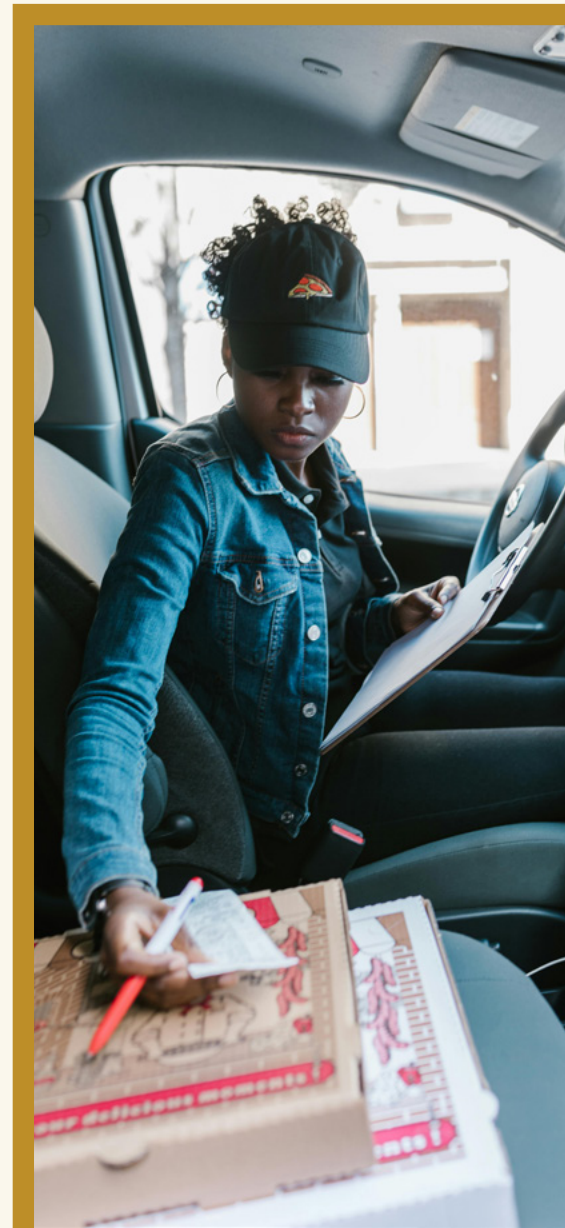




THE
RE-SEASONING
COALITION

STOKING THE FLAME:

**EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND
THE BLACK EXPERIENCE
IN FOODSERVICE**



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FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and Signal49 Research.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's foodservice sector has the ingredients for inclusive growth, yet everyday practices still limit Black participation, mobility, and ownership. With the Black Canadian population projected to be the second largest by 2041 and Black youth currently accounting for 42% of the group, devising strategies to engage them in foodservice has never been more important. Stoking the Flame updates The Re-Seasoning Coalition's (TRSC) 2022 report, *Lighting the Fire: Exploring Racial Inequalities in the Canadian Foodservice Industry*, with new national data and lived-experience insights to help operators, educators, and policymakers convert equity commitments into site-ready actions.

TRSC used a convergent mixed-methods approach, with the research administered in both French and English. A national survey of 2,002 foodservice employees, operators, and consumers, inclusive of Black youth and adults, was paired with focus groups and interviews conducted across Ontario and Québec. The results of this research were compared with findings from TRSC's 2021 baseline study. Analysis was guided by the Critical Culinary Capital (C3) framework which, situated within culinary justice and decolonial economic thinking, helps explain why one-off training does not shift outcomes when hiring remains informal, schedules are opaque, and incident response is inconsistent.

Since 2021, awareness and public statements in support of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) have increased; however, Black workers still report biased front-of-house hiring, limited mentorship, thin ladders into lead and supervisory roles, alongside prejudicial responses to Black consumers. Black entrepreneurs face financing, procurement, and demand-volatility barriers while Black culinary students describe persistent mentorship, curricula, and sponsorship gaps that do not consistently reflect Black food literacies. Many workers face a late-career cliff with limited access to pensions, benefits continuity, and culturally responsive financial planning at retirement.

Three findings anchor the implications. First, EDI sentiment has shifted slightly upward, but discriminatory structures are largely unchanged. This suppresses retention and internal mobility, increases replacement and training costs, and weakens service quality. Second, viewed through Max-Neef's Human Scale Development (HSD)¹ lens, the foodservice sector often falls short on meeting the needs of Black employees around safety, learning, participation, recognition, and autonomy. Limited training access, biased supervision, and cultural extraction undermine these needs, lowering performance, raising churn, and demotivating innovators. Third, Black consumer sentiment links inclusion to demand. Visible practice, not statements, drives visit frequency, loyalty, and brand equity. Consistent incident response builds trust across shifts, locations, and delivery channels.

¹ Max-Neef's Human Scale Development (HSD) lens is a framework for understanding and supporting development that's centered on human well-being rather than economic growth alone. Created by Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef in the 1980s, it challenges the idea that progress equals higher GDP, and instead asks: Are people's fundamental human needs being met in sustainable, dignified ways?

Ultimately, *Stoking the Flame* highlights that equity pays off. When workplaces are fair and safe, Black staff stay longer, move into better-paid roles, and report stronger belonging. That translates to improved guest sentiment: when Black diners are welcomed without friction, see themselves reflected in staff, and feel physically and culturally safe, they report stronger belonging while reducing complaints and reputational risk. For operators, these outcomes translate into fewer vacancies, lower recruitment and retraining costs, stronger teams, and better service. For communities, supplier diversity and Black ownership pathways keep dollars circulating locally and build community wealth.

What operators can do now is practical and measurable. Hire for skills using clear job descriptions, structured interviews, and diverse panels. Publish fair scheduling rules and run routine pay-equity audits. Require manager training on anti-Black racism, bias-resistant supervision, equitable scheduling, pay transparency, and equity-informed conflict de-escalation. Recognise prior learning, install mentorship ladders into lead and supervisor roles, and align micro-credentials to real jobs. Close the tools gap with editable posting and interview templates, scheduling and pay-audit checklists, guest conduct and incident-response policies.

To incentivize and lock in results, policy and funding must follow. Track what matters: fewer incidents and faster resolution, higher retention and promotion for Black staff, wage-gap closure, representation in management roles, entrepreneurship success, and stronger safety and belonging scores. Reduce cost barriers through transit-to-work supports and credential subsidies. Expand shared kitchens and incubators paired with micro-loans, bookkeeping and licensing supports, and procurement readiness programs. Strengthen the training ecosystem by co-designing curricula with Black chefs, educators, students, and employers so programs reflect Black food literacies and prepare learners for fair, high-quality jobs. Require paid co-ops or internships with equity standards and establish Black Culinary Student Associations with mentor pools, networking, portfolio reviews, and scholarship pipelines. Treat Black-led, race-based research as essential infrastructure with unrestricted, multi-year funding, and require community-led standards with paid advisory tables, trauma-informed protocols, and culturally safe methods.

In neighbourhoods with high Black youth unemployment, place-based pilots can bundle employer coaching, paid pre-employment training, anchor procurement, and pop-up retail. Partners should measure jobs created, retention, promotions, new business development, local spend recirculation, incident reduction, and guest loyalty, then adapt quickly based on results. This report is accompanied by a companion toolkit (see *Stoking the Flame at Work*) that provides the editable templates, checklists, and sample policies that make on-site adoption straightforward.

Limitations include the use of non-probability sampling and qualitative concentration in Ontario and Québec, and forthcoming pilots will extend the evidence base. Systems change efforts towards greater equity in foodservice do not require perfect conditions. With standard tools, accountable training, targeted supports, and attention to the full career arc, from recruitment to retirement, Canada's foodservice sector can translate commitments into stronger communities, more resilient small businesses, and measurable gains for Black workers, Black consumers, and owners. ●

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Patrick Noone, then Executive Vice President of Technomic, noted that, “Canada [was] facing a moral awakening with how social justice is achieved....unlike past social issues, consumers are demanding that the foodservice industry speaks up.”

This comment was shared within the context of the social justice protests of that year, following the murders and assaults of members of Black communities around the world at the hands of the police. These protests, coupled with the socioemotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and ‘The Great Resignation’, galvanized employees and consumers of all walks of life to demand better experiences. The Canadian foodservice industry, in particular, was slow to express their support of their Black employees who were bearing the brunt of these crises, leading to a call-to-action that surprised even the most trusted market prognosticators.

This cornucopia of change spurred the creation of The Re-Seasoning Coalition (TRSC), a non-profit with a mission to address the lack of Black representation in foodservice through research, programming, and community engagement. With the Black Canadian population projected to be the second largest racialized group by 2041, Black guests dining out more often than the national average, and youth accounting for 42% of the group, devising strategies to support Black foodservice workers and consumers has never been more important to the success of the industry. Informed by data and lived experience, TRSC works with operators, suppliers, corporations, and community partners to put equity into practice by leveraging innovative solutions to create an industry where everyone can reach their highest potential.

Renewed attention to social and civic justice also led to the development of TRSC’s first national research project exploring the Black experience in foodservice. In 2022, TRSC published *Lighting the Fire: Exploring Racial Inequalities in*

the Canadian Foodservice Industry in collaboration with Technomic, Restaurants Canada, and Centennial College, as a baseline study documenting the challenges facing foodservice employees, consumers, and operators in the push for diversity, equity, and inclusion at work. The results of the race-based research surfaced a clear manifesto: interest in foodservice is strong, but discrimination against Black guests and employees is disproportionately high; Black cuisines, culture, and labour have and continue to shape products, media, and revenue without proportional recognition or benefit; industry advancement depends on the work environment and the willingness of leaders to demonstrate care for their employees; equity matters to consumers and employees; and foodservice brands need to speak up and step up to stay competitive in a rapidly changing environment.

“ THE RESULTS OF THE RACE-BASED RESEARCH SURFACED A CLEAR MANIFESTO... FOODSERVICE BRANDS NEED TO SPEAK UP AND STEP UP TO STAY COMPETITIVE IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT. ”

As a follow-up, *Stoking the Flame* builds on that foundation with a mixed-methods study cataloguing what has changed since 2021 and what barriers the foodservice industry continues to face in truly embracing inclusive and anti-racist leadership. It centres Black voices and experiences, especially among youth, while also engaging non-Black workers, managers, and consumers to understand perceptions, pinch points, and the business case for sustained action. The project combined a national survey with focus groups and in-depth interviews in English and French to better reflect the realities of the foodservice industry in Ontario and Québec which accounted for 58% of commercial foodservice sales across the country in 2024 according to *Foodservice Facts 2025*.

In presenting key findings, this report acknowledges readers may not be familiar with the effect of systemic racism on economic policies. Therefore, in addition to exploring the shift towards increased support for equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives in the foodservice industry across racial groups and roles, the report's analysis examines the structural racism in foodservice through the lens of a new framework, Critical Culinary Capital (C3) and pairs it with Manfred Max-Neef's theory of Human Scale Development (HSD).

HSD is a modern approach to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that posits that all humans have fundamental needs that must be met in a positive way in order to lead a fulfilled life. Using this lens, our analysis illustrates how the foodservice industry fails to meet some of the most basic human needs of Black people leading to widespread underrepresentation and poor economic outcomes. The purpose of C3 is to connect three domains that are often treated separately: how organizations value Black labour and skill, how culinary knowledge is recognized, credentialed, and rewarded, and how external gatekeepers shape who moves forward and who is left behind. By combining these two frameworks, we see both the impact and the cause of inequality. Max-Neef shows which human needs aren't being met, while Critical Culinary Capital explains why—because the system values White or Eurocentric ways of cooking, learning, and working. Finally, our analysis examines the role of Black consumers in pushing the industry's focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) forward and showcases how closing cultural and generational value gaps between Black jobseekers, Black guests, and foodservice employers creates an industry that can evolve alongside the pace of social change.

Led by sector and research partners with complementary strengths, this report and its toolkit include quantitative design and benchmarking, community-based qualitative methods, economic development analysis, cultural localization, and industry-wide mobilization to do more than diagnose the problems of an economy lacking inclusion – it identifies specific practices that can be implemented with limited HR capacity and links those practices to measurable outcomes. It also names the social and emotional barriers stalling change and offers clear areas of focus to develop solutions. Finally, the report offers a policy bridge for sector leaders and economic development policy to shift towards race-based research and equity implementation as core practices in order to design policies that make fair workplaces the default rather than the exception.

Stoking the Flame is grounded in Black experience, aligned with culinary justice, and designed to help Canada's foodservice sector to build a layer of resilience that can survive the next crisis. ●



LITERATURE REVIEW

Across Canada, the foodservice industry is both a site of cultural creativity and a terrain of racialized labour exploitation. Black peoples' contributions have shaped food culture, yet their labour remains undervalued. The framework of culinary justice (Twitty, 2018) offers a critical lens for understanding these dynamics, connecting everyday inequities in restaurant work to historical processes of dispossession, cultural appropriation, and systemic anti-Black racism. This literature review synthesizes empirical, theoretical, and community-based research to examine Black peoples' experiences in the foodservice industry, arguing that culinary justice reframes these experiences as struggles for ownership, recognition, and economic redress.

Studies of racialized labour in Canada reveal that Black workers remain overrepresented in low-wage, insecure service roles while underrepresented in management and ownership positions. Tufts et al. (2012) found that immigrants and racialized workers in Toronto's accommodation and foodservice sectors are concentrated in "precarious, low-skill, and

customer-dependent employment” (p. 7). Stevens and Connelly (2024) extend this analysis, demonstrating how aesthetic labour, which privileges Whiteness, excludes Black, Indigenous, and migrant workers from front-of-house and promotional opportunities.

The Black Experience Project (2017) likewise documents the persistence of workplace racism, where Black workers report both overt discrimination and subtle bias in performance evaluations and customer interactions. Blackett (2025) argues that such dynamics constitute systemic anti-Black racism, noting that Canadian labour law’s focus on individual complaints fails to address the institutional cultures that reproduce exclusion. The racial stratification of food labour also reflects what Mamaweswen Niigaaniin, MacNeill, and Ramos-Cortez (2024) term colonial political economies: systems where racialized and Indigenous workers are positioned as “peripheral to economic sovereignty” (p. 463). Their notion of decolonial economics resonates with culinary justice frameworks.

While mainstream industry research often frames workforce inequities as “human capital challenges,” critical scholarship reveals that this language obscures systemic racism. Bradley et al. (2017) describe recruitment and retention problems in Canada’s hospitality sector, urging “innovative solutions to develop talent pipelines” (p. 413). Yet, as Miller (2017) found in her study of leadership strategies, such initiatives often reinforce managerial hierarchies and Black workers are encouraged to exhibit “professional soft skills” and deference to customer bias rather than to feel empowered to challenge discriminatory norms.

“ACROSS CANADA, THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY IS BOTH A SITE OF CULTURAL CREATIVITY AND A TERRAIN OF RACIALIZED LABOUR EXPLOITATION.”

Hossein (2017) observes parallel dynamics in Canada’s third sector, where Black women leaders in the social economy confront racialized expectations of servitude and gratitude. Her concept of “resistance within the margins” (p. 752) applies equally to the food industry, where Black workers build informal networks of care and mentorship to survive exclusionary cultures. Together, these studies illustrate how institutional narratives of “skills gaps” and “work ethic” mask structural inequities and divert attention from racism as a defining feature of the labour process.

Beyond the workplace, racism in food culture manifests through representation and consumption. Fofie (2025) argues that Black and African gastronomies are subjected to ethnoracism and “white palatability,” where culinary traditions are commodified only when mediated through white chefs, critics, and institutions. This mirrors what MacKenzie and Dominic (2023) identify as the “spectacle of elite gastronomy”: food criticism and media coverage that uphold whiteness as the default marker of expertise and refinement. They note that professional recognition in the culinary arts depends on access to “prestige circuits—Michelin stars, food festivals, and media visibility—that remain disproportionately white” (p. 8).

Culinary justice expands conventional definitions of food justice, moving beyond access and nutrition to include recognition, intellectual property, and reparative redistribution. Twitty (2018) writes that culinary justice demands “a right to authority, sovereignty, prosperity, and acknowledgment” (p. 243). In the Canadian context, this resonates with MacRae and Winfield’s (2016) call for regulatory pluralism in food policy: integrating counter-hegemonic advocacy with formal governance to build “joined-up” systems that reflect diverse epistemologies (p. 165).

For Black food workers, culinary justice reframes wage inequities and limited mobility as symptoms of cultural extraction. The success of “soul food” or “Caribbean fusion” restaurants owned by non-Black entrepreneurs exemplifies what Fofie (2025) calls “epistemic violence”, a process where Black creativity fuels profit while Black people remain excluded from ownership. Despite systemic barriers, Black leadership in the food industry and related sectors demonstrates resilience and innovation. Hossein (2017) highlights how Black women leaders employ community-based, cooperative models to navigate institutional exclusion, building what she terms “social economy solidarity networks” (p. 770). Similarly, Roberts, Mayo, and Thomas (2019) emphasize that racial equity in leadership requires transforming organizational cultures rather than merely diversifying representation.

Policy interventions aligned with culinary justice include equitable wage models, anti-discrimination enforcement, and targeted investment in Black food entrepreneurship. However, as Dimanche and Perzyna (2023) caution, diversity rhetoric must be matched with accountability: “Equity must be measurable, resourced, and embedded in governance, not left to goodwill” (p. 279).

Across this literature, a central insight emerges: Black peoples’ experiences in the foodservice industry are shaped by intersecting systems of racial capitalism, gendered labour, and cultural appropriation. Culinary justice reframes these conditions as questions of sovereignty and redress rather than diversity or inclusion alone. Recognition of Black food culture must translate into material benefit, authorship, and decision-making power. As Navarro (2021) and Twitty (2018) remind us, Black foodways carry deep epistemologies of survival, creativity, and freedom. Therefore, advancing equity in Canada’s foodservice sector requires structural redistribution of value and voice that honours those traditions. ●

RESEARCH DESIGN

There is a significant gap in addressing the systemic biases shaping the work experiences of Black Canadians in the foodservice industry. The literature documents how bias operates across hiring, scheduling, supervision, and advancement, concentrating Black workers in unstable, low-wage roles while limiting access to higher-paying management positions (Bradley et al., 2017; Hossein, 2017; Miller, 2017; Stevens & Connelly, 2024). This evidence informed the development of the C3 framework, Critical Culinary Capital, as a policy response to build inclusive local economies and, more specifically, improve outcomes for Black youth in the Canadian foodservice sector. C3 addresses gaps in policy knowledge by highlighting the nexus between the value and the culinary construction of racialized labour in Canada (Stevens & Connelly, 2024) and by integrating insights from culinary justice to surface biases toward Black food literacies and expertise (Twitty, 2018; Fofie, 2025).

