



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy



Shine On

[Ignite the Light](#) guides every part of the YMCA's work – from employment, health and fitness and shelter services to camping, newcomer services and child care.

This Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) strategy addresses all these areas. It aims to support more equitable outcomes among YMCA participants, volunteers and employees and across communities we serve.

As YMCA leaders, we embrace our responsibility to implement the DEIB strategy: to adopt the practices it describes; to collaborate and innovate in pursuit of equity; to monitor our results and reflect on our progress; and to keep learning and listening as we work alongside communities.

Please hold us accountable.

This DEIB Strategy is endorsed by YMCA of Greater Toronto leadership:

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Strategic Direction 1

“Champion diversity, social connection and belonging.”

Goal 4

Create more equitable outcomes for staff and participants through a renewed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan.



How Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging connect with Ignite the Light

Ignite the Light’s vision of “vibrant communities where everyone can shine” can only be achieved through strong action on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB). Not every community member, participant, employee or volunteer has the same level of opportunity and access – the same chance to shine. Systemic barriers built into society, and discriminatory practices by both individuals and institutions, constrain people’s life chances in different ways – at school and at work, in health care and child care settings, in recreation activities and in many other contexts of daily life.

As a charity whose mission rests on our values of inclusiveness, integrity, kindness, optimism, respect and well-being, it’s

important for us to invest in initiatives – both internal and external – that treat people and groups more equitably now, in order to achieve more equitable outcomes for YMCA employees and participants. Ultimately, we aim to make the GTA a great place to live and work for everyone, including YMCA employees.

In addition to advancing DEIB objectives through the focus areas and tactics outlined in this document, we will ensure that anti-colonial and DEIB perspectives are embedded in other strategies connected to Ignite the Light, including the YMCA’s Housing and Positive Aging strategies and the People Strategy that guides our approach to the YMCA’s employees and volunteers.

A brief history of DEIB at the YMCA of Greater Toronto

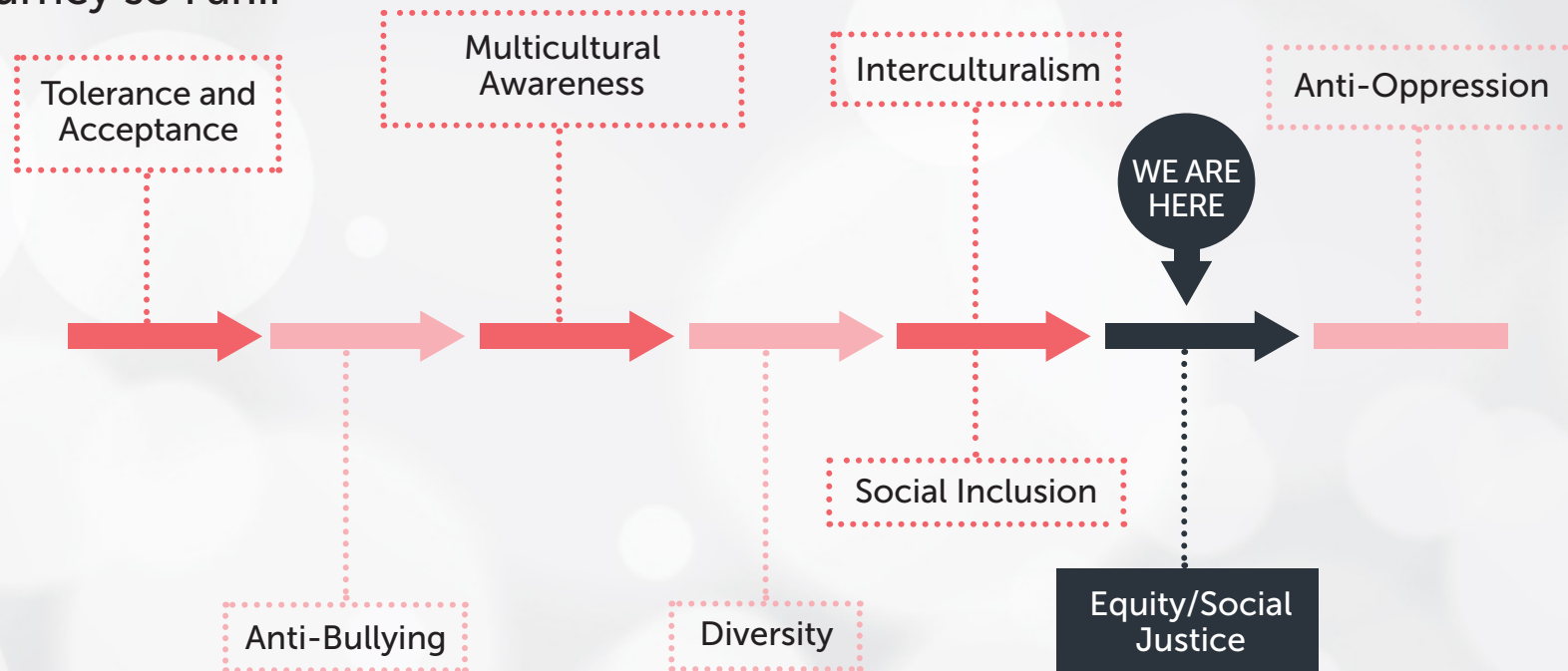
The YMCA of Greater Toronto adopted its first formal Diversity and Social Inclusion Strategy in the early 2000s. Since that time, we've continued to learn and evolve our approach. As this aspect of our work has matured, we have developed new policies and frameworks, created dedicated employee positions and Board oversight roles and engaged in equity-oriented collaborations. We've also built equity-focused questions into our

program evaluation framework to learn whether there are differences in how participants experience our programs, and to identify opportunities to improve.

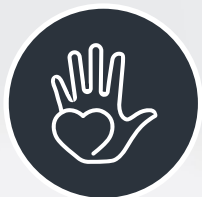
With this latest strategy, we are taking a step forward in our approach, moving beyond diversity and social inclusion toward equity and social justice. We're focusing more intently on identifying and removing systemic barriers to belonging both

internally among employees and volunteers, and more broadly among participants and community members. We recognize that equitable access to opportunities and services is what ultimately allows people to experience inclusion and belonging. The following strategy outlines the path we are following to become a charity grounded in anti-oppression practices and values.

The Journey so Far...



As society continues to change and our own organization continues to learn and improve, we expect this work to be ongoing: steadily driving our relevance and impact, and integrated into every aspect of what we do.



FROM EQUALITY TO EQUITY

The YMCA needs to make a conscious and intentional shift away from equality as the default approach in our charity. Across many contexts and organizations, treating everyone the same way has proven to be ineffective in achieving higher levels of diversity and inclusion, especially in positions of power. Equal treatment has not worked to achieve outcomes that are more equitable because it ignores – and fails to work against – the systemic barriers that create inequities in the first place.

Everyone deserves respect, access, opportunity and to be included. That is not up for debate. But while everyone should have the same access to the life chances all people deserve, we can't achieve more equitable outcomes by treating everyone the same way. We need to adjust our programs, policies and practices to take into account the unequal effects of historical and current inequities, which shape people's lived experiences both inside and outside the YMCA.

An equity approach recognizes that different people and groups have different circumstances, experiences and needs because of systems of oppression. Equity work allocates specific resources –

opportunity or access, for example – to address specific barriers. This enables those experiencing marginalization or those who face disproportionate barriers to achieve outcomes equal to those who have not faced such barriers (that is, people in the dominant culture, who benefit from systems – formal and implicit – designed to support their well-being).

While targeted equity programs and initiatives will be part of this strategy, the Y can also make gains toward higher levels of equity by assessing current programs and services from an equity perspective. Our DEIB strategy can guide changes that could make Y programs originally designed for everyone more welcoming for Indigenous Peoples and equity-deserving groups specifically. Indeed, by seeking ways to apply the principles and ideas in this strategy to many areas of our work, including through small adaptations in areas such as research, technology and communications, we can contribute to a cultural shift that has the potential to make a meaningful difference for community members, reducing barriers and building a greater sense of belonging through everything we do.

A deeper sense of belonging for people within the YMCA and in GTA communities is the intended impact of all the work described in this strategy. By taking steps toward greater equity, we aim to create more diverse and inclusive environments,

policies, programs and partnerships; these in turn support a sense of belonging. It's important to note that both the YMCA and the GTA are already highly diverse. But by dismantling barriers to full participation and inclusion, we will reduce gaps in diversity

(increasing the presence of groups of folks not participating because of discrimination, for example) and will ensure that everyone has equitable opportunities to thrive and contribute in every part of the YMCA.



Image Courtesy of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



PRINCIPLES

The YMCA of Greater Toronto is committed to achieving higher levels of equity through focused initiatives aimed at clear outcomes. The principles that guide our DEIB work are:

Well-being – We strive to enhance the well-being of communities and individuals. We understand that there is a direct correlation between physical and mental health and equitable access to programs, services and opportunities.

Community collaboration – We ensure that communities participate in and contribute to decision-making processes related to anything about them.

Innovation – We recognize that we're aiming for new outcomes in DEIB and therefore must work in new ways. We strive to be receptive to insights, knowledge, experiences, approaches, partnerships and ways of using space that are new to our charity.

Empathy – We respect lived experience and we are accountable for the impact of all of our work, including DEIB work, in and with communities. Being accountable includes receiving critical feedback without defensiveness, and applying it in a way that demonstrates care.

Balance – Lived experience, professional expertise and research all inform the decisions the YMCA makes to advance DEIB. We incorporate these diverse sources of insight in a coordinated and intentional way across all areas of our work.

Sustainability – We take a long-term view of our DEIB efforts and invest in their ongoing success and sustainability. We plan carefully to ensure that we're able to commit the people, time and money required to keep our promises to partners and communities, and to meet the expectations of stakeholders.

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Understanding our work through an equity lens is a deep and important change for the YMCA. This kind of change can sometimes be uncomfortable, but by embracing and learning from the challenges that arise as we work toward justice and against oppression, we can help to make an even more meaningful difference in the communities we serve.

John McIntyre – Chair, Board of Directors

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DEFINITIONS

Diversity – refers to the differences among individuals, their identities and their intersections. Diversity is simply a **fact**. Regardless of whether it's equitable or inclusive, a group that contains many identities is diverse. Everyone contributes to that diversity.

Inclusion – occurs when everyone is heard and can contribute and participate. The state of inclusion is achieved when a group or organization takes **action** to create those conditions.

Equity – occurs when a group or organization removes barriers and advantages so that inclusion and diversity are achievable. In a social context of inequity, creating more equitable conditions must be a **choice**; it doesn't happen on its own.

Belonging – is the result of diversity, equity and inclusion. It's a feeling that your authentic self is valued and understood. Belonging is an **outcome** that groups or organizations can support through their actions and choices with respect to equity and inclusion.

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This strategy's intersectional approach allows us to focus our efforts on overlapping systems of oppression, such as racism and ableism, as well as the people affected by them. By focusing on systems, we can be more effective in confronting – and dismantling – the roots of inequity.

Robin Waley – General Manager, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging

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Language note: Equity-deserving groups

We describe those facing systemic inequities or oppression as “equity-deserving” or “marginalized” and not “equity-seeking groups.” While well-intentioned, the term “seeking” connotes that these groups are interlopers, asking for special treatment. The opposite is true. Everyone deserves equity as a right, and those with less access, fewer resources,

less power or a weaker sense of belonging should not need to seek equity in order to obtain it. It should not be framed as a gift, granted by those with power to give it, and the power to take it back. **Equity-deserving** is more accurate and more generative.

We refer to Indigenous Peoples separately from equity-deserving communities

throughout this strategy because Indigenous Peoples, through their own advocacy, ask not to be grouped this way. They affirm themselves as **sovereignty-deserving** and the Y recognizes this. Indigenous Peoples are the original inhabitants of the land we reside on in the GTA and across this continent.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Strategy (DEIB):



ASPIRATION BY 2025: Meaningfully reduce barriers and build a sense of belonging through targeted equity initiatives and inclusive partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and with equity-deserving communities

Focus Area:

Anti-Colonialism and Indigenous Reconciliation

Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity

Disability and Accessibility

Gender and Sexual Diversity

Goals:

- To contribute to anti-colonial processes that enhance reconciliation efforts.
- To strengthen and build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, with attention to intersecting identities, to ensure that the Y is a trustworthy partner.

- To ensure the Y is intentionally anti-racist, and makes continued efforts to dismantle anti-Black racism.
- To ensure the Y is intentionally racially and culturally diverse.
- To ensure the development of consistent equitable practices, programs and education that address inequities related to race, ethnicity, religion and intersecting identities.

- To ensure the Y is accessible to disabled communities, adopting and promoting universal design principles.
- To advance a strength-based and intersectional approach to disability.

- To ensure the Y supports the advancement of women and members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.
- To develop equity-oriented gender and sexual diversity initiatives, applying them consistently across the Y with attention to intersecting identities.

