an unconscious bias expressed in the search for candidates with “clean-cut” profiles, which is Black hair that looks Caucasian. Such attitudes that penalize Black people for wearing their own hair has a long-institutionalized history of racism.<sup>10</sup> For decades, Black employees have been forced to conform to European standards of professionalism by wearing Caucasian hairstyles, like straight hair, and sleek ponytails to work. This is because hairstyles that show the natural state of black hair, which is coily and textured, have for decades not been considered professional within corporate workspaces. For instance, certain Black hairstyles such as twists, braids, dreadlocks, micro locks and afros are associated with unprofessionalism, deviancy, lack of proper grooming skills and criminality.<sup>11</sup>

## Micro-aggressions

Micro-aggressions are “the everyday, subtle, intentional or unintentional interactions or behaviours that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups” (Nadal).<sup>12</sup> In this regard, Black employees also face micro-aggressions in the form of verbal, nonverbal, and environmental insults. Whether intentional or unintentional, they communicate hostile, derogatory, or condescending messages to people based solely on their marginalized group membership. Micro-aggressions range from instances where people’s credentials are put

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<sup>9</sup> “‘Shadeism’ is the dark side of discrimination we ignore” by Meera Estrada May 24, 2019 <https://globalnews.ca/news/5302019/shadeism-colourism-racism-canada/>

<sup>10</sup> Alisha Jarwala, “Fighting Workplace Hairstyle Discrimination: An Explainer” <https://onlabor.org/fighting-workplace-hairstyle-discrimination-an-explainer/> March, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> The Natural Hair movement has tried to destigmatize notions that Afro- textured hair is unprofessional. Currently, only two states (New York and California) have acknowledged and criminalized discrimination against Black natural hairstyles. See Jenna McGregor “More states are trying to protect black employees who want to wear natural hairstyles at work” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/09/19/more-states-are-trying-protect-black-employees-who-want-wear-natural-hairstyles-work/> September, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> “Micro-aggressions Are A Big Deal: How To Talk Them Out And When To Walk Away” by Kevin Nadal. <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/08/872371063/micro-aggressions-are-a-big-deal-how-to-talk-them-out-and-when-to-walk-away>

into doubt to questions such as, “Where are you from? Where are you really from?” Another example would be commenting on how well a person from a minority community speaks English or French even when they were born or grew up in a Canadian community.

## Spokes-modeling

Black employees may find themselves the only racialized individuals in the room and are often called upon to speak for minorities in general and Black people. There is an unspoken and ever-present pressure to behave and perform in such a way as not to misrepresent the race. This can be daunting for Black people since this group is highly diverse. Additionally, their lived experiences may not resemble the views held by the general audience in the organization. There is also the sense of discomfort that speaking about race-related issues may cause for certain racialized people. It is important to understand that some of these experiences are personal, involved their whole community or their families and social groups and may elicit strong emotional and sometimes traumatic reactions when they are instinctively called upon to rehash these incidents.

## Code-switching

Within an environment where professionalism is strictly defined, Black employees constantly renegotiate their identity at work, home, and in society. The pressure to conform and the reality of belonging to numerous socially segregated communities can lead to code-switching.

There is a perception that non-conformity to the standard language and culture communicates that they are unprofessional and could impact their success and ability to rise within the workplace. For instance, Black employees may shy away from using the varieties of English spoken or certain cultural clothing or symbols within their communities in order to adhere to the politics of respectability in the workplace. This need to belong within corporate spaces is an enormous emotional labour. Inclusive environments consider the linguistic and cultural diversity among the workforce and enables employees to bring their whole selves to work, and this includes expressing themselves in the language and style that communicate their ideas most effectively. Here, it is important to reconsider stereotypical notions about using different cultural practices, languages or language dialects at work and set clear guidelines and expectations on how they can be used in the workplace.

## For non-Black employees

The common negative notions that exist about Black people are repeated and carried forward both in conscious and subconscious ways in the workplace. These notions are communicated to Black employees through micro-aggressions (already defined above) and conscious and unconscious bias (explicit or implicit bias). Unchecked and unexamined biases and micro-aggressions can lead to acts of racism and discrimination.