Drawing on insights from a range of stakeholders, our research investigates the barriers to addressing anti-Black racism in the foodservice industry and highlights substantive actions to facilitate the career advancement of Black Canadians, measures which are essential for enhancing the overall dining experience for all Canadians. Across both our qualitative

“ THE C3 LENS REVEALS THE COMPLEX WAYS THAT LABOUR HAS BEEN BOTH VALUED AND DEVALUED THROUGH RACIAL DYNAMICS AND HIGHLIGHTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS. ”

thematic data and quantitative survey, we used C3 to identify and analyze how systemic barriers, including discriminatory organizational practices, racial labour stereotyping, power imbalances, and the devaluation of Black culinary knowledge, prevent Black Canadians from accumulating the capital (mentorship, networks, training, certifications and resources) necessary for career advancement, economic empowerment, and narrative control in the foodservice industry. Although contextual factors such as establishment type, geographic location, and intersectional identities intervene differently in how the relationship between racialized labour and compensation of skill unfold in the foodservice industry, the C3 lens reveals the complex ways that labour has been both valued and devalued through racial dynamics and highlights opportunities for sustainable solutions that address anti-Black racism and advance culinary justice for Black youth and workers. By identifying structural obstacles,

mediating socio-economic factors at the individual and organizational level, and identifying key outcome measures, C3 provides a roadmap for policy interventions that address anti-Black racism, foster inclusive leadership practices, and create equitable pathways for Black workers across all segments of Canada's foodservice sector.

This research employed a convergent mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2017) to gather qualitative and quantitative data in response to three research questions. We included survey data from the TRSC 2021 study, published in 2022, to provide a historical comparison to our 2025 survey.

We used a quota-based non-probability sampling method to select a nationally representative sample of 2,002 participants for the survey, in collaboration with Prodege, a market research provider. Prodege's Technomic Panel includes pre-vetted participants from diverse backgrounds who have enrolled in foodservice-related research programs for compensation. In the qualitative phase, we recruited 56 participants with connections to the foodservice industry for focus groups and interviews via snowball sampling.



The qualitative study used data collected from participants residing in Ontario and Québec through seven, one-hour long focus group discussions, and twelve, 45-minute interviews. Interviews and focus group questions were designed to understand barriers identified across groups (i.e. Black consumers, Black youth, EDI specialists and policy makers, culinary educators, Black business owners) that were viewed as hindering Black and equity-deserving professionals from advancing in their careers. The prompts focused on socio-emotional and equity-related concerns influencing the motivations of Black youth to seek employment, remain in the industry, or exit. The questions also explored practices within small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and recommendations for the effective implementation of equity, diversity, and inclusion policies. The research team initially expected to interview multiple groups of foodservice employers. However, the data collection phase was conducted during the peak operating season for the foodservice industry, leading us to interview fewer industry decision-makers than expected. Nevertheless, we were successful in gleaning insights from restaurant operators through the limited interviews and the quantitative open-ended questions. We recorded and transcribed the focus groups and interviews in English and French. TRSC's Research Coordinator and Research Assistant read and reread the qualitative data and coded responses to the questionnaire's five open-ended questions separately,

merged the open-ended survey response themes, and triangulated these with the qualitative data's corresponding themes. French language responses were kept as is but coded interpretively with themes from the English responses.

In the quantitative phase, we administered a 25-minute questionnaire with five open-ended survey questions capturing responses from non-Black Canadians, Black youth and adults, foodservice employees, guests, restaurant operators, and corporate leaders.

The quantitative survey instrument comprised 50 questions, including Likert scale-type multiple-choice and open-ended questions, and gathered information about employment equity, diversity, and inclusion in foodservice from a diverse range of individuals. The questionnaire's first and second sections gathered demographic information and focused on food industry employment, unemployment drivers, job-seeking factors, workplace safety, roles in foodservice, company size, tenure, and reasons for or against joining the industry. The questionnaire's remaining sections assessed dining habits at various restaurants and the importance of EDI initiatives. It explored respondents' views on racial justice in Canada, experiences with discrimination, and equitable hiring practices in the food industry. Additionally, it looked at support for Black food entrepreneurs and EDI integration in culinary education, as well as mentorship access and workplace EDI issues among culinary educators and employers.

We coded 2,002 responses from our survey questionnaire, an increase of 54% from 2022's survey's 1300 respondents. Below is the distribution of responses categorized by ethnicity and gender:

- Black respondents (n=868)
- White respondents (n=638)
- South Asian respondents (n=118)
- East Asian respondents (n=141)
- Other groups (n=117)
- 48.55% identified as male
- 49.95% as female
- 0.60% as transgender
- 0.80% as non-conforming
- 0.10% chose not to disclose their gender
- Black Men made up 21.78% of respondents
- Black Women 21.33%
- White Men 15.53%
- White Women 15.63%
- Most respondents were aged 19-24 (29.97%)
- Followed by 25-34 (24.98%)
- 35-44 (23.08%)
- 45-54 (14.99%)
- 55-64 (5%)

In terms of employment statistics, a total of 1,391 respondents were employed or self-employed, making up 69.5% of the surveyed population. There were 202 unemployed individuals, with 132 actively seeking work. In the foodservice sector, 257 respondents (12.8%) were currently employed, and 612 (30.6%) had previous experience. Additionally, 317 respondents (15.8%) expressed interest in foodservice opportunities, while 816 (40.8%) were uninterested.

Statistically, the quantitative data indicated that the foodservice economy lacks inclusivity. Although Black and non-Black Canadians participate in foodservice employment at similar rates (69.5% vs. 70.2%), this apparent equality conceals significant disparities in employment quality and opportunities for advancement. Black workers report experiencing racial bias as a barrier to career advancement 67% more frequently (17.4% vs. 10.4%, $p < 0.001$). They also cite a lack of representation in leadership roles 52% more often (17.6% vs. 11.6%, $p < 0.001$) and face a 63% greater gap in access to culturally responsive mentorship (18.9% vs. 11.6%, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, they are significantly more likely to report that racial bias has adversely impacted their career progression (3.15 vs. 2.73 on a 5-point scale, $p < 0.001$) and are less likely to believe that Black employees receive equitable treatment. Notably, Black workers are 58% more likely to pursue entrepreneurship, suggesting that starting their own businesses may serve as an alternative pathway when traditional avenues for advancement appear blocked. ●

Racial Group	2022 Employment	2025 Employment	% Change	Pattern	Key Finding
White Workers	4%	11.5%	+188%	SURGE	Captured majority of expansion; dramatic gains (Men +250%, Women +125%)
South Asian Workers	Low*	20%	+200%+	SUCCESS	Both genders succeeded; ethnic economy effects; community hiring in expanding restaurants
Black Workers	10%	11%	+10%	STAGNATION	High interest (17%) + declining rejection (-10 pts) but minimal hiring gains; under-recruited and under-retained
East Asian Workers	13%	13.5%	+4%	DIVERGENCE/ EXODUS	Women surged +171% (7%⇒19%); Men declined -58% (19%⇒8%); gendered racialization + post-COVID anti-Asian racism

FINDINGS

The findings translate TRSC's mixed-methods evidence from our 2025 national survey (n=2,002) and Ontario and Quebec focus groups/interviews into what's changing, what isn't, and where action delivers returns. We analyzed the data through the C3 framework and, where relevant, Max-Neef's Human Scale Development lens. Together, these frames show how everyday choices in hiring, scheduling, training, supervision, and guest conduct shape mobility, safety, creativity, and ownership for Black workers and entrepreneurs and, in turn, effect retention, productivity, and revenue for operators.

We benchmark against TRSC's 2021 baseline to distinguish genuine shifts from persistence. Public commitments and awareness have risen, but many workplace practices and market gatekeeping patterns remain intact. Three core stories emerge:

- 1.** Sentiment about EDI has shifted while discriminatory structures persist.
- 2.** The foodservice industry is not meeting Black workers' core needs in ways that enable advancement.
- 3.** Black consumer sentiment is heavily influenced by inclusion, anti-racism, and core brand values.

Each key finding pairs evidence with its economic implications and points to site-ready moves for operators and enabling levers for policy partners. The companion toolkit (*Stoking the Flame at Work*) provides editable templates, checklists, and sample policies to help teams implement these steps consistently across shifts and locations. ●