Tactics

- 1 Create new DEIB employee positions to advance equity, under the leadership of the General Manager – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging.
- 2 Deliver ongoing DEIB education, training and Indigenous-focused learning for YMCA employees and volunteers, as well as community members.
- 3 Improve HR policies and practices to ensure that opportunities for advancement are equitably available to employees from equity-deserving and Indigenous communities, and to increase diversity at all levels of our organization.
- 4 Build financial capacity for DEIB and Indigenous-focused initiatives into operational budgets across the YMCA every year.
- 5 Develop a portfolio of targeted equity programs and initiatives designed to reduce barriers and enhance the sense of belonging among Indigenous communities and equity-deserving communities.
- 6 Build new relationships – and leverage existing ones – with equity-deserving and Indigenous communities and organizations when developing programs and initiatives.
- 7 Explore the development of an advocacy plan for the YMCA grounded in the framework of this DEIB strategy.
- 8 Increase engagement with the YMCA DEIB work and Indigenous-focused initiatives by changing how employees contribute to and connect with them.
- 9 Build processes and skills to ensure all communications across every area of the YMCA (internal and external, across all media) are developed and reviewed from an equity and anti-colonial perspective before publication or release.
- 10 Be accountable for this strategy by being reflective and learning-oriented, formally tracking the progress of DEIB and Indigenous-focused initiatives, and being transparent in our reporting on intended and unintended outcomes.



ASPIRATION

By 2025:

Meaningfully reduce barriers and build a sense of belonging through targeted equity initiatives and inclusive partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and with equity-deserving communities.





FOUR FOCUS AREAS

The strategy focuses on four key areas. We've chosen to focus our time and effort in these areas because members of these groups – Indigenous Peoples and equity-deserving groups – are disproportionately and negatively affected by systems of oppression. They face systemic and institutional barriers that affect all areas of life, and are likely to affect relationships with the YMCA specifically. By focusing our efforts on these groups, we aim to have greater success in promoting equitable outcomes. It's important to note that although our goals connect to identity groups in some respects, our underlying focus is not on identity but on barriers that result from systems of oppression.



How do systems of oppression connect with the Y's work?

There are many ways in which the inequities and barriers described in this strategy connect with YMCA program areas. To name a few examples:

- Indigenous folks are among the groups most affected by the affordable housing crisis in Toronto.
- People with disabilities disproportionately struggle to find full-time and part-time work.
- Trans folks experience barriers to participating fully in physical activity, and often feel unsafe in health and fitness spaces.
- Racialized youth are underrepresented in camps and outdoor education across the country.

To be effective in implementing our strategy, the Y must apply an intersectional approach (see page 22) to address overlapping systems of oppression that compound these barriers and inequities.



Focus Area:

Anti-Colonialism and Indigenous Reconciliation

Goals

- To contribute to anti-colonial processes that enhance reconciliation efforts.
- To strengthen and build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, with attention to intersecting identities, to ensure that the Y is a trustworthy partner.

Anti-colonialism is a dynamic process that challenges the systems and structures of the settler colonial state, which fails – and has failed historically – to recognize the needs and rights of Indigenous Peoples. [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples, setting minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world. The Y supports UNDRIP, recognizing that colonialism continues to

threaten Indigenous Peoples' survival, dignity and well-being in the GTA and beyond. Anti-colonialism goes beyond asking who's at the table, whether they are valued at the table and whether the barriers to their being valued are being addressed. It asks instead who built the table, why is it designed as it is, and whether Indigenous Peoples were involved. By challenging how colonial systems and structures manifest at the Y, we aim to address inequities that result from those systems and structures.



This work must be tangible, including behavioural changes, programmatic shifts and systemic rebuilds that recognize the importance of Indigenous Peoples, cultures and communities to achieving the goals in this focus area. Without question, we must approach this work with Indigenous Peoples every step of the way.

It's important to note that anti-colonialism is not just important in approaching work to advance Indigenous inclusion, rights and sovereignty. It also offers a framework for every area across the Y to challenge existing structures and systems not specifically related to this focus area – and we will seek ways to apply this framework across our charity.

We already have some tables and mechanisms in place to advance this work (notably the Indigenous Advisory Council); we will develop these further and apply them not only to YMCA operations but also to governance, reflecting the importance of Indigenous inclusion at every level of our charity.

Responding to the [Calls to Action](#) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in areas connected to our work (a commitment we've already begun to advance) is integral to our success in this area. On a related note, we recognize the importance of land and sovereignty in anti-colonialism work. We have opportunities to revisit land allocation and space usage in relation to Indigenous Peoples, honouring our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Focus Area:

Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity

Goals

- To ensure the Y is intentionally anti-racist, and makes continued efforts to dismantle anti-Black racism.
- To ensure the Y is intentionally racially and culturally diverse.
- To ensure the development of consistent equitable practices, programs and education that address inequities related to race, ethnicity, religion and intersecting identities.

Anti-racism includes beliefs, actions, and policies adopted or developed to oppose racism. Anti-racism is intended to address inequities in society, to ensure people do not face discrimination based on their actual or perceived race.

At the YMCA, this goal aims to create a more culturally aware and safer environment for racialized employees, volunteers and community members, who face racism in many manifestations across society. We're committed to

addressing all forms of racism, ensuring the Y is intentionally anti-racist and inclusive for Black people, Asian people, Brown folks, and Indigenous Peoples, for example; these folks are systemically at a disadvantage outside of the White majority who hold privileges and advantages in society.

Addressing racism-reinforcing systems of White privilege at the Y is part of this work. We aim to ensure no one, including racialized folks, upholds or reinforces



these systems. In its “Recognition” statement regarding the [International Decade for People of African Descent](#), the United Nations calls on states to “remove all obstacles that prevent the equal enjoyment of all human rights, economic, social, cultural, civil and political, including the right to development” for people of African descent. Through the Y’s work, we can respond to this call by acting on our commitment to dismantle anti-Black racism; providing ongoing support for existing programs that address anti-Black racism; and developing new initiatives with Black communities in the Y and in the GTA. At the YMCA we put an emphasized focus on anti-Black

racism because of the pervasiveness and consistent experience of this type of discrimination that is present globally and in the GTA. By understanding how anti-Black racism exists within our society and learning to dismantle it, we are better equipped to dismantle all types of racism.

It’s important to note that in the GTA specifically, increased expressions of anti-Asian hate – including those resulting from COVID-19-related discrimination – need to be addressed through action at the Y. We’re committed to identifying and addressing barriers across the Y that limit full participation by Asian people. Our approach will centre the voices and

experiences of Asian folks of all ages within the Y and in the wider community.

Ethnicity and religion intersect with race in important ways, and are integral to this work. Creating a sense of cultural inclusion, celebration and safety helps promote diversity at the Y. It also deepens a sense of belonging for people from ethnic and religious groups who face discrimination and barriers to belonging. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, for example, are forms of religious discrimination that often intersect with racial or ethnic discrimination; dismantling these also requires our attention.

