THE BLACK EXPERIENCE PROJECT

A GREATER TORONTO AREA STUDY CAPTURING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

PHASE 1 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
FINAL REPORT
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The Atkinson Charitable Foundation

DIVERSITY INSTITUTE
RYERSON UNIVERSITY

THE ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE

United Way Toronto

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THE FOUNDING PARTNERS

THