



Project Insights Report

Strength in Structure



PARTNERS

Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity



LOCATIONS

Alberta
Nova Scotia
Ontario
Quebec



INVESTMENT

\$445,000



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☰ Executive Summary

Because of systemic racism and discrimination, Black youth in Canada have fewer education and employment outcomes. They would benefit from culturally relevant employment programs and services that affirm the intersecting factors in their identities and address the unique barriers, notably anti-Black racism, when navigating labour markets.

The Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity's Strength in Structure project engaged Black youth and Black-focused, Black-led and Black-serving, or B3, community organizations to develop a toolkit intended to improve delivery of services to meet the needs of Black youth job seekers. The toolkit was piloted by three B3 organizations: Rise in STEM, DYLOTT and Life of Hope Foundation.

The toolkit laid out 10 objectives for programming by service providers including:

- Ensuring youth are considering their personal and mental health needs in the workplace and helping them understand their rights and options if their professional or personal lives challenge their mental health.
- Ensuring that Black youth understand the breadth of professional opportunities available to them and the pathways to achieving them
- Training on discrimination and microaggressions in the workplace, combatting imposter syndrome and discussing what professionalism looks like as a Black person
- Supporting youth to conduct value-adding activities in their workplace and to navigate professional hierarchies and workplace politics

KEY INSIGHTS

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Black youth suffer disparities in their employment prospects when compared to other youth demographic groups.

- 2 Black youth need culturally relevant employment programs and services that affirm their intersectional identities and address the unique barriers they face when navigating labour markets, notably anti-Black racism.
- 3 There is a need for a more inclusive workforce development ecosystem that reflects an understanding of systemic anti-Black racism in the labour market.

▶ The Issue

Examining the lower education and employment outcomes of Black youth, it is found that they face unique obstacles and experience systemic racism and discrimination. Black youth would benefit from culturally relevant employment programs and services that affirm their intersectional identities to support when navigating labour markets.

Black-led, Black-serving and Black-focused (B3) organizations play a central role in connecting Black youth to the culturally relevant employment resources they need, however, these organizations face challenges of their own. Obstacles include fluctuating funding and support, a rapidly changing service environment and increasing need with deepening complexity.

To improve the experience with and outcomes of employment programs for Black youth, there is a need to develop culturally informed and culturally safe standards of practice for B3 organizations. They also need support in implementing and adopting these standards.



What We Investigated

This project engaged Black youth and B3 community organizations with the aim of expanding their capacity to provide employment services and community resources to their clients in multiple jurisdictions across Canada.

To prepare, a literature review on the experiences of Black communities and youth in the Canadian labour market was undertaken. This facilitated a comparison of outcomes for Black youth and those of other racialized groups in terms of health, employment, education, access to computers and the Internet and labour force participation.

Ten focus groups were held with 82 Black youth and five focus groups with 25 B3 organizations from Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Quebec. The focus groups explored experience and perspectives, workplace aspirations, needed programs and supports, and key barriers to success.

The data gathered led to development of a toolkit intended to improve competencies and capacities of those delivering job skills services to meet the needs of Black youth seeking employment.

The toolkit was validated with focus group participants and then piloted by three B3 organizations: Rise in STEM, DYLOTT and Life of Hope Foundation.

What We're Learning

Both Black youth and B3 organizations underscored how systemic racism is a significant challenge to their success, and the need to explicitly prepare Black youth for how to navigate that racism in education, training and employment.

Among the key findings from the literature review were that Black youth suffer disparities in their employment prospects when compared to other youth demographic groups, and how these outcomes are shaped by systemic racism and discrimination.

In focus groups with Black youth, participants talked about the persistence of anti-Black racism in workplaces disguised as expectations of professionalism and physical presentation. For example, some Black job-seekers said they feel pressure to change their name or hairstyle when applying for work. Others reported a focus by many Black-serving organizations on fields like retail which offer precarious employment as well as general concerns about equity in the hiring process.

In focus groups with the B3 organizations, recurring themes had to do with a range of issues affecting the sector such as capacity constraints that affect the reliability of community services and misalignment in how the funder and service provider evaluate the program. The funder prefers quantitative data while those providing the service stress the need for holistic qualitative evaluation methods.

Other issues raised included the need to incorporate participants in design of the program, for more resources to address mental health challenges among youth and the desire for greater cohesion within programs and sectors.

Staff expressed a need for disaggregated race-based data on Black youth experiences rather than just relying on labels like BIPOC, which may merge distinct experiences with other racialized groups.

The Strength in Structure toolkit distilled the research findings into a set of resources and recommendations for B3 organizations. The toolkit's objective is to strengthening capacity, enhance social and cultural responsiveness and deepen relationships with clients. It stresses a flexible approach that leaves room for organizations to modify resources according to their circumstances. The toolkit reflects 10 objectives for service providers to include in their programming:

- Measures to ensure youth understand their rights and options if their professional or personal lives challenge their mental health.
- Education that illustrates the wide breadth of professional opportunities available to ensure youth are able to align their core values with their chosen career
- Supports for long-term career planning to ensure youth have an accurate picture of how their career goals in future years might be reached
- Training on how youth can detect discrimination and microaggressions in the workplace
- Supports to encourage youth to conduct activities that add value in their workplace
- Supports to help youth address imposter syndrome in their workplaces
- Discussion on what professionalism looks like as a Black person
- Supports to help youth navigate professional hierarchies and workplace politics
- Supports for youth development and enhanced professional communication skills
- Measures to ensure youth are considering their personal and mental health needs in the workplace

★ Why It Matters

There is a growing acknowledgement of and effort to address systemic anti-Black racism in Canada. As part of this work, there is a need for a more inclusive workforce development ecosystem that includes understanding of systemic anti-Black racism in the labour market. The skills development system needs to welcome B3 service providers to meaningfully contribute to mainstream discussions and activities on the future of work and to adequately funds organizations to meet the needs of Black youth job seekers.

This project holds lessons for decision makers on how to integrate anti-Black racism practices into existing workforce development programs. It also provides a helpful model for decision makers on how to engage in collaborative consultation and prototype development with the target population of the intended intervention.

▶ What's Next



State of Skills: Enhancing Career Prospects and Well-Being for Canadian Youth

Focus on early career guidance programs to introduce youth to a range of career paths, empowering them to make informed decisions with a strong emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

The Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity's Strength in Structure has indicated it could grow the impact of its project in several ways. These include development of a toolkit for youth and expanding use of the toolkit by service providers in more provinces.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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