



Guide to Applying a Black-Centric Lens to Employment and Social Development Canada's Policies, Programs and Services

Prepared by Employment and Social Development Canada's Gender Based Analysis Plus Center of Expertise

The objective of the Black-Centric Lens is to equip employees with the knowledge and resources, allowing them to address the existing disparities facing the diverse and intersectional Black communities by:

1. Emphasizing the importance of understanding historical contexts when developing and implementing initiatives that impact Black populations.
2. Understanding the demographics and socio-economic conditions of Black populations in Canada, including key drivers of quality-of-life disparities and gaps in research and analysis.
3. Highlighting the importance of the lived experiences of Black populations, by emphasizing the recurring concerns voiced by Black-led/serving organizations so that employees are equipped with a basic understanding of the lived experiences of Black Canadians.
4. Equipping employees with best practices and key considerations when applying a Black-Centric lens.



Key Terminology

What is Race?

Race is a social construct. It was used to establish a classification system of people and those categorized as “non-white” were subject to some of the greatest atrocities in human history. While biological attributes of race have been scientifically discredited, the social construction of race remains a potent force in society.

What is Systemic Racism vs. Implicit or Unconscious Bias?

Systemic racism is defined by persistent structural practices that economically, culturally and socially disadvantages historically underrepresented populations. On the other hand, implicit or unconscious bias are internalized belief patterns shaped by assumptions and practices rooted in prejudiced social norms. These biases arise out of our history.

What is Anti-Black Racism?

Anti-Black Racism distinguishes between racism experienced by Black communities and discrimination directed towards other racialized groups. The intention is not to minimize the experiences of other groups but to emphasize that anti-Black racism persists specifically because of colonial policies tailored to exclude Black people.

What is a Microaggression?

A microaggression is a subtle behavior – verbal or non-verbal, conscious, or unconscious – directed at a member of a marginalized group that has a derogatory and harmful effect. While this definition distinguishes between implicit and explicit forms of discrimination, and more particularly racism, it is important to understand that microaggressions have significant adverse effects, cumulative, chain-linked, and long-term impacts on individuals and communities. For example complimenting a person raised in Canada on their English simply because they are not white or a white person telling a Black person that “Racism does not exist in today’s society.”

It is important to address microaggressions because they occur daily and are the most common form of Anti-Black racism. People who engage in microaggressions may mean no harm toward the person or group being targeted. They may not even realize that they are making a microaggressive comment or action. Regardless, microaggressions can be very hurtful to the people who experience them.

A Brief History...

Canadian slavery differed in certain ways from American slavery. The Canadian climate did not allow plantations to exist, meaning large groups of slaves were not in demand. However, the treatment of those enslaved remained the same - trauma related to the loss of cultural identities, as well as physical, psychological, and sexual violence and death. As a result, America's history of racism has eclipsed Canada's and left it largely forgotten. Despite this, the legacy of slavery is shared between both nations and has produced similar assumptions of who is deserving of full and equal participation in society.

The lives of Black Canadians have undeniably been shaped over centuries by discriminatory practices designed to marginalize and disadvantage their communities. However, this history should be noted alongside a recognition of the advancements made by Black Canadians such as Viola Desmond, Mary Ann Shadd, and Rosemary Brown. Desmond's refusal to leave the Whites-only section of a Nova Scotia theater sparked Canada's civil rights movement; Shadd was Canada's first Black women newspaper publisher; and Brown was the first Black woman (and second woman) to run for leadership of a federal political party.

Narratives on the struggle of Black Canadians should be balanced with narratives on the community's courageous and rich history. Many civil and human right advancements influenced by Black Canadians changed the course of Canadian law and are now embedded into the Canadian Constitution through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.



How to Apply a Black Centric Lens

The application of a Black-Centric Lens requires critical self-reflection and a willingness to recognize that we all carry assumptions/implicit biases shaped by our lived experiences. In addition, identifying and acknowledging the “systemic” or “institutional” aspect is also a main factor that calls for the application of this lens.

Therefore, it is crucial for employees to carefully read the introduction and history sections in their entirety.

Evidence clearly indicates persistent differential quality of life outcomes for certain populations in Canada related to racialized characteristics and ethnicity. The diverse Black population continues to experience many relatively unique systemic barriers to achieving quality of life outcomes. As such, and for ESDC to fully meet its mandate, a much better understanding of the history, demographics, socio-economic characteristics of, and barriers like racism facing the diverse Black population is needed. The application of the Lens will challenge ESDC’s employees to self-reflect, examine their own assumptions, and intentionally work to address known disparities facing Black communities in Canada.

Trends to help you inform your decision making going forward

- The 2021 census showed that there were approximately 1.54 million Black people living in Canada, representing 4.3% of the Canadian population.
- The ethnic origins of Canada’s Black population are very diverse. In 2016, over 200 ethnic or cultural origins were reported, and respondents often reported multiple origins, particularly among third-generation Black Canadians.
- Canada’s Black population is young and growing. In 2016, the median age for the Black population was 29.6 years, versus 40.7 years for the total population
- A higher percentage of the Black population speaks French at home compared to the rest of the Canadian population
- Educational attainment tends to decrease across generations
- Labour Market Outcomes for Black Canadians tend to be less favourable than the Canadian average

Key Considerations When Applying a Black-Centric Lens

Key consideration #1: Identifying the needs of the community

- What are your assumptions about this community? How might your assumptions impact delivery?
- Has the community asked for this type of support/service/opportunity?

Key consideration #2: Building the right team

- Who is working on the file?
- Do they have any lived experience that may give them additional insight?

Key consideration #3: Understanding the historical context

- How does Canada's historical treatment of Black Canadians shape the way the Federal Government interacts with the community today?
- Have we identified gaps in our knowledge and how to address them?

Key consideration #4: Effective use and collection of data

- Have we included a qualitative data approach?
- What exactly are we measuring and how will we measure the impact?

Key consideration #5: Establishing an effective engagement and outreach strategy

- Have we established ongoing engagement with the community?
- Has their input been considered in a meaningful way?

Key consideration #6: Evaluating Impact of Policy, Program and Service Implementation

- Do we have a plan to report back to the population on established outcomes and impact?
- Were we successful in building relationships with local Black-led/serving organizations by creating ongoing relationships?

Role of ESDCA's GBA Plus Center of Expertise

The GBA Plus Centre of Expertise is responsible for advising, collaborating and supporting ESDC in incorporating an intersectional perspective to the development of policies, programs and initiatives in alignment with the Government of Canada's commitment to equality, equity, inclusion and diversity.

The GBA Plus COE is available to help you should you require support in applying a Black-Centric Lens . Our analysts can guide you through the process of including gender considerations and/or provide tools to assist you in your analysis. You can contact the GBA Plus unit at NC-GBA-ACS-GD or visit the GBA Plus GCpedia website at: [ESDC GBA CoE -GCpedia](#)