In a 1993 interview with the American Journalist Charlie Rose, the Pulitzer Prize-winning African- American novelist Toni Morrison spoke of the “deleterious effect [racism has] on White people”<sup>13</sup> by pointing out how racism affects those individuals who exhibit racist behaviour or allow it to exist. The events of last summer showed that non-Black employees can no longer stay silent about anti-Black racism, for they risk perpetuating it through their silence. From a

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<sup>13</sup> <https://charlierose.com/episodes/18778>

workplace perspective, one must ask how anti-Black racism affects the ability to engage, innovate and produce quality work fully? Might it be time to consider that discrimination harms all those involved, from the actor, to the bystander, to the receiver?

## Call to action

Non-Black employees can sustain the BLM movement by striving to be allies to Black employees. Allies actively seek to understand, earn trust, continuously educate themselves and show accountability for their mistakes and repair work relationships when harm has been done.

Part of being an ally is acknowledging your privilege and using it to support others. One way to begin this journey is by asking yourself:

- What privilege do I have because of my race, education, gender, sexual orientation, ability, socio-economic background, etc.?
- How can I use that privilege to support/amplify colleagues?
- Are there opportunities in my workplace to listen to the lived experience of Black colleagues? If not, how can I support/advocate for the creation of these spaces?
- What educational initiatives can I participate in/start to promote diversity and inclusion at my workplace?
- What can I do to be an agent of change within my spheres of influence?

## For leadership team

Sustaining the BLM movement in the workplace requires leaders who lead in an inclusive way and truly understand what it takes to go beyond performative or optical allyship. In a workplace that can have individuals who represent many different cultures, its leaders can benefit immensely from the opportunity to build inclusive leadership skills, including cultural competency, and to turn this knowledge into change for good

## Make fundamental changes

“Leaders need to understand the systemic nature of racism. Systemic racism is not attributed directly to the actions of specific individuals. Rather, it arises from policies, procedures, practices and conduct which may not be discriminatory in their intent but which adversely impact Black and racialized individuals or groups.” (Jeffers)

The changes needed to create a more inclusive workplace are fundamental. They must go deep and wide within the organization. Without said changes, an organization stands the chance of losing financially, their reputation and their ability to retain top talent within their field. The competitive employer market today also creates a high demand for skilled employees, and to accommodate the diversity within this talent pool, organizations need to understand how to create inclusive workplaces to attract and retain qualified Black candidates.

Research shows that Black job seekers are:

- 30% less likely to be in the candidate pool.<sup>14</sup>
- discriminated against in initial resumé screenings and are three times less likely to be called back if they have a “Black sounding” name,
- negatively affected by credentialism (65% of employers will likely reject qualified Black applicants who do not have academic degrees in specific fields despite their years of professional experience).

If employers discriminate consciously or unconsciously against Black applicants, they lose out on talent and can become categorized as unfriendly places to work. As the examples provided show, Black employees and job seekers have faced various obstacles that formed part of how organizations functioned. The systemic nature of these barriers requires a deep understanding of the structures, policies and practices in place within an organization and to try and identify how operational practices reinforce discrimination for its racialized members.

## Be a culturally competent leader

When organizations develop culturally competent leaders, research shows these benefits:

- Improved recruitment of diverse employees<sup>15</sup>
- Improved team functionality<sup>16</sup>
- Increased employee retention<sup>17</sup>

Research also shows that ethnically diverse companies at the board and executive team level are 33% more likely to outperform the national industry median for financial performance<sup>18</sup>.

## Be accountable

Leaders need to go beyond performative leadership to demonstrating who is accountable for what aspect(s) of their anti-Black racism strategy and have regular channels for communicating and reporting on their results. Transparency and accountability are critical components to embed in having and sustaining anti-racist workplaces.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bcg.com/en-ca/publications/2020/reality-of-anti-black-racism-in-canada>

<sup>15</sup> Cox & Blake 1991

<sup>16</sup> Cox 1991, Scott Heathcote & Gruman 2011, Adler 2002

<sup>17</sup> Oklahoma Nurse 2006, Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies 2012

<sup>18</sup> Delivering through Diversity, McKinsey (Hunt, Yee, Prince, Dixon-Fyle) Jan 2018. Analysis is based on composite data for all countries in the data set.