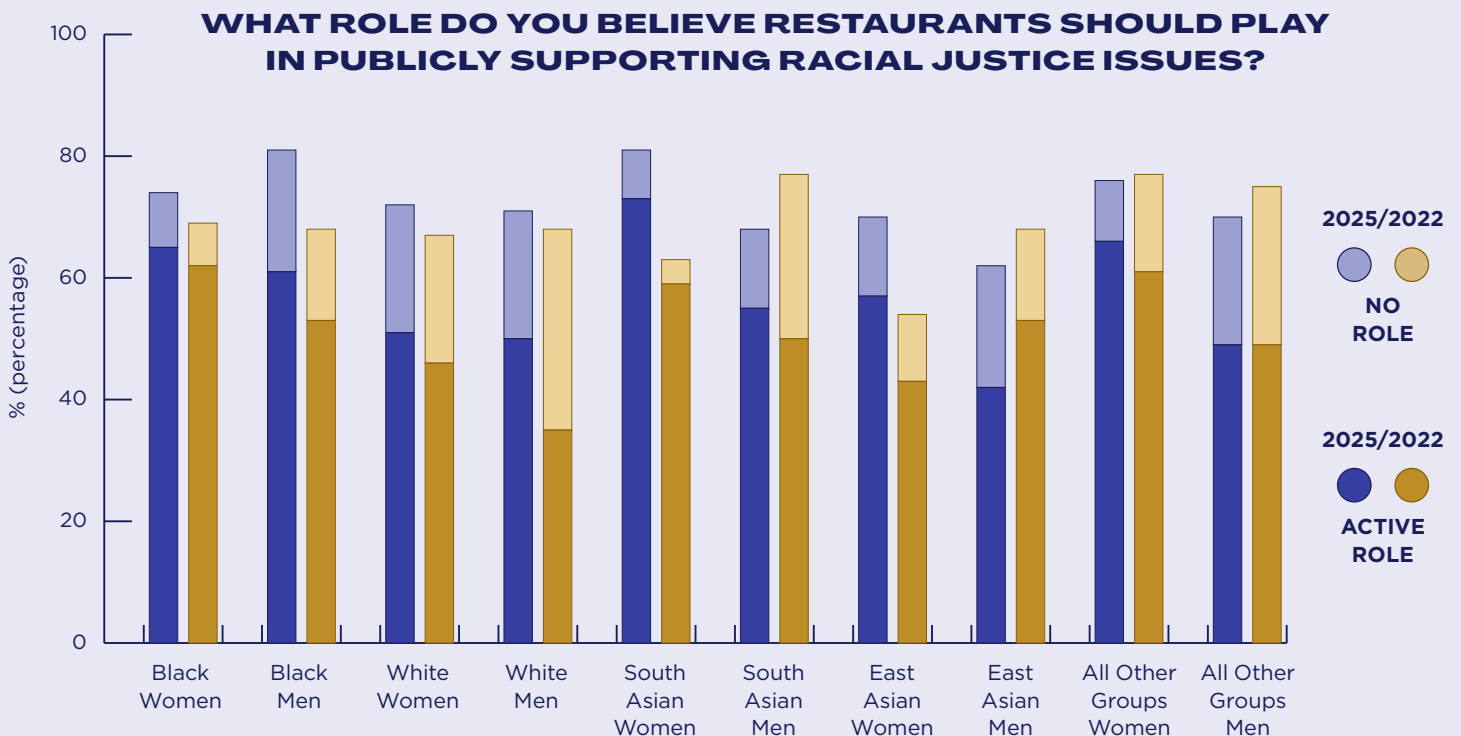
KEY FINDING 1

Sentiment around EDI has shifted, but discriminatory structures remain

Despite political suggestions to the contrary, Canada’s “moral awakening” has remained steady, with support for equity, diversity, and inclusion holding within the foodservice community. The majority of Canadians continue to believe that food businesses should play an active role in publicly supporting racial justice issues as opposed to a passive or non-existent one. Nuances emerge when reviewing this data by race. White men showed the biggest jump in positive sentiment with a 15 point jump to 50% in 2025. Similarly, South Asian men, 27% of whom believed that restaurants should not play a role in supporting racial justice in 2022, changed their perspective in dramatic fashion with only 13%

believing the same in 2025. The tendency towards taking an active role for Black men and women, non-Black racialized women, and White women held, with Black women continuing to have the strongest preference towards public activism at 65%.

Similarly, percentage increases in the belief that restaurants and delivery apps should prioritize EDI practices within their organizations are strong among Black, non-Black racialized groups, and White men with an average increase of 4.4 points. Curiously, while East Asian women led respondents with a 14 point jump in EDI importance, White women’s opinions declined by the same factor to 44% in 2025. ▶



This change is particularly noteworthy considering the disproportionate benefit White women have received from inclusion policies across industries.

“I HAVE EXPERIENCED OR WITNESSED DISCRIMINATION AT WORK”



1 in 2
Black employees



1 in 2
non-Black racialized employees



1 in 3
White employees

Advocacy may be rising, but it lags in practice. One out of two Black foodservice employees are still experiencing or witnessing racism or discrimination at work, while non-Black racialized men saw a sharp increase in the number of those experiencing the same, from 46% to 59% in 2025. Similarly, non-Black racialized women are experiencing more or more overt discrimination at work with responses to “agree or agree strongly” jumping 21 points to 51% in 2025. The polarizing Temporary Foreign Worker program – participants of which are largely concentrated in foodservice & hospitality and negative rhetoric around immigration on both sides of the border are likely key drivers in this shift. White men stand out as experiencing the greatest net increase with difficulty with career advancement, with 41% of them agreeing that they have been denied employment or advancement because of their race as compared to 21% in 2021. This sentiment may continue for as long as equity efforts are successful as they signal shifting expectations in the workplace about White privilege.

Despite these trends, discrimination is still pervasive in foodservice and a widely-held belief in greater equity has not yet translated into working conditions, with greater acceptance of EDI having little impact on the experiences of Black employees who cited poor mentorship, declining motivation, and hidden opportunities to advance as indicators of a workplace that did not demonstrate political will towards EDI. Employment trajectories diverge sharply from 2022 to 2025. Despite rejection rates for Black workers falling (from 9–11%), Black employment barely moved while White men rose from 4% to 14% (+250%) and White women from 4% to 9% (+125%). Black interest in foodservice is high (e.g., 44–46% in 2025), and Black respondents are less likely to cite compensation as the barrier; workplace climate dominates. EDI specialists also point to systemic pressures on Black entrepreneurs, illustrated by the Elias Restaurant case (Ontario), where a lease renewal was denied despite timely rent, signalling bias against Black-serving businesses (Manias & Lo, 2021). ▶

Qualitative and quantitative accounts describe biased front-of-house hiring, limited mentorship, unclear advancement, and little Black representation in management across the country.

JE PENSE QUE S'IL Y AVAIT PLUS DE MENTORAT... PEUT-ÊTRE QUE J'AURAIS ÉTÉ INTÉRESSÉE.

RIMA

(Québec)

Entered as a dishwasher in 2024 and left within months due to absent pathways

I was a barback. I was being made fun of and witnessed time after time as caucasian and asian staff were newly hired and then immediately placed in higher paying front-of-house positions. I stayed there for 8 months, but my frustration boiled over as I was working like crazy, but being overlooked for any promotion. Screw restaurant jobs honestly!

ANONYMOUS RESPONDENT

(British Columbia)

THEY KEEP SAYING YOU'RE NOT READY... AND IT NEVER HAPPENS.

ALEESA

(Ontario)

It's like we have to dance and skirt and baby steps because, you know, the term intersectionality or EDI might be too much, so it's like bringing in the policies and the training and the mentoring programs in a way that it's like not shoving it down their face... but going slowly so that they can digest it.

HEATHER

(Québec)

Internally, I hit the "diversity fatigue" of peers who treat anti-racism as performative HR theatre; externally, shrinking legal protections and politicised backlash make every new policy feel like a risk instead of a right.

ANONYMOUS RESPONDENT

I THINK I CAN COUNT HOW MANY BLACK STUDENTS I'VE HAD. I THINK NOT EVEN 10 IN TWO YEARS IN MY PROGRAM.

ANITA

(Ontario)

Culinary educators and leaders in EDI within and outside of foodservice echo the realities of a shift in sentiment, but not action. Weak EDI structures contribute to low enrollment of Black students in competitive programmes, where their cultural recipes and techniques are not visible or valued. Similarly, in corporate and institutional spaces, a lack of training and dedicated resources contributes to a feeling within leadership that focusing on EDI is not important or critical to the businesses' success or longevity. ●



KEY FINDING 2

The foodservice industry has failed to meet the needs of Black employees

Applying Max-Neef’s Human Scale Development to Black peoples’ experiences in the Canadian foodservice labour market reframes workplace indicators as determinants of whether core human needs are met. Rather than treating employment as a single economic metric, the HSD lens asks whether labour markets enable subsistence, understanding, protection, participation, creation & identity, and freedom. Though Max-Neef’s Scale comprises nine needs – the seven above including idleness and affection – in analyzing the data, we found that these seven themes provided the clearest link to the Black experience in foodservice and the strongest alignment with TRSC’s mission and tactics. Taking a culturally relevant approach to the race-based research also led us to combine the heretofore separate needs of creation and identity because the activation of innovation, cultural recognition, and expression are often intersecting parts of the Black experience rather than exclusive markers. People of Black African descent, especially in non-Black

spaces, need both the freedom to express creativity and the recognition that their contributions matter. To make traditional Ghanaian jollof rice, for example, is akin to showcasing and recognizing that the country’s beloved recipe for this side dish is distinct from one made in Nigeria or Sierra Leone, and vice-versa.