A note on our name and history:

Historically – in the GTA and elsewhere – the YMCA was grounded in Christianity. In 1970, the YMCA in Canada made a deliberate decision to move past its original Christian roots in order to be more inclusive. To reflect this change, the YMCA of Greater Toronto adopted “YMCA” as its full name; that is, the letters no longer function as an acronym. While many YMCAs in other locations around the world remain committed to their organizations’ Christian heritage, the YMCA of Greater Toronto is a pluralistic charity focused on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. We recognize and respect that different YMCAs have varied approaches to serving different communities, and with our own history in mind, we work carefully and intentionally to address inequities where they exist in the communities we serve.



A young boy with dark hair, wearing a grey plaid shirt, is seated in a wheelchair. He is smiling broadly, showing his teeth. A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a light-colored top, is leaning over him, smiling and holding a yellow block. They are playing with colorful blocks (yellow, green, blue, orange) on a table. The background is a bright, blurred indoor setting.

Focus Area:

Disability and Accessibility

Goals

- To ensure the Y is accessible to disabled communities, adopting and promoting universal design principles.
- To advance a strength-based and intersectional approach to disability.

Disability is not a negative word. Many disabled people are proud of being disabled, asking non-disabled people to shift away from words like “differently abled” and “special needs.” This type of language makes some non-disabled people more comfortable, but doesn’t foreground the disabled person’s identity, and centre it as a strength. Adopting a strength-based understanding of disability is a cultural shift that the Y will foster in order to shape an inclusive environment for disabled folks – one that doesn’t centre ableism or ageism, or set norms that ignore or create shame related to differences in ability.

In tandem with the cultural shift to strength-based thinking, we will work to apply universal design principles to program development, indoor and outdoor spaces and services. We will also dismantle existing systems that reinforce barriers to accessibility. This work will make our Y more barrier-free, meaning disabled people can participate fully and rely less on seeking accommodations. We will also develop targeted programs for disability across our service areas to

address specific needs and barriers that communities face in accessing YMCA services and programs.

It's important to note that "disability" in this focus area includes all types of disability – physical, sensory and learning disabilities as well as mental health, neurodivergence, brain injuries and medical conditions, to name a few – and we'll consider the different needs of folks with different disabilities in this work.

Although we may not have the capacity to develop highly targeted programs or interventions for every situation, we're committed to considering the diverse experiences of people with visible and invisible disabilities across the disability spectrum. If the Y can effectively achieve our goals in this area, we can advance more equitable outcomes and reduce stigma for disabled people who work or volunteer at the Y, as well as those who interact with the Y across the GTA.



Focus Area:

Gender and Sexual Diversity

Goals

- To ensure the Y supports the advancement of women and members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.
- To develop equity-oriented gender and sexual diversity initiatives, applying them consistently across the Y with attention to intersecting identities.

This focus area supports the advancement of several different communities, including women and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks. The Y understands that the term “women” includes cisgender and transgender women. To be inclusive and equitable as we move forward, we must work to address inequities supported by sexist policies and practices both internally and in communities. Our work and thinking on gender extends beyond the

binary of men and women, taking into account the existence, experiences and concerns of Two-Spirit, transgender and non-binary folks, as well as other gender non-conforming identities denoted in the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym and beyond.

To demonstrate the nuance and care required to approach gender and sexual diversity, our work in this area must also include recognition of



discrimination towards sexualities beyond heterosexuality such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and asexual, and beyond the biological male-female binary, too – acknowledging intersex folks. These communities are not homogenous, and need to be understood as having distinct needs, with a consideration that knowledge and [terminology](#) about gender

and sexual diversity is ever evolving. The 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym is not an exhaustive list of identities, and the Y must be open to learning and change as we work with communities. Being aware of how experiences vary by age is important in DEIB work in general, but in this focus area it's especially valuable. Often, older adult 2SLGBTQIA+ folks are invisibilized.

For example, after years of living openly, some “go back into the closet” for fear of discrimination in long-term care facilities. Meanwhile, youth need support as they explore emerging changes in their identities and experiences. Our work in this area may be activated both through existing programs and new initiatives.





INTERSECTIONALITY AND PRIVILEGE

Our identities are multifaceted. They are made up of a combination of biological traits, cultural practices, politics, choices we make – and much more. Sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, age, ability and other dimensions all shape our experience. We also have differences in education, language and communication (including non-verbal), nationalities and religions.

Many people experience discrimination based on multiple parts of their identities, including combinations of traits. This overlapping of identities and oppression is referred to as “intersectionality,” a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Similarly, different aspects of our identities may confer different degrees of privilege. We have privilege when we benefit (even unknowingly) from the structural inequities in our society, such as the centering of “Whiteness” in North American institutions and culture. Recognizing, understanding and challenging privilege are essential parts of challenging oppression. Like oppression, privilege is complex: while one part of your identity may confer privilege, moving you closer to the “centre” and to power (see diagram below) another may push you



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The DEIB strategy is an important complement to our People strategy, which seeks to remove barriers to inclusion and embed equity in all of our HR programs and practices. To ensure that the YMCA is an equitable environment for employees, we are working to implement recommendations from the recent Anti-Black Racism and Equity Review. And looking beyond our own teams, this strategy will also support community programs that promote equity for people across the GTA.

Rahima Mamdani – Chief People Officer

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toward the margins, making you more vulnerable to discrimination. Discrimination causes deep suffering, but trying to decide whether one type is worse than others is problematic. It diminishes lived experiences and divides communities, preventing collaborative work to address systemic issues. The YMCA of Greater Toronto is committed to taking an intersectional approach