# Strategies for supporting Black Lives Matter at work

## BLM in the workplace

Many Canadian organizations made statements in solidarity with Black communities all across North America after the death of George Floyd in May 2020. Beyond these statements, how are organizations making Diversity and Inclusion an integral part of their organizational and operational strategy? How are they leading the creation of safe and inclusive spaces for Black employees within their organizations? What follows are key guidelines for sustaining BLM in the workplace.

### LEAD

The Deloitte (2016) report entitled “Black in Canada” outlines effective strategies for creating and sustaining an anti-racist workspace. The four guiding principles of this model are summed up in the acronym **LEAD: Listen, Engage, Acknowledge** and **Do**. These practices are the basis for creating a workplace where employees trust the management, are authentic and can speak up.

- **Listen:** create spaces where Black employees can share their lived experiences. Believe them when they do, and ensure these voices are heard at the table.
- **Engage:** learn from Black employees, experts and community members and find and or create opportunities to partner with them on projects and initiatives in the workplace and in the community.
- **Acknowledge:** that anti-Black racism exists in the workplace and re-evaluate any behaviours employers/employees exhibit that reinforces it. Reach out to Black colleagues and strengthen relationships with them.
- **Do:** actively follow through on actions to deconstruct oppressive systems that marginalize Black employees.

Many of the strategies for sustaining anti-Black racism in the workplace must be woven into the operational fabric of the organization. This is not a linear process as each organization is unique with specific strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. What is being provided, as part of this toolkit, are actions based on promising practices, and these can be used to create an anti-racist workplace, one that puts the needs of marginalized groups at the centre. When implemented, these strategies will support in creating a just workplace that benefits the whole organization and its employees.

### Re-evaluate and earn trust

Earning trust is a process that requires time. Trust from Black employees is earned when resources, financial and otherwise, are allocated to implement long-lasting changes. Start by examining your organization's:

- **Values:** how are the values of the organization seen in the workplace environment? Do they explicitly address inclusion as key to the organization's success?
- **Vision:** does this look to a more inclusive future? Is this vision a sustainable one?
- **Leadership:** does leadership reflect the diverse make up of employees? Is there representation of Black individuals? Are Black perspectives considered in the decision-making process of the organization? If not, what is the plan to address this?

- **Hiring:** are there systemic barriers that inhibit the recruitment of Black candidates? Are job postings targeting a specific demographic? How is this being rectified?
- **Structure:** What are the opportunities for advancement? Are these opportunities made equally available for all employees?

Additionally, it is important to have buy-in from all employees because they are vital in ensuring that the workplace is truly inclusive. Listen to all employees as a part of this process. This can be done through:

- Focus groups
- Surveys
- One-on-one conversations
- Exit surveys when people leave the organization.

## Create opportunity

### Representation in recruitment

Recruitment processes within the organization could marginalize applicants from certain backgrounds. This should be owned and corrected.

“One promising practice is to revisit job postings and look for hidden biases. For example, the Johnson & Johnson corporation saw a 9% increase in the number of women applying for roles after using software to adjust job postings and remove gender-coded language, business jargon, and laundry lists of skillsets not required. The same approach could be used for the Black community.” (DasGupta, Nan, et al.)

- Invest in training human resources staff to recruit and hire candidates that represent the talent pool available in your industry. This can be done through:
  - Training hiring staff on avoiding biased hiring practices in job descriptions, advertisements, interviewing, candidate selection and advancement
  - Partnering with Black professional and non-professional networks (For ex: trade, customer service, etc.) and arrange speed networking activities to connect and hire Black professionals
  - Show your job description or post to members of the Black community for their feedback on whether the language and requirements speak to them
  - Putting in place fair and accessible screening and interview processes to create barrier-free hiring practices
  - Ensuring that there are mechanisms to address bias when it occurs, such as conducting a panel interview instead of one-on-one interview.
  - Hiring based on skillset and not based on “fit.”