Using HSD alongside the C3 framework, the analysis exposes how systemic racism and unequal valuation of Black culinary expertise hinder these needs from being met, showing up in practice as unstable schedules, unsafe environments, thin training access, biased supervision, and the under-recognition of Black food literacies. Survey data indicate that 65% of Black employees see opportunity in the industry, yet 74% believe Black people must work harder to succeed, and only one in four rate their workplace “very well” on racial equity. The needs map below shows how these gaps manifest on the ground and where community-level or structural fixes already exist or can be built. ►

Human Need (Max-Neef)	Observed barriers / inhibiting satisfiers	Examples from the data	Community / structural satisfiers (actual or proposed)
SUBSISTENCE (economic security & livelihood)	Unequal access to funding, mentorship, and promotion; unpaid internships; credential barriers that limit income stability.	Youth “can’t afford certification or unpaid training.” Owners describe biased landlords and being denied loans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based hiring and mentorship • City grants and targeted small-business loans for Black restaurateurs • Paid apprenticeships for youth
UNDERSTANDING (learning & recognition)	Culinary education and management overlook Black food literacies; Eurocentric menus dominate.	“We never learn African or Caribbean food at school—it’s treated like street food.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate Black food histories and techniques into culinary programs • Require cultural-literacy training for chefs and servers

Human Need (Max-Neef)	Observed barriers / inhibiting satisfiers	Examples from the data	Community / structural satisfiers (actual or proposed)
PROTECTION (safety, stability, dignity)	Thin psychological safety; normalised racism and tokenism; weak accountability.	Workers describe being “the only one” and “working twice as hard.” Consumers report being asked to prepay or followed by staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero-tolerance anti-racism policies • Confidential complaint channels • Manager training on bias • Culturally safe dining guidelines
PARTICIPATION (voice, leadership, decision-making)	Few Black people in leadership or teaching roles; DEI initiatives lack accountability.	Youth note “no Black instructors.” Employees report promotions “go to friends, not talent.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated community-based hiring, shared decision-making committees; incentivized equity targets in hiring and promotion • Leadership development for Black professionals
CREATION & IDENTITY (innovation, expression, cultural recognition)	Hypervisibility without power as Black creativity fuels menus and trends but is under-credited or appropriated; cultural erasure is acceptable in mainstream spaces	Chefs’ ideas “get taken and rebranded by others.” Consumers say they feel “seen” only in Black-owned restaurants and workers feel tokenized: “They use my face for diversity but don’t listen to me.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight Black culinary heritage in marketing and education • Fund Black culinary start-ups • Protect creative ownership • Increase media visibility of Black chefs • Establish a Black Culinary Association in institutions, create pipelines for representation in leadership
FREEDOM (autonomy and self-determination)	Structural racism, financial gatekeeping, and token DEI restrict autonomy and voice.	Youth: “We just want the same chance to lead that others get by default.” Black owners face barriers to expanding or franchising.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redistribute funding and decision-making power to Black-led organizations • Support self-determined training and policy initiatives • Equitable franchising opportunities

Subsistence (economic security and livelihood):

The data reveals that the foodservice industry does not provide Black youth and adults with the ability to maintain a stable livelihood with 52% of Black workers reporting limited access to advancement, and 46% citing low pay and unpredictable scheduling as reasons for exit. These findings echo focus group reports that Black youth enter the sector with enthusiasm but encounter barriers to training and certification that curtail career growth. Even

among entrepreneurs, 41% report unequal access to financing as a barrier to business growth. Through the C3 lens, undervaluing Black culinary traditions limits how readily skill converts into income or ownership and together, this data illustrates that economic survival within the foodservice sector remains precarious for many Black workers, despite their overrepresentation in frontline roles. Practical remedies flagged in the table such as community-based hiring and mentorship, city grant programs

and targeted small-business loans, and paid apprenticeships open more stable pathways.

Protection (safety, stability, dignity): Psychological safety remains thin, with racism and tokenism described as normalised features of many workplaces. Research found that 57% of Black respondents had experienced or witnessed racial discrimination in the workplace, and nearly half felt they could not safely report such incidents without retaliation despite 82% of the surveyed restaurants having formal EDI statements. C3 interprets this as a structural devaluation of Black identity making safety conditional. Operators can counter this with clear anti-racism policies, confidential complaint channels, manager training to recognise and interrupt bias, and culturally safe dining guidelines that set expectations for staff and guests.

Understanding (learning and recognition): Culinary education and day-to-day management often under-represent Black and diasporic cuisines, reinforcing Eurocentric menus and assessment standards. The data notes that 54% of Black workers want more training in leadership and business management, yet only 28% report having access to such programs. Integrating Black food histories and techniques into curricula and requiring cultural-literacy training for chefs and servers helps ensure knowledge is recognised and rewarded, providing workers with upward mobility to continue to integrate Black food literacies into mainstream spaces.

Participation (voice, leadership, decision-making): Meaningful participation in a sector requires widespread representation in decision-making roles and yet in some regions, only 15% of Black employees hold management roles despite comprising up to 27% of the workforce. A further 56% feel their voices are not valued in policy or menu decisions, and 48% report lacking mentors or sponsors. Even when inclusion initiatives exist, they often function as pseudo-satisfiers, symbolic gestures without redistributive outcomes. By contrast, community-hiring, diversified decision-making committees, incentivized equity targets for hiring and promotion, and leadership development build credible routes into supervisory and management roles.

Creation and identity (innovation, expression, recognition): Creation and identity intersect in the capacity to express one's culture and be recognized for it. However, across the country, 71% of Black culinary professionals say their ideas are undervalued or appropriated and fewer than 10% of nationally profiled chefs identify as Black. C3 identifies the conversion of Black culinary labour into cultural profit without corresponding ownership or credit as cultural extraction. Yet innovation continues, with 64% of Black entrepreneurs developing fusion and heritage-based menu items balancing authenticity with market adaptation. Funding and structures that enable the expansion of creative output needs to be activated by funding Black culinary start-ups, protecting creative ownership and crediting



originators, increasing media visibility, and creating Black Culinary Associations in culinary institutions to strengthen authorship and market recognition.

Freedom (autonomy and self-determination):

Freedom, in Max-Neef's model, is the culmination of fulfilled needs and the ability to act on one's values without penalty. Our data shows that the current foodservice system limits self-determination even as workers and entrepreneurs build community-based solutions: 59% aspire to entrepreneurship, yet 45% cite financing gaps and 38% report fear of discrimination from suppliers or landlords. Cooperative and community-led ownership models operate as synergic satisfiers, linking autonomy with identity, participation, and creation while widening access to capital and reducing gatekeeping that limits firm formation and scale. As Jessica (Ontario) put it: "I personally feel like Black-owned restaurants

serve as role models and provide mentorship opportunities for aspiring Black chefs, and it also helps to build a stronger food industry within the Black community. So it's a win-win."

Viewed through the Human Scale Development lens, the Canadian foodservice industry operates as a deficient satisfier—it depends on Black labour and creativity to generate value but fails to meet the fundamental human needs of those it relies on most. This is systemic rather than anecdotal: wage gaps, unsafe environments, limited advancement, and exclusion from authorship and ownership produce deprivation across need categories. Yet, the same data also reveal the seeds of transformation and the resilience of the community underscoring the dual lesson of HSD and C3: equity in the foodservice is not merely a matter of inclusion but of redistribution—of power, profit, and cultural value. ●





KEY FINDING 3

Black consumer sentiment is influenced by inclusion and anti-racism

Black consumers link visible inclusion to where they dine, how often they return, and how they talk about brands. Operators should take note, as Black diners continue to outrank other racialized groups in foodservice spending, with 78% Black women and men noting that they order food and beverages once a week or more compared to 62% of White people and 51% of non-Black people of colour. This is a 10-point decrease from the 2021 survey which more than likely accounts for the change in post-pandemic eating habits.

The intersectionality of their identities as frequent diners and minorities existing in largely non-Black spaces lends Black consumers a unique perspective towards businesses prioritizing EDI practices for workers and guests. Consumers evaluate credibility by what they see in the room, at the door, and online.



The biggest thing is the attire, the dress code. That thing drives me crazy because a lot of the times when you're going into an establishment the first kind of, like, red flag is if you're wearing a hat, then you can't come in. And that's usually, historically, been tied to, like, obviously black people. Like, you're playing the music that we created, but we have to dress a certain way to be able to come into the establishment to experience it, or even, you know, spend our money.

IBRAHIM
(Ontario)

Les serveurs étaient moins disposé à faire un bon service parce que j'étais noire. Il m'ignorait complètement alors que les gens à côté qui étaient blancs les serveurs leur offraient un bon service.

ANONYMOUS RESPONDENT
Describing being treated poorly by waitstaff, a typical experience of "Dining while Black"

WHEN YOU'RE GOING OUT TO EAT, YES, YOU'RE GOING FOR FOOD, BUT YOU'RE ALSO GOING FOR LIKE, THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF IT. AND BEING ABLE TO BE FREE AND OPEN WITH THAT SERVER BECAUSE YOU HAVE SOME CULTURAL THINGS IN COMMON IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO THAT OVERALL EXPERIENCE.

MAX
(Ontario)

UNLIKE OTHER GUESTS, THE HOST REQUESTED REPEATED ID VERIFICATIONS.

ANONYMOUS RESPONDENT

And yet, despite these incidents Black consumers are not opting out of foodservice altogether. Rather, consumers and employees are resolute in advising restaurants on what to do to create systems change solutions that create better dining experiences, community relationships, and work environments for all equity-denied groups. For Black women, this looks like creating safe spaces for employees to have their voices heard (85% agreed), fostering relationships with community leaders and racial justice organizations (75% agreed), and aligning with food and beverage suppliers that have DEI commitments that mirror the restaurant’s values (70% agreed). Similar responses were shared by Black men who ranked “including EDI as part of a restaurant’s core values” as the third most popular option with 70% in agreement.

Welcoming diversity is not new to the Black community thanks to the vast diversity of nationalities and ethnicities within the Black diaspora. As a result, they seek out and reward establishments that feel safe, fair, and culturally competent. As one focus group participant put it, “my favourite food is food.” Authentic cultural culinary experiences are appreciated, while appropriation, dishonesty, and a watering down of cultural traditions is derided.

When operators act on equity, visit intent and loyalty improve. When they do not, consumers reduce frequency, warn their networks, or avoid entire chains. This formula is essential for

I’m looking at service, I’m looking at respect. I’m looking at principle: the way you deal with me, the way I’m dealing with you. I don’t have a problem with hiring somebody that is from a different culture, as long as they understand the Jamaican culture or the African culture and how to service Black people in that restaurant. But nowadays, it’s changed, because you have a lot of Chinese people that are popping up restaurants and saying it’s a Trinidadian restaurant, it’s a Jamaican restaurant when it’s basically not.

MARJORIE
(Ontario)

In Toronto we have a lot of enclave communities. Some restaurant owners only hire people from their own background. It would be good if the owners had DEI training to see how they can create and see the benefits of a more inclusive workforce.