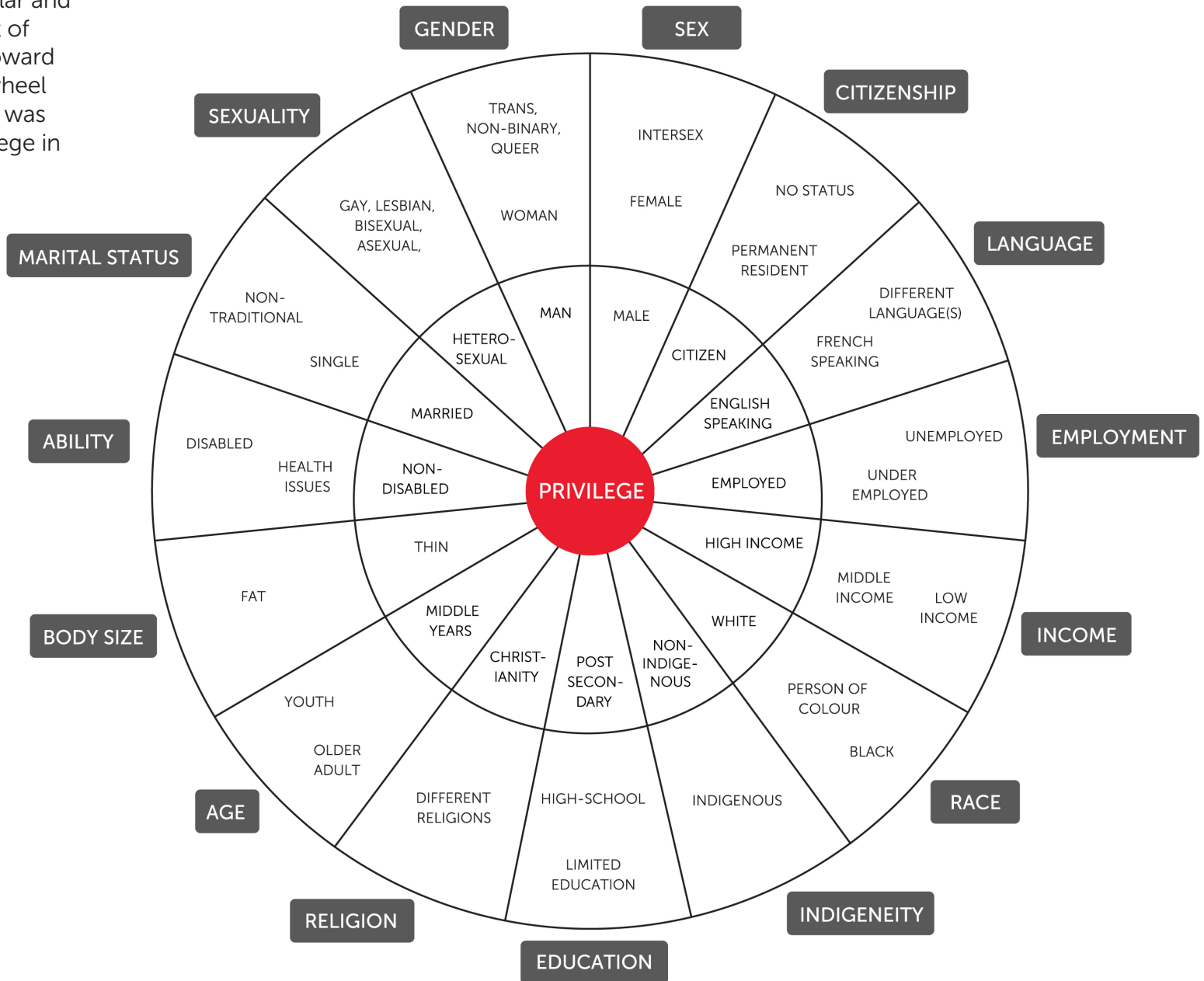
to DEIB. We seek to understand and address the ways in which overlapping identities shape the lived experiences – including experiences of discrimination – of our participants, volunteers and employees.

We believe in coalition-building, where groups identify that they may have different goals and priorities, but

understand that all forms of oppression are connected and harm everyone – and therefore work collaboratively to achieve shared objectives. At the YMCA, we’re working toward more equitable outcomes for everyone in the GTA.

Wheel of Privilege

This strategy draws on scholar and activist bell hooks's concept of moving from the margins toward the centre (privilege). This wheel is not an exhaustive list, and was designed in relation to privilege in a North American context. Some sections are not fixed and change over time.





Why are we committed to using an “intersectional” approach?

Individuals and communities are complex, layered with dynamics of privilege and oppression. Intersectionality encourages us to centre the perspectives and experiences of those who are the most marginalized, with the most intersecting identities, facing the most systems of oppression, to better understand and address the needs of individuals and groups through DEIB efforts. Mental health issues and mental health disabilities were on the rise prior to the pandemic, and have become even more prevalent since 2020; these trends will shape our intersectional approach, guided by the principle of well-being.

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As we implement the new Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging strategy, it's vital that we maintain a strong focus on the importance of community relationships.

Building and sustaining meaningful connections is essential to this work.

Jenna Robar – Manager, Indigenous Relationships

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TACTICS

To advance the strategic goals in each of our four areas of focus and to generally increase our capacity to demonstrate effectiveness in DEIB, from 2022 through 2025 we will pursue the following 10 tactics.

1. Create new DEIB employee positions to advance equity, under the leadership of the General Manager- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

We'll use an internal partnership model to enable a small DEIB team to build capacity for this work across a large organization, while at the same time helping the DEIB team better understand the needs and operations of the YMCA. DEIB and other areas will form reciprocal learning partnerships focused on guidance, support and exchange. An Indigenous-focused position and other new DEIB roles will support centralized initiatives, HR efforts and area-specific program development. The DEIB team needs multiple positions both to encompass distinct areas of expertise and to ensure the work – which is emotional and personally demanding – does not place too many demands on too few people. To further increase capacity and ensure this work is shared, DEIB experience and competency will be considered a key requirement when hiring positions across all different program areas and at all levels.

2. Deliver ongoing DEIB education, training and Indigenous-focused learning for YMCA employees and volunteers, as well as community members.

Education and training are important for building internal capacity, and to ensure employees and volunteers are equipped to engage in the DEIB and Indigenous-focused activities needed for their work. We'll support foundational learning, organized centrally, to ensure that all employees and volunteers understand the strategy's four focus areas (see page 10). We'll also support advanced or specialized learning opportunities related to specific fields or programs. "Education" in this context denotes learning beyond just a workshop or training; learning must be ongoing to build knowledge, shift behaviors and develop skills related to DEIB.

Training for YMCA leadership is a priority – both to ensure DEIB learnings are applied in key decisions and to ensure that employees at other levels can approach leaders regarding equity issues without fear. DEIB should be incorporated into orientation/ onboarding activities to ensure that incoming employees and volunteers are equipped to champion DEIB in their roles. Formal and informal learning are both important to the success of this tactic: employees and volunteers need to support each other in learning from successes, mistakes and feedback. Employees and volunteers can further support the strategy through self-education: welcoming learning opportunities whenever possible related to DEIB and Indigenous Peoples. Lastly, engaging with the wider community through DEIB education creates chances to deepen relationships and share our DEIB efforts with those we aim to serve. Where appropriate, we'll aim to incorporate DEIB learning opportunities into community initiatives.

3. Improve HR policies and practices to ensure that opportunities for advancement are equitably available to employees from equity-deserving and Indigenous communities, and to increase diversity at all levels of our organization.

We're committed to ensuring that employees are treated equitably in every respect. To that end, we will review our Human Resources and Organizational Development programs and practices from an equity and anti-colonial perspective, considering recruitment and hiring, promotion, compensation, performance reviews, and professional and career development. We will also work toward racial representation and overall diversity reflective of the communities we serve at every level of our charity, from the Board of Directors to frontline employees, with a priority focus on leadership. We'll also increase transparency regarding reports of complaints related to equity issues, and how complaints are resolved. Our Human Resources Information System will gather and share information in support of DEIB objectives, generating a more accurate picture of employee demographics and identities and monitoring trends for different groups. Our existing survey program will continue to evolve, gauging employees' sense of belonging and tracking the impact of DEIB initiatives. The Human Resources Department will advance specific goals, articulated in the YMCA of Greater Toronto People Strategy and consistent with the Anti-Black Racism and Equity internal review and report.