## Mentoring / coaching

Each organization has a set of written and unwritten rules that can make a big difference to new hires when shared. Ensure that influential members of your staff are encouraged to mentor new employees, especially people who come from different backgrounds. These can include:

- Providing a thorough orientation of the operations and culture of your organization
- Sharing opportunities for training
- Encouraging them through challenges and
- Regular check-ins to ensure they are settling well into their roles.

## Sponsorship

Sponsorship differs from mentorship in the sense that the “sponsorship relationship is founded upon a deeper sense of trust in each other built over years, and a real confidence in the employee being sponsored” (Odom and McCalister).<sup>19</sup> It also means advocating for a Black worker or colleague to suggest them for promotion, to speak at events or other roles, especially when they do not have representation at the table. This can also be extended to professional practices and organizations where Black people are underrepresented such as the STEM industries. Organizations can also show their commitment to employment equity by partnering with educational institutions and community centers to recruit interns from minority groups. Such initiatives can be instrumental in giving interns professional experience in their fields.

## Professional development

A strategic professional development plan that considers the potential barriers in career advancement for Black employees can help sustain its commitment to professional growth for its racialized members. It is vital to ensure that Black employees within the organization have equal access to professional development, training, and networking opportunities. Consider implementing programs, practices, and events within your organizational calendar that:

- improve Black employees’ sense of belonging by creating an inclusive work environment
- support employees in navigating the professional environment
- guide employees in mastering their tools
- instill a growth mindset, and help employees clearly understand the feedback process
- help employees enhance their skills<sup>20</sup>

These steps will impact career advancement and testify to the organization’s ability to retain top-trained talent. Additionally, surveying the following can be a more accurate way to gauge whether Black employees have equal access to these opportunities:

- the make up of management teams
- who is being recommended for professional development opportunities
- who is being promoted and;
- representation of C Suite executives

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<sup>19</sup> <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/getting-representative-sponsorship-right-in-your-organization/>

<sup>20</sup> “The Real Reason Diversity is lacking at the top” [https://www.bcg.com/en-in/publications/2020/why-is-diversity-lacking-at-top-of-corporations?utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_source=esp&utm\\_campaign=diversity&utm\\_description=featured\\_insights&utm\\_topic=diversity&utm\\_geo=global&utm\\_content=202101&utm\\_usertoken=CRM\\_ad5a5a0b0cb721be8672d5bff3f2d39f40785e60](https://www.bcg.com/en-in/publications/2020/why-is-diversity-lacking-at-top-of-corporations?utm_medium=Email&utm_source=esp&utm_campaign=diversity&utm_description=featured_insights&utm_topic=diversity&utm_geo=global&utm_content=202101&utm_usertoken=CRM_ad5a5a0b0cb721be8672d5bff3f2d39f40785e60)

## Invest, collect information, and prioritize training

A part of instituting long-lasting change is having sufficient information to do so. Employers should seek employees' consent to collect the data needed to identify who makes up the employee population and what supports are required to ensure they can bring their whole selves to the workplace. Beyond that, invest in resources to use the information for the benefit of the entire organization.

## Support employee resource groups

The work of ERGs should be essential and critical to sustaining the BLM movement at work. Those who belong to them should be allotted the time to work on relevant topics.

Leverage ERGs by:

- Providing members with the flexibility to allocate sufficient time to ERG work
- Acknowledging the credibility of ERGs and following through on their recommendations
- Providing the accessibility to the data and training for them to be effective

ERGs can also identify needs such as safe and brave spaces where employees can come together for meaningful conversation and encourage and accompany teams to act on structural changes.<sup>21</sup>

## Allocate resources

Dedicated individuals should be responsible for gauging hurdles and finding ways to turn them into learning opportunities. This will not be a seamless process, but it will pay off with increased engagement if enough commitment is put forth. These individuals can devote time doing the following:

- Identify the short- and long-term changes that can be implemented to make the workplace more inclusive
- Engage ERGs and other resources available to implement said changes
- Find weaknesses and view them as areas for potential growth
- Promote action from leaders. Leaders within the organization must walk the talk.
- Measure impact and share successes with employees.