ANONYMOUS RESPONDENT

employers to grasp in light of the Target boycott in the US where online and offline organizing, led by Pastor Jamal Bryant, corralled Black communities to cease visits to the retailer following its unexpected

anti-EDI shift in January 2025. The widespread consumer action led to a 33% stock price drop and consistent 3% or more monthly decline in foot traffic, as reported by Investopedia in September 2025. Despite their relatively small demographic size, Black Canadian consumers are similarly prepared to speak out with their wallets. Between 2022 and 2025, Black women and men noted that they would be more or less likely to visit restaurants or order through delivery apps if the following actions were taken: have a reputation for treating employees fairly (76% more likely), proactively educate the public on racial justice issues (67%), and/or use their website, social media, menu, in-store advertising etc. to voice support for racial justice (63%). With Black out-of-home dining habits outpacing the

next consumer category by 16 percentage points, foodservice operators must address their operational and marketing gaps to meet the expectations of a consumer segment with an outsized share of visits and spend.

Above all, regular interactions with interpersonal and systemic racism have left Black guests hyperobservant and easily able to connect visible inclusion to concrete market behaviour: where they dine, how often they return, and how they speak about brands. They notice when businesses carry inclusive practices through the full experience but also confer outsized impact to small improvements that are visible and consistent, whether for national chains or independent locations. ●

AWAY FROM HOME DINING TRENDS



78% of Black Canadians order dine in, takeaway, or delivery more than once a week compared to:



65% of other racialized groups,



62% of White Canadians,



56% of South Asian Canadians, and



34% of East Asian Canadians.

IMPLICATIONS, POLICY LEVERS, & NEXT STEPS

The report's three key findings show that equity is not a reputational add-on, it is a core operating system that shapes who can access good work, how long they stay, and where guests choose to spend. How decision makers choose to activate solutions for these focuses carries direct economic consequences for operators and the wider ecosystem. Together, our conclusions explain why underinvestment in equity shows up as higher costs, weaker performance, and volatile revenue, and why sector-wide action is an economic as well as moral imperative.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

When attitudes shift but structures do not, employers leave talent and money on the table. Support for EDI has grown, yet hiring, promotion, and incident response activities often operate as they always have. Hidden ladders and selectively shared information increase turnover, extend vacancy days, and increase backfill and retraining costs. Proven staff are held in lower-impact roles or decline promotions to avoid toxic environments, signalling a “promotion penalty” that depresses internal mobility and forces operators into more expensive external recruitment. Demand for foodservice jobs is present, but the supply of fair, transparent jobs is constrained, placing an avoidable drag on growth and service quality.

“EQUITY IS NOT A REPUTATIONAL ADD-ON, IT IS A CORE OPERATING SYSTEM.”

Where workplaces fail to meet Black workers' core human needs (subsistence, protection, understanding, participation, creation and identity, and freedom) business risk rises. Unpredictable schedules and unsafe environments push absenteeism and turnover up, inflating replacement and training budgets and eroding service consistency. Minimal access to training and limited decision-making voice reduce problem-solving on the floor, slow recovery from errors, and blunt productivity. Cultural extraction (drawing on Black foodways and creativity without recognition, authorship, or reward) undermines motivation and weakens product differentiation, squeezing margins and dulling brand distinctiveness. Financing gaps, landlord and supplier bias, and limited ownership pathways constrain business formation and scale, dampen local economic multipliers, and narrow supplier diversity. The sector depresses retention, productivity, and new business creation even as it relies on Black talent and literacies for everyday performance and innovation. ►

Black consumers’ choices directly shape demand in the sector. Black guests dine out more frequently than many other groups and closely track whether inclusion is visible in staffing, policies, and practice. When operators act credibly on equity, visit intent and frequency rise, average cheque stabilises, and revenue becomes less volatile. When incidents of “dining while Black” go unaddressed, spend drops, churn accelerates, and months of marketing investment can be undone by negative word of mouth. Consistent incident response, clear guest conduct standards, and standardised or public reporting of incidents and resolution timelines reduce uncertainty for both guests and racialised employees. This strengthens loyalty and opens brand opportunities for operators who can demonstrate accountable practices and good faith within the communities they serve.

These patterns leave the sector with a clear choice. Foodservice in Canada can continue to rely on Black workers and guests while absorbing the rising costs of exclusion or it can treat equity as core operating infrastructure by funding the right systems, aligning incentives with measurable outcomes, and centering Black leadership.

POLICY LEVERS AND NEXT STEPS

The recommendations that follow translate these implications into concrete levers for operators, educators, funders, and policymakers. The focus is on building equity as basic operating infrastructure: funding Black-led systems, aligning incentives with measurable outcomes, and embedding race-based research and implementation so that fair workplaces become the norm rather than the exception.



1

Fund Black-led research as essential infrastructure. Provide multi-year, flexible grants so teams can set priorities, adapt methods, compensate participants fairly, and share findings openly. Establish a dedicated Black foodservice research fund to build longitudinal datasets and support sector-wide learning.

2

Adopt community-led research standards. Require paid community governance, trauma-informed protocols, culturally safe methods, and budgets for translation, childcare, food, and transportation. These standards strengthen data quality and trust, and ensure results flow into tools, training, and policy.

3

Train the environment, not only employees. Make manager capability the centrepiece: anti-Black racism, bias-resistant hiring and evaluation, equitable scheduling, pay transparency, conflict de-escalation, and equity-informed responses to “dining while Black” incidents. Pair training courses with on-the-job coaching and checklists supervisors use in interviews, scheduling, and performance conversations.

4

Tie training dollars to measurable results. Require a light, consistent dashboard that tracks incident rates and resolution times, retention and promotion for Black staff, wage-gap closure, representation in lead and management roles, completion of paid training, and safety and belonging scores. Share aggregate results with staff. Renew funding for operators that hit targets and provide technical assistance where results lag.

5

Remove cost and time barriers to uptake. Offer transit-to-work support such as monthly passes for hourly workers and subsidies for required credentials. Pair these with predictable, equitable scheduling so staff can use the benefits. For SMEs, package support as turnkey bundles that include manager training, transit, credential renewal, and quick-start policy templates to better meet the needs of Black youth seeking supported career progression.

6

Invest in ownership and supplier diversity. Expand shared kitchens and incubators, pair space with micro-loans or patient capital, bookkeeping and licensing supports, and procurement readiness. Set procurement targets and timelines in public institutions, major venues, and chains to move real dollars to Black-owned suppliers and caterers.

7

Plan for later-career and retirement security. Introduce pooled pensions or RRSP matching for hourly staff, phased retirement options, benefits bridges for part-time employees, ergonomic assessments, and scheduling adjustments that extend healthy tenure. These measures protect lifetime earnings and reduce precarity after retirement.

8

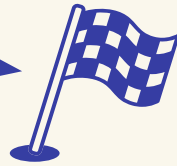
Run place-based pilots and measure impact. In neighbourhoods with high Black youth unemployment, bundle employer coaching, paid pre-employment training, anchor procurement, and pop-up markets that drive foot traffic. Evaluate jobs created, retention, promotions, business births, local spend recirculation, incident reduction, and guest loyalty. Use rapid-cycle evaluation to adjust within weeks.

9

Standardize tools and keep them open. Operators need editable templates for skills-based job postings and structured interviews, checklists for scheduling and pay equity audits, guest-conduct and incident-response policies, mentorship ladders from line to lead to supervisor, supplier-diversity procurement templates, and simple dashboards for turnover, promotion, wage-gap, and belonging tracking. Host these resources with sector guides and refresh annually using lessons from audits and pilots. The accompanying toolkit includes resources that operationalize some of these items.

10

Strengthen the training ecosystem and curricula. Co-design foodservice curricula with Black chefs, educators, students, and employers so training reflects Black food literacies and prepares learners for fair, high-quality jobs they can innovate within. Require paid co-ops or internships with equity standards, align micro-credentials to real roles, launch Black Culinary Student Associations with mentor pools, and provide faculty development on anti-Black racism, inclusive assessment, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Embed bias-resistant evaluation in practicum and track completion, placement, promotion, and entrepreneurship outcomes.



Equity must be treated as a system to be built and maintained. Resource Black-led research and implementation. Train managers and hold environments accountable for results. Reduce barriers that keep good ideas from taking root. Expand ownership and protect workers across the full arc of their careers, including retirement. With these steps, Canada's foodservice sector can translate commitments into measurable gains for Black workers and owners, more resilient small businesses, and stronger community wealth. ●



APPENDICES

A. BIOS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

B. SURVEY QUESTIONS

C. REFERENCES

APPENDIX A: Bios & Acknowledgements

Elle Asiedu (she/they) is a strategist, entrepreneur, and systems change facilitator known for developing innovative, data-informed solutions. As the Co-Founder and Executive Director of The Re-Seasoning Coalition (TRSC), she has developed a reputation for strategic partnerships that build new avenues for equity, representation, and action in Canada's foodservice industry. Formerly a public sector marketer and small business owner, Elle is a valued contributor to municipal and community think tanks that re-imagine equity at the forefront of social change through the lens of business development and community engagement.

A multihyphenate creative, Elle was selected as an inaugural member of How Women Lead's Women Leaders for the World - Black Diaspora Cohort in 2024 and has leveraged her eclectic expertise to spearhead each of TRSC's sector leading initiatives including their *Equity & Empowerment in Foodservice* e-learning program, Black Experience Pavilion exhibit, and Hire Her and Black Talent Networking Session events.