4. Build financial capacity for DEIB and Indigenous-focused initiatives into operational budgets across the YMCA every year.

Because government revenues, donor fundraising and grant awards comprise operational budgets at the Y, making a sustained commitment to DEIB means that dollars from these sources must be allocated as consistently as possible to the work laid out in this strategy. Managing this aspect of the strategy is not straightforward. Some funding follows trends and may not provide reliable support for long-term initiatives. Some donors may attach conditions to their gifts that do not align with this strategy's goals. Fundraising and grant awards should be allocated to DEIB where appropriate, being deployed to advance efforts in the four focus areas, but resources for DEIB work should remain as stable as possible since fluctuating or precarious funding will impede our ability to build trust with communities and achieve sustained impact. We will strive to connect with donors who want to support DEIB in a flexible way, letting the needs of communities lead our work. As we work to secure resources for our own DEIB work, the YMCA will ensure that we do not compete for funding opportunities intended for grassroots organizations that are Indigenous-led or Black-led or led by members of other equity-deserving communities. We will strive to be a model for DEIB and reconciliation in the charity sector in this regard.



5. Develop a portfolio of targeted equity programs and initiatives designed to reduce barriers and enhance the sense of belonging among Indigenous communities and equity-deserving communities.

New and targeted equity initiatives will complement, not replace, existing offerings designed to build strong community connections and inclusive environments. Using an intentionally community-centred approach, employees and communities will create equity initiatives together; program areas or departments will not work in isolation. New initiatives will succeed by concentrating on one of the four focus areas, approaching program development with universal design, anti-colonial, anti-racist and intersectional perspectives. We will actively avoid duplicating existing programs, instead partnering wherever possible with organizations already working to address the same barriers. We'll strive to use our resources and scale in a supportive way, achieving impact as a trustworthy, humble and reciprocal partner. Our targeted programs and initiatives will not focus on identity, but on barriers that result from systems of oppression. For example, we will focus not on race but on systemic barriers and inequities resulting from racism.

A program targeting anti-Black racism in, for example, employment will differ significantly from a program addressing the same issue in sport. Inequities rooted in anti-Black racism manifest differently across sectors, so each requires specific action. Programs and initiatives may be small or large in scale, intentionally designed to correspond with the need being addressed.

We will evaluate co-designed programs in partnership with communities, reflecting on the changes we're seeing and designing adaptations together. In the event of a major change or even cessation of a program, we will engage carefully to ensure a shared understanding of the change and to ensure communities don't feel abandoned. In evaluating the success of this tactic, we will focus primarily on the sense of belonging among participants from equity-deserving and Indigenous communities. To develop programs with this understanding, the Y needs to prepare employees and volunteers to thoughtfully serve the specific communities and groups we aim to engage.



Graphic adapted from Centre for Urban & Regional Affairs Racial Equity Framework – University of Minnesota.



6. Build new relationships – and leverage existing ones – with equity-deserving and Indigenous communities and organizations when developing programs and initiatives.

Anything the YMCA GTA does in service or in celebration of equity-deserving groups or Indigenous Peoples must be rooted in community partnership. (See Principles, page 7.) Partnerships may be with individuals, groups, organizations or communities. We can only ensure that our work meets the needs of people for whom it's designed by co-designing and co-delivering it alongside them. The Y and this strategy define partnerships as structured, formal relationships based on negotiated roles, responsibilities and contractual obligations. They involve a sharing of risks, rewards, resources, accountability, visions, ideas and decision-making. Partnerships may be local, where Y centres and program teams build them with nearby communities or organizations. Or they may be larger-scale, addressing systemic issues affecting larger populations, First Nations and other Indigenous Peoples. With this definition in mind, the Y will evaluate its existing partnerships to ensure they are ethical, and there is reciprocity and alignment with the "partnership" definition stated above and the goals of this strategy.

7. Explore the development of an advocacy plan for the YMCA grounded in the framework of this DEIB strategy.

The YMCA's existing government relations and advocacy practices are primarily related to the charity's operational priorities and needs. As a starting point, we will evolve our advocacy to ensure that it's informed by the DEIB strategy's four focus areas. Silence on issues related to social justice and inequity is increasingly viewed as inaction – or even complicity – by those who are affected by systemic inequities and calling for change. The Y has historically remained neutral on many social justice issues, focusing more on support for those affected by, for example, a systemic inequity than on taking a public stance on systemic change. It may no longer be possible to reconcile public neutrality with a commitment to making a meaningful difference



in the social inequities this strategy is trying to address. In some areas, advocating for systemic change may be the best way to achieve the goal of supporting communities in ways that communities themselves endorse. At a minimum, equity-oriented advocacy deserves serious consideration, and we will explore this prospect through the development of a social justice advocacy plan. We will also take stock of the overall consistency and coherence of our advocacy approach, considering whether our existing relationships with partners and donors align with our DEIB approach and any future advocacy work we may contemplate.

8. Increase engagement with the YMCA's DEIB work and Indigenous-focused initiatives by changing how employees contribute to and connect with them.