## Offer training

Diversity and inclusion work is vast. The right type of training suitable to address the specific needs that an organization has is key. CCDI offers several courses to equip your organization with specific tools to make your workplace more inclusive. Some of these include:

**Diversity and Inclusion fundamentals** training. This is a foundational course that everyone in the organization can take to start them on their journey to understand the basic principles needed to create an inclusive workplace.

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<sup>21</sup> Use the CCDI toolkit to create active ERGs: <https://ccdi.ca/media/1073/20150716-ccdi-report-erg-toolkit.pdf>

**Unconscious bias** training helps employees understand the insidious ways bias, micro-aggressions and racism are perpetuated and re-enforced in society and helps everyone approach this work from a place of understanding rather than blame.

The **Anti-racism certificate program** is open for groups or individuals to take and includes these courses:

- History of racism and colonization in Canada
- Race and racism in the Canadian workplace
- The intersections of race and other identities
- How to be an ally to racialized people
- Introduction to cultural competence

These courses equip individuals with the knowledge they need to advance their diversity and inclusion journey and make them effective promoters of anti-racism and inclusion in their teams.

## Sustain the effort

Sustaining the BLM movement in the workplace requires a big-picture outlook on possibilities. One must look to a continuous and rewarding process of creating a more inclusive workplace.

## Measure the impact

Efforts being made must be continuously assessed to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. It is not enough to have made some changes. Measuring impact requires setting goals and observing milestones made along the way to achieve those goals. How to accomplish this?

- Understand the level of exclusion that exists in the organization by:
  - Conducting listening circles with Black employees and non-Black employees
  - Using anonymous surveys to understand how frequently incidents of exclusion take place
- What percentage of Black employees are employed by the organization?
  - Black people make up 3.5% of the Canadian population. Is this reflected in the organization?
- What percentage increase can be accomplished in the next one to five years?
  - Measure progress yearly and share results with all staff.

Engage professional services:

- Diversity Meter™ (A CCDI workplace solutions product)
  - This is both a quantitative and qualitative measurement tool that evaluates two aspects of your workforce:
    - Representation of diverse groups (based on self-identification), and
    - Feelings of inclusion (based on a Likert scale and open-ended comments.)

## Communication strategy

An effective communication strategy is crucial to accomplishing the above strategies. There needs to be an intentional commitment to creating an anti-racist workplace.

- Communicate to staff about intentions of creating an anti-racist workplace, precisely one where Black employees can bring their whole selves to work
- Share how you will accomplish this
- Invite the participation of all staff to contribute to this effort through:
  - Full participation in surveys and employee consultation opportunities
  - Attendance to training being offered
  - Responding to calls to action, whether they be encouraged to read and learn more on the topic of anti-Black racism, join an ERG, or commit to allyship.

## Resources

### Books

- Policing Black Lives by *Robyn Maynard*
- The Skin We're In by *Desmond Cole*
- White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by *Dr. Robin DiAngelo*

### CCDI toolkits

- [Navigating race in Canadian workplaces](#)
- [Diversity & inclusion councils](#)
- [Employee Resource Groups \(ERGs\)](#)
- [Addressing fear and resistance](#)
- [Locking in your leadership: Developing a diversity and inclusion strategy](#)
- [Locking in your leadership: Developing the ironclad business case for diversity and inclusion](#)

### Reports

- DasGupta, Nan, et al. "The Pervasive Reality of Anti-Black Racism in Canada." Canada - EN, Boston Consulting Group, January 6th 2021, [www.bcg.com/en-ca/publications/2020/reality-of-anti-black-racism-in-canada](http://www.bcg.com/en-ca/publications/2020/reality-of-anti-black-racism-in-canada)
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- Diversity Institute at Ryerson University. "Diversity Leads: Diversity Representation in Leadership: A Review of Eight Canadian Cities." [https://www.ryerson.ca/diversity/reports/DiversityLeads\\_2020\\_Canada.pdf](https://www.ryerson.ca/diversity/reports/DiversityLeads_2020_Canada.pdf)
- Report of the Advisory on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario, Bob Rae. June 9th, 1992. [http://www.siu.on.ca/pdfs/report\\_of\\_the\\_advisor\\_on\\_race\\_relations\\_to\\_the\\_premier\\_of\\_ontario\\_bob\\_rae.pdf](http://www.siu.on.ca/pdfs/report_of_the_advisor_on_race_relations_to_the_premier_of_ontario_bob_rae.pdf)