Mama Adobea Nii-Owoo (she/her) is an incoming Assistant Professor at McGill University, specializing in multilingual education policies, teacher education, and international development education. Her research aims to translate data into policies that improve access, equity, and excellence in education. She has worked on research projects in Ontario that address multilingual learners in mainstream schools and has conducted workshops to collect multilingual data on women's roles in sustainable farming in West Africa and their participation in Ghana's parliament. Additionally, Mama has contributed to research on the skill development of Black emerging filmmakers in Canada and supported curriculum reviews aimed at strengthening African Studies programming at the University of Toronto.

Her research has been published in *Centring Multilingual Learners and Countering Racio-linguistic Ideologies in Teacher Education*, the *Handbook of Language and the Global South*, and in journals such as TESL Canada and OLBI. Mama's work is featured in the documentary *No Vernacular*, which examines African multilingualism and language policy in Ghana.

Evelyn Amponsah (she/her) is a transformative leader renowned for driving systemic change, fostering strategic innovation, and building empowered, high-performing teams. With deep expertise across multiple sectors, she bridges divergent interests to build consensus and inspire action. Evelyn has earned a reputation for her groundbreaking work in developing anti-Black racism frameworks, evidence-based community approaches, and practical toolkits grounded in anti-oppression and equity principles.

A scholar and advocate, Evelyn holds a PhD from York University, where her research examines the political economy of anti-Black racism. She was the co-founder of the York University Black Graduate Students Collective, which spearheaded institutional change, resulting in the creation of Black Studies programs and a commitment to increase Black faculty representation. Evelyn is committed to equipping individuals, organizations, and communities with the tools to confront anti-Black racism, dismantle systemic inequities, and create transformative, inclusive futures.

Kyra Knapp (she/her) is an economic development & tourism leader based in Ontario's Southwest. She is the CEO of KLB Consulting, a values-based consulting firm dedicated to supporting equity, diversity, and inclusion in Canada's economic landscape. Kyra is passionate about elevating the voices and businesses of marginalized peoples and sustainable approaches to Economic and community development. She has her PAED (Professional Aboriginal Economic Development Certification), is CANDO certified, and is a trained Experience Development Coach. Named one of EDCOs Top 10 Economic Development Professionals in 2021 and one of Business Elite's Top 40 Under 40 In Canada, Kyra has honed her skills over a decade working in Municipal and Indigenous Economic Development and believes that the way to an equitable economic landscape is centred around regenerative practices.

Kyra specializes in community economic development, strategic planning, and tourism development. She was a Director for RTO1, Ontario's Southwest, where she sat as the Chair of the Governance Committee. Kyra is also a director of the Economic Development Council of Ontario where she also chairs the DEI Committee.

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Vivian Lai

Tristan Vogel

KLB Consultants

APPENDIX B: Survey Questions

TRSC's Stoking the Flame Survey

Survey Cover

This survey is designed to understand your experiences with discrimination in the foodservice industry and your perceptions of restaurants and their affiliated suppliers as employers of choice. We are primarily interested in understanding what actions leaders should take in creating inclusive workplaces and how Canadians perceive their employment prospects at restaurants, at food and beverage manufacturers, at restaurant equipment and packaging companies and food/beverage distributors. The survey will take about 20-25 minutes to complete. Thank you!

1. In which Province/Territory do you live?

- a. Alberta
- b. British Columbia
- c. Manitoba
- d. New Brunswick
- e. Newfoundland & Labrador
- f. Northwest Territory
- g. Nova Scotia
- h. Nunavut Territory
- i. Ontario
- j. P.E.I.
- k. Quebec
- l. Saskatchewan
- m. Yukon Territory

2. Select the population size that best describes your community.

- a. Major city (1 million or more)
- b. Mid-size city (100,000-499,999)
- c. Small city (10,000-99,000)
- d. Small town/rural (less than 9,999)

3. Please indicate your age

- a. Under 18
- b. 18 to 24
- c. 25 to 34
- d. 35 to 44
- e. 45 to 54
- f. 55 to 64
- g. 65+

- 4. Please indicate your gender**
- Male
 - Female
 - Transgender
 - Non-Binary/Non-Conforming
 - Prefer not to disclose
- 5. Which of the below do you most closely identify as?**
- Black (e.g Black African, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, Black Canadian, etc.)
 - East and Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, Chinese, Japanese, Korean etc.)
 - Indigenous, First Nations
 - Latin, Central, or South American
 - Middle Eastern, North African
 - Non-Black Caribbean (e.g., Indo-Caribbean, Chinese-Caribbean, etc.)
 - South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)
 - White (e.g European, White Canadian, etc.)
 - Of mixed heritage
 - Other
- 6. What is your employment status?**
- Employed/Self-employed
 - Unemployed
 - Seeking employment
 - In school
 - Retired
 - Other
- 7. IF SELECTED 18-34 AND “UNEMPLOYED” OR “SEEKING EMPLOYMENT”:**
What factors have affected your unemployment status?
- Employed/Self-employed
 - Unemployed
 - Seeking employment
 - In school
 - Retired
 - Other
- 8. IF SELECTED “SEEKING EMPLOYMENT”, ALL AGES:**
Which of the following factors are the most important when considering a new job opportunity?
- Compensation and/or benefits
 - Distance of workplace from home
 - The job’s connection to my field of study or interest
 - Whether anyone on the team looks like me
 - Stability of the role or industry

- 9. IF SELECTED “SEEKING EMPLOYMENT” and “BLACK” OR “MIXED HERITAGE”, ALL AGES:
Which of the following actions do you see as indicators that a particular workplace will not be a safe space for you?**
- Few or no employees look like me (lack of representation within peer groups)
 - Few or no leaders look like me (lack of representation within management)
 - Employee Guidebooks or Codes of Conduct are missing or hard to find
 - Interview process was rushed or impersonal
 - Other
- 10. Are you currently or have you been previously employed in the restaurant industry in any capacity (e.g., Kitchen staff, server, cashier, restaurant brand manager, caterer, corporate chef, taste tester, food influencer, journalist, etc.)?**
- No
 - No, but I am considering working in the restaurant industry
 - Yes, I am currently employed in the restaurant industry
 - Yes, I have previously worked in the restaurant industry
 - Of mixed heritage
 - Other
- 11. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
What was your/is your role in the food and beverage industry?**
- Front of House (host, server, bartender, cashier)
 - Back of House (chef, line-cook, dishwasher)
 - Store-level Management (manager, key holder)
 - Brand Management (head office, support staff)
 - Industry Supplier (producer, distributor, association)
 - Media (influencer, journalist)
 - Educator (culinary school instructor, hospitality management professor)
 - Food entrepreneur (caterer, baker, etc)
 - Other: Please specify
- 12. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE BUT NOT “MANAGEMENT”:
How many workers are/were employed in the establishment you work/worked at?**
- 1-9 workers- Micro business
 - 10-49 workers small business
 - 50 to 249 workers medium sized business
 - 250-499 workers Large but under 500 workers employed
 - 500 + workers Large scale operation-Corporation
- 13. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Overall, how many employees does your company employ?**
- 1-9
 - 10-49
 - 50 to 249 workers
 - 250-499 workers
 - 500 +

- 14. IF SELECTED “1-499” to HOW MANY WORKERS:
You mentioned you worked in foodservice at a small or medium size business/
independent restaurant. How long were you employed there?**
- Less than a year
 - 1 -5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - More than 10 years
- 15. You mentioned that you are working in the foodservice industry or considering
a career in foodservice. What factors have influenced your decision to join the
industry? Check all that apply.**
- Abundance of entry level positions
 - Flexible hours
 - Working with people my age/developing a social network
 - Following my passion/dream
 - Potential to make tips
 - Learning a trade or skill
 - Future career prospects
 - Jobs within walking distance of my dwelling
- 16. IF SELECTED “NO” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
What deterred you from seeking employment in the foodservice industry?
Check all that apply.**
- Work-life balance
 - Physical environment/labour
 - Future career prospects
 - Lack of representation
 - Lack of foundational skills/training
 - Inadequate compensation
 - Lack of health benefits
 - Racism
 - Other
- 17. How often do you order food and beverages from the following types of
locations?**
- Restaurants for Dine-In
 - Restaurants for take-out/drive-thru
 - Food Delivery Apps (e.g., Uber Eats, SkipTheDishes, etc.)
 - National Chains (McDonald’s, The Keg, Swiss Chalet, etc.)
 - Midsized Regional Chains (e.g., Triple O’s, St. Hubert, Turtle Jacks)
 - Local Independent Restaurant Operators
 - Never
 - Longer than every 3 months
 - Once every 2-3 months
 - Once a month
 - Two to three times a month
 - Once a week
 - A couple times a week but not every day
 - Every day

- 18. How important is it to you that the restaurants you visit or the food delivery apps you use (e.g., Uber Eats, SkipTheDishes, etc.) prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion practices within their organization?**
- Very unimportant
 - Unimportant
 - Neither important nor unimportant
 - Important
 - Very important
- 19. What role do you believe restaurants should play in publicly supporting racial justice issues?**
- Passive role (ally): provide general support, but take limited action
 - Active role (activist): provide proactive support and take broad action
 - No role: I do not want foodservice businesses to get involved
- 20. A restaurant company or delivery app can best support racial justice by...**
- Bringing in credible DEI consultants to help assess current HR practices
 - Bringing in a credible DEI consultant to help assess ways to eliminate bias in hiring/promotion
 - Requiring anti-bias training for employees
 - Including DEI as part of a restaurant's core values
 - Offering paid time-off for employees wanting to demonstrate activism
 - Routinely sharing successful and unsuccessful DEI practices with neighbouring restaurants to help strengthen the entire community
 - Aligning with food and beverage suppliers that have DEI commitments that mirror the restaurant's values
 - Creating safe spaces for employees to have their voices heard
 - Donating a percentage of proceeds to racial justice organizations and/or local organizations supporting underserved communities
 - Donating 100% of proceeds on a specific day to racial justice organizations and/or local organizations supporting underserved communities
 - Fostering relationships with community leaders and racial justice organizations
 - They should take no action-steps to support diversity, equity and inclusion
 - Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree

21. How will the following actions from a restaurant or food delivery app impact your intent to visit/order?

I will order or visit from restaurants or food delivery apps, more or less frequently, if they..