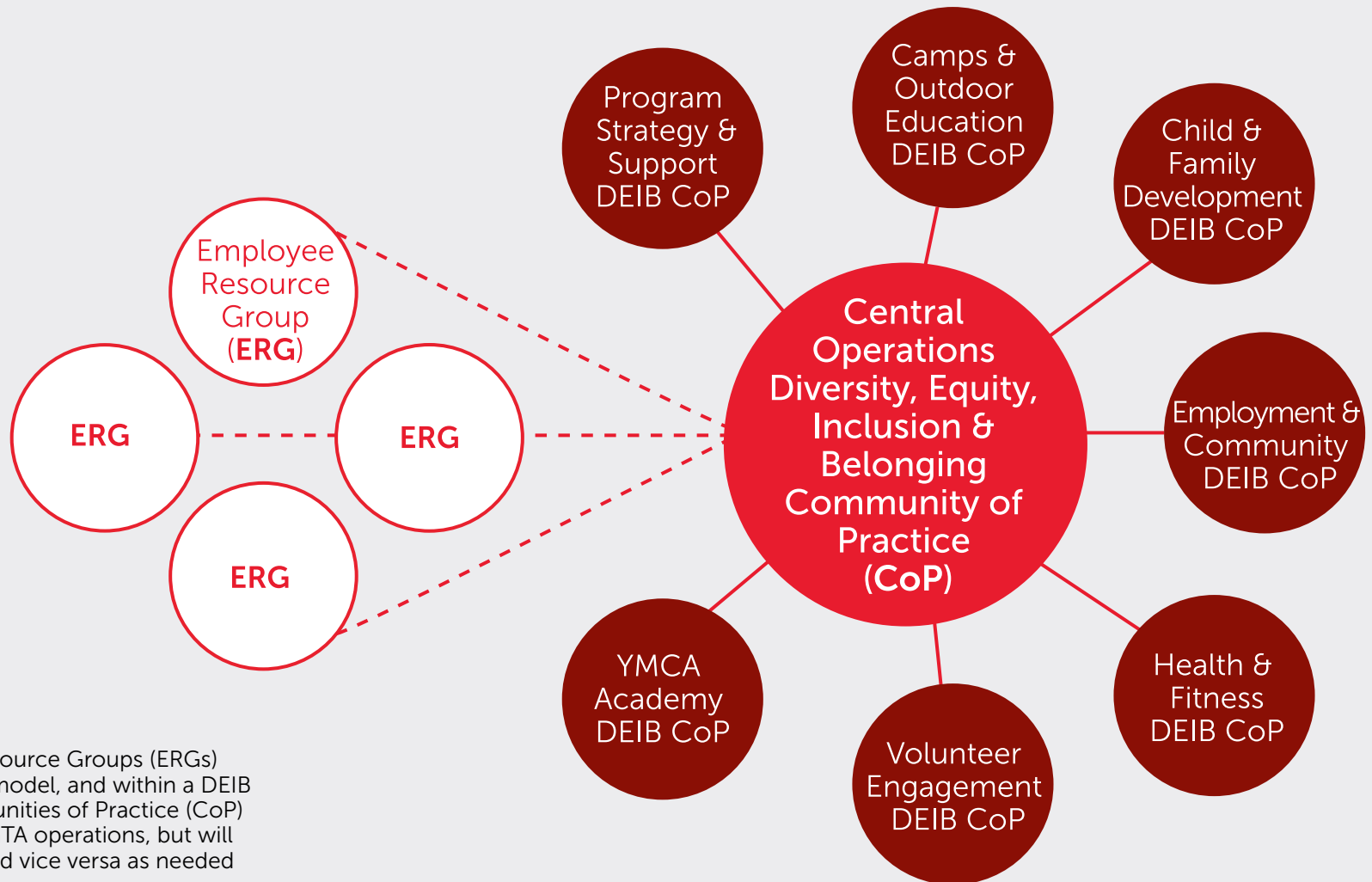
We will use a hub-and-spoke model, creating a central community of practice (the hub) with representation from various departments and operational areas. Each of those departments and operational areas will, in turn, foster their own communities of practices – spaces to discuss equity-oriented issues and initiatives specific to their work. These latter groups (the spokes) are not responsible for executing change; their role is to involve employees who want to contribute to DEIB efforts, and to advise departments/areas on learnings, successes and best practices. The hub-and-spoke model will help our charity embed DEIB priorities into operational decision-making and track and report on DEIB efforts.

To further increase engagement and belonging, we'll also create a set of employee resource groups (ERGs), connected to the structure described above as spokes. ERGs will create opportunities to build community for those with shared identities; for others, ERGs will create opportunities to learn, build

relationships and work toward stronger ally-ship with equity-deserving and Indigenous communities. This structure will encompass existing groups, such as the Pride Committee, Black Experience Staff Advisory Committee (BESAC) and the Indigenous Reconciliation Working Group (IRWG). Importantly, this new employee

engagement structure will dismantle the expectation that anyone will complete DEIB work “off the side of their desk” – an endemic problem in equity-oriented work. Some DEIB functions will reside in operations portfolios among other core departmental expectations. Other responsibilities will reside with

the DEIB and HR Departments. Part-time and hourly employees are included in this model and will be paid for their contributions to communities of practice, and for efforts they undertake to foster a deeper sense of belonging for everyone.



*Many Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) can exist within this model, and within a DEIB Context. The Communities of Practice (CoP) are based in YMCA-GTA operations, but will engage with ERGs and vice versa as needed (see dotted line).



9. Build processes and skills to ensure all communications across every area of the YMCA (internal and external, across all media) are developed and reviewed from an equity and anti-colonial perspective before publication or release.

Communications from the Y should use an equity and anti-colonial framework, examining the use of intentional and meaningful imagery and language about individuals and communities. Success will rely on

a careful examination of our current approaches and practices, and on the consistent application of new practices where necessary. The communications team, with the DEIB department, will develop the tools and skills to apply

DEIB frameworks in all aspects of communications – from signage and posters to social media, marketing, newsletters and campaigns.



10. Be accountable for this strategy by being reflective and learning-oriented, formally tracking the progress of DEIB and Indigenous-focused initiatives, and being transparent in our reporting on intended and unintended outcomes.

Transparency, flexibility and reflection are vital to our success in implementing this tactic. We need to be transparent about the outputs and outcomes of DEIB work both internally and externally. We need to reflect on what we learn, and be flexible enough to adjust our approach when tracking, evaluation and reporting reveal a need for change. Yearly reports should capture the breadth of DEIB work at the Y in that period, identifying successes, lessons, outcomes, questions and gaps. We want our indicators to be meaningful and will periodically review and adapt them to ensure they are still the best way to assess our progress and identify areas for improvement.

We'll aim to complement flexibility in our approach with discipline in our practice: we'll gather data regularly and be informed by both numbers and narrative, striving to always have a complete and up-to-date picture of our work and our team. We will engage participants, volunteers and staff in evaluation and will use culturally appropriate methods. These practices will help us to gauge our success in building an increased sense of belonging, the ultimate goal of the strategy.

In addition to supporting ongoing learning, by tracking and reporting our progress we promote greater accountability for both activities and outcomes, a vital part of DEIB work. In addition to being accountable for our

own stated objectives, including those in this strategy, we are also accountable in our anti-colonial efforts for responding to the Calls to Action laid out in the 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in areas connected to the Y's, work. Roles and responsibilities for this work across the organization are outlined in this strategy. Everyone – from the Board of Directors to senior leadership to front-line employees, volunteers and participants – has an important role to play in this strategy's success.



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

These Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are to be included in the public DEIB Strategy document and progress will be reported through an annual DEIB report available to all stakeholders.

	Quantity	Quality
Effort	<p>How much we did:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> # DEIB initiatives (new and on going)* 	<p>How well we did:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfaction/Net Promoter Score of employees, volunteers and participants in DEIB initiatives
Effects	<p>What difference it made:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increased employee confidence to engage DEIB in their work Participants in DEIB programs' perception of Y's contributions to their sense of belonging to their local community 	

***DEIB initiatives include 2 components:**

1. Formal activities that are intended to contribute to more equitable outcomes amongst YMCA employees.
2. Programs and services that are intended to contribute to more equitable outcomes amongst YMCA participants and/or volunteer and their communities.