### Other resources

- Anti racism resources: <https://experiencescanada.ca/resources/anti-racism-resources/>
- Employment Matters curated content: <https://employmentmatters.ca/news-feed/>
- Harvard University Implicit Association Test: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" and "Some Notes for Facilitators": <https://nationalseedproject.org/Key-SEED-Texts/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack>

## Appendix

### Definition of terms

**Bias:** an inclination or preference formed without reasonable justification that can prevent judgement from being balanced or even-handed.

Prejudice in favour or against a person or group. It cannot be eliminated but must be managed.

**BIPOC:** Black Indigenous People of Colour

**Code-switching:** switching ways of speaking and behaving from one environment to another to adapt and fit in.

**Culture:** the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, activities and knowledge of a group of individuals who share historical, geographical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic or social traditions and who transmit, reinforce and modify those traditions.

**Diversity:** the mix of differences that make each individual unique.

**Discrimination:** an action, decision or policy that puts a person or group of people at a disadvantage reasons such as their race, age or disability.

**Equitable employment:** employment practices that actively seek to remove barriers for women, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, and racialized groups.

**Jim Crow Laws:** collection of laws and statutes that made racial segregation legal in the United States

**Intersectionality:** a framework used to understand how different parts of a person's identity intersect and impact the way they experience discrimination and privilege

**Multiculturalism:** the extent to which, within one society or nation, two or more non-homogeneous, but equally recognized, ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, or religious groups co-exist.

**Prejudice:** hostile, irrational beliefs, feelings, opinions, and actions directed toward particular individuals or groups on the basis of stereotypical generalizations about group characteristics.

**Race:** a false concept utilized to classify humankind according to common ancestry or descent and reliant upon differentiation by general physical characteristics such as colour of skin and eyes, hair type, stature, and facial features.

**Racism:** a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, assumptions and actions based upon ideology of inherent superiority of one racial or ethnic group over another and which is evident within organizational or institutional structures and programmes as well as within individual thought or behavior patterns.

**Respectability politics:** a framework used to understand the behaviour of groups to conform to neoliberal, White, bourgeois normativity from a gendered, classed, and racialized perspective.<sup>22</sup>

**Stereotype:** a false or generalized conception of people that results in a conscious or unconscious categorization of each member of that group. Stereotypes may be based upon misconceptions or false generalizations about race, colour, age; ethnic, linguistic, geographical, or national groups; religion, social, marital, or family status; physical, developmental, or mental attributes, sexual orientation or sex.

**Systemic racism:** the systemic and institutional biases that put racialized groups at a disadvantage. These biases are subtle and often hard to identify but are evidenced by lack of representation of racialized groups in organizations at all levels, gaps in wages and salaries between white and racialized employees, incidences of racial profiling and police violence against racialized groups, etc.

**Unconscious biases:** social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mikaela Pitcan, Alice E Marwick, danah boyd, Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 23, Issue 3, May 2018, Pages 163–179, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmy008>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

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## Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI)

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) is a made-in-Canada solution designed to help employers, diversity and inclusion/human rights/equity, and human resources practitioners effectively address the full picture of diversity, equity and inclusion within the workplace. Founded and run by experienced diversity and inclusion practitioners, CCDI's focus is on practical sustainable solutions that help employers move toward true inclusion. Effectively managing diversity and inclusion, and human rights and equity is a strategic imperative for all Canadian organizations that wish to remain relevant and competitive.

We focus on the topics of inclusion that are relevant in Canada and the regional differences that shape diversity by addressing the issues that move employers from compliance to engagement. Our research, reports and events have become valuable cornerstones for people developing and implementing diversity plans.

CCDI is grateful for the support of our over 500 Employer Partners across Canada.

## Contact us

Have questions about the benefits of becoming a CCDI Employer Partner, or any of our services? Please contact:

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