- a. Have a reputation for not treating all customers with respect
- b. Treat customers in ways that result in social media backlash and/or calls for boycotts of the company
- c. Treat employees in ways that result in social media backlash and/or calls for boycotts of the company
- d. Are minority owned and operated
- e. Donate a percentage of proceeds to racial justice organizations and/or local organizations supporting underserved communities
- f. Donate 100% of proceeds on a specific day to racial justice organizations and/or local organizations supporting underserved communities
- g. Have a reputation for treating its employees fairly
- h. Proactively educate the public on racial justice issues
- i. Use their website, social media, menu, in-store advertising etc. to voice support for racial justice
- j. Do nothing to support racial justice
 - i. Much less frequently
 - ii. Less frequently
 - iii. Neither more or less frequently
 - iv. More frequently
 - v. Much more frequently

22. In general, how big of an issue do you feel racial injustice is in Canada today?

- a. Not an issue at all
- b. Not that big of an issue
- c. Somewhat of an issue
- d. An important issue
- e. A very important issue

23. Thinking of your own experiences at restaurants, for a dine-in or takeout/delivery occasion, about how often would you say you have personally experienced or witnessed racial discrimination while dining out at a restaurant?

- a. Never
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often
- e. Always

24. IF SELECTED “YES” TO WITNESSING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION:

Can you describe specific examples of the racial discrimination you have experienced at a restaurant?

[OPEN ENDED]

25. IF SELECTED “BLACK OR MIXED HERITAGE”:
Earlier you mentioned experiencing some form of discrimination while dining out at restaurants. How can restaurateurs create better dining experiences for Black Canadians?
[OPEN ENDED]
26. IF SELECTED YES” TO IMPLEMENT DEI:
What approaches should restaurants and other foodservice employers take to provide more equitable hiring practices? Please select your top three 3 choices from the list below
- Revamp job descriptions to focus on skills instead of credentials and/or review job descriptions to have more inclusive terminology
 - Explicitly state the organization’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in job postings and/or implement policies that provide a long-term commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion
 - Participate in job fairs and events focused on underrepresented communities and/or partner with community organizations to build relationships with underrepresented groups
 - Encourage employees to refer candidates from diverse backgrounds
 - Create diverse interview panels that include people from various backgrounds
 - Remove identifying information from resumes during initial screening and/or standardize interview questions and processes to focus on skill-based questions instead of cultural fit
 - Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training to all hiring managers and interviewers and/or regularly assess the hiring process to identify areas for improvement
 - Report on diversity levels within the organization transparently
 - Other: Please specify
27. **In your own words, what are restaurant and other foodservice employers missing when it comes to integrating diversity, equity and inclusion into the workplace?**
[OPEN ENDED]
28. **It has been roughly 5 years since the latest wave of social justice activism began. In your opinion, to what extent has the workplace in Canada become more or less equitable?**
- Significantly less equitable
 - Less equitable
 - Unsure
 - More equitable
 - Significantly more equitable
29. IF SELECTED “MORE EQUITABLE OR SIGNIFICANTLY MORE EQUITABLE”:
You indicated that you felt the Canadian workplace had become more equitable over the last few years. In what ways has it become more equitable?
[OPEN ENDED]

30. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:

Thinking about your experiences as a foodservice employee, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- a. I have experienced or witnessed racial discrimination in my workplace
- b. I am confident my employer will/did act fairly if an act of racism was reported to management
- c. I am confident my employer will/did act quickly if an act of racism was reported to management
- d. My employer is/was committed to promoting an equitable and inclusive workplace
- e. Opportunities for growth and advancement exist for all employees
- f. I have received adequate training on diversity and inclusive workplaces
- g. My employer had/has equity policies, including harassment and discrimination procedures
- h. I have been denied employment or advancement because of my race
 - i. Strongly disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neither agree nor Disagree
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly agree

31. IF SELECTED “NO’ TO EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:

To what extent did the training requirements for working in foodservice and/or hospitality prevent you from joining the industry?

- a. Culinary arts/hospitality programs were too expensive
- b. Culinary arts/hospitality programs were not available in my area
- c. I did not meet the requirements for culinary arts/hospitality programs
- d. The training requirements did not prevent me from joining the industry
- e. Other

32. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:

What factors have most influenced your inability to advance in your restaurant career? Check all that apply:

- a. Lack of mentorship
- b. Unclear promotion pathways
- c. Racial bias,
- d. Financial limitations,
- e. Limited access to training,
- f. Other - please specify

- 33. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:**
How would you describe the inclusivity of your workplace hiring practices?
- a. Not inclusive at all
 - b. Not inclusive
 - c. Somewhat inclusive
 - d. Inclusive
 - e. Very inclusive
- 34. IF SELECTED “YES OR NO” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:**
I feel that racial bias has negatively impacted my career progression in the foodservice industry.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
- 35. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:**
I think that Black employees receive equal treatment in hiring practices, promotion opportunities, and equal pay as compared to their non-Black colleagues in the restaurant and foodservice industry.
- a. Not inclusive at all
 - b. Not inclusive
 - c. Somewhat inclusive
 - d. Inclusive
 - e. Very inclusive
- 36. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE and “BLACK OR MIXED HERITAGE”:**
Workplace bias or discrimination have affected my confidence in pursuing leadership roles.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
- 37. IF SELECTED “YES” to EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE and “BLACK OR MIXED HERITAGE”:**
I have access to mentorship and leadership opportunities that support my professional growth in foodservice.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree

38. IF SELECTED “CULINARY SCHOOL” TO EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
My culinary school offers strong support for aspiring Black food entrepreneurs, including guidance on business registration, funding, branding, and access to career development opportunities.
- Not inclusive at all
 - Not inclusive
 - Somewhat inclusive
 - Inclusive
 - Very inclusive
39. IF SELECTED “EDUCATOR” TO EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Representation (EDI&R) training is effectively incorporated into our curriculum for all students.
- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
40. IF SELECTED “EDUCATOR” TO EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
My institution provides mentorship and networking opportunities specifically for Black students pursuing culinary careers.
- Not inclusive at all
 - Not inclusive
 - Somewhat inclusive
 - Inclusive
 - Very inclusive
41. IF SELECTED “EDUCATOR” TO EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Our program collaborates with Black chefs and food entrepreneurs to provide role models and industry insights to students.
- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree

42. IF SELECTED “EMPLOYED”:
In your opinion, what are the biggest barriers preventing Black and other marginalized groups from being fully prepared for employment in the foodservice industry? *Select all that apply*
- Limited access to culturally responsive mentorship programs that support Black and racialized applicants interested in working in food service.
 - Bias in hiring processes that disproportionately affect Black and marginalized applicants
 - Inadequate industry training programs that fail to address systemic inequities in career progression
 - Gaps in financial resources, scholarships, and grants tailored for Black culinary students and entrepreneurs
 - Limited access to professional networking and leadership pipelines for racialized workers
 - Lack of representation of Black and racialized chefs, managers, and executives in foodservice industry leadership
 - Other (please specify)
43. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
To what extent do you believe diversity and inclusion is an important priority area for your company?
- Not important
 - Slightly important
 - Moderately important
 - Important
 - Very important
44. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
How familiar are you with the term ‘systemic racism’ or ‘systemic anti-Black racism’?
- Not at all familiar
 - A little bit familiar
 - Somewhat familiar
 - Very familiar
 - Extremely familiar
45. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Does your company or organization currently have a diversity and inclusion program to help attract, retain, and promote Black employees?
- Yes
 - No
 - I don’t know

46. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Do you have a mentorship or sponsorship program in place to support, retain, and/or promote Black employees as part of your corporate strategy?
- Yes
 - No
 - I don't know
47. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Please describe what barriers you face, internally or externally, to pushing anti-racist and diversity & inclusion policies forward.
[OPEN ENDED]
48. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
As a business owner, how would you prefer to implement policies and practices supporting equity, diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation in your workplace?
- Through a program I develop internally
 - Through a program developed by an external consultant
 - Through hiring an HR representative to work within the company
 - Through a program co-developed with an external consultant
 - Other
49. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Which factors are the most important when determining whether to implement policies and practices supporting equity, diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation in your workplace?
- Overall cost
 - Actual vs expected impact on the workforce
 - Time required to implement new policies and practices
 - Public perception of the business after implementing new policies and practices
 - Approval from head office/corporate
50. IF SELECTED “MANAGEMENT, SUPPLIER, EDUCATOR” IN EMPLOYED IN FOODSERVICE:
Which of the following types of programs would make it easier for you to implement policies and practices supporting equity, diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation in your workplace? *Select all that apply*
- Subsidies for skill building programs for management
 - Training programs led by a research institute or university to train managers on implementing such policies
 - An e-learning program providing recommendations for recruitment and retention of equity-deserving groups
 - industry-wide programs and initiatives promoting equitable hiring practices and/or Black representation in foodservice.
 - Other, please specify

APPENDIX C: References

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