**An employee authenticity score will also be measured as a part of the YMCA of Greater Toronto People Strategy and in an Ignite the Light strategic metric reported annually to the Board of Directors.



STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION:

How we got here and
what happens next

How was this strategy created?

This document is the result of a process the YMCA of Greater Toronto undertook over a number of months in 2021-2022, involving internal and external experts and a range of stakeholders.

1. External review. We engaged the KOJO Institute to undertake a comprehensive review of DEIB policies, practices and outcomes across our charity, and to make recommendations about how we could improve. This review process has informed a number of initiatives across our charity, including our DEIB strategy as well as related but distinct employee- and volunteer-focused DEIB efforts.

2. Strategy development team.

We struck a YMCA DEIB Strategy Development Team: an eight-member group whose professional roles and expertise made them well positioned to shape our charity's approach.

3. Strategy framework.

The DEIB Strategy Development Team drafted a working framework for this strategy with the goal of building on the Y's current culture of diversity and social inclusion and ultimately moving the charity forward toward equity and social justice. The working framework, shared in autumn of 2021, included early drafts of the principles, aspirations, focus areas and tactics contained in this final strategy document.

4. Consultation.

The team shared the framework with more than 250 stakeholders within the YMCA and across wider communities (see sidebar). We asked those we consulted about their responses to our existing ideas, and invited input on any gaps or omissions. We mainly received affirmations of the direction we were pursuing; we also received some suggestions for improvement.

We couldn't implement all the feedback we received, since part of the strategy development process involves reconciling this document with the Y's other commitments and overall strategic goals. However, we did review and consider every comment we received through the consultation process.

5. Strategy release. After incorporating feedback from our consultations and arriving at a finished framework with key elements and important language in place, DEIB team leads assembled a small team to draft, review and design the final report.

6. Moving ahead. Once the strategy is finalized, we will continue to share and discuss it within the YMCA, and begin moving forward with operational planning and implementation, including near-term phasing and priority-setting.

“

An important strength of this strategy is that it creates so many ways for YMCA employees to connect with equity-focused work as we make operational changes, adapt our service offerings and engage in new conversations. The four focus areas and the tactics mapped out in the strategy provide a strong foundation for change; I look forward to learning from, and unlearning with, my colleagues as we advance this important work.

Lesley Davidson – Chief Operations Officer

”

Our consultation process engaged more than 250 people:

8

Indigenous Elders & Knowledge Keepers

23

YMCA members, participants and volunteers

10

YMCA older adult members & volunteers

20

YMCA youth members & participants

7

YMCA alumni (former leaders)

131

YMCA employees

19

YMCA senior leadership

23

YMCA Board of Directors and Youth Advisory Committee members

12

DEIB professionals

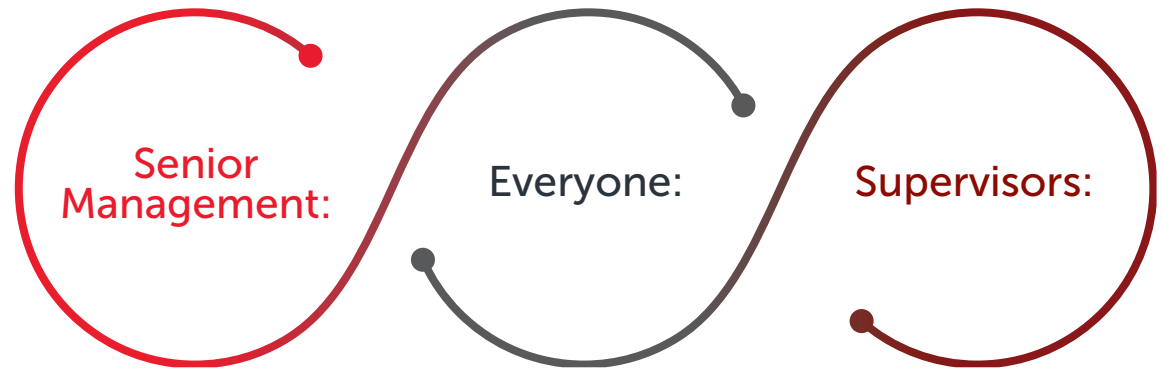
How will the strategy be implemented?

The strategic goals and tactics in this document will be activated differently in different programs and parts of our charity. Implementation will look different in a Health and Fitness Centre than in a Child and Family Development Centre, for example, and the strategy's implications for our Human Resources Department differ from its implications for our Facilities team. But everyone connected to our work has a role to play in helping to make our charity more equitable and inclusive, and in helping people experience a greater sense of belonging through the YMCA. We'll succeed by embracing our responsibilities related to DEIB and working together to realize our shared aspiration.

Notes:

- An individual can be in more than one circle at the same time, and contribute it multiple ways
- Senior Management refers to positions that are decision makers for a department or team
- Supervisors refers to positions that provide 1:1 support for employees who report to you

How can I contribute to DEIB at YMCA of Greater Toronto?



- Support & celebrate DEIB advancement internally & externally
- Resource DEIB initiatives
- Integrate DEIB strategy in planning & evaluation
- Encourage team participation

- Ongoing learning with room for growth
- Embody strategy principles & YMCA values
- Participate in DEIB programs & initiatives
- Expect & provide fair & equitable treatment
- Raise DEIB concerns
- Apply DEIB strategy in your work & interactions
- Collaborate on DEIB initiatives, program design, delivery & evaluation.
- Participate in & promote DEIB initiatives

- Coach & support professional / career development with DEIB perspective
- Apply DEIB perspectives in hiring & promotions
- Foster brave spaces for DEIB conversations & wise practices
- Recognize employee efforts & progress in DEIB advancement
- Create opportunities for collaboration on DEIB initiatives



THANK YOU

Many people and groups generously supported the development of this strategy by sharing their time, insights, and expertise with us. The YMCA of Greater Toronto gratefully acknowledges the contributions of:

The DEIB Strategy Development Team:

Team Co-Leads:
Robin Waley
Sarah Earl

Team Members:
Amanda Stephens
Brandon McClounie
Christina Sanakidis
Clare Nobbs
Ellah Mangwiza
Felipe Palleros

The more than 250 community members (see page 37) who contributed to the consultation process that shaped the strategy. YMCA employees who helped to refine the strategy by reviewing drafts and providing feedback. The KOJO Institute, whose recommendations helped to guide our work.

If you have questions about this document, or want to learn more about how to support the DEIB strategy as an employee, volunteer or participant, please get in touch.

Diversity@ymcagta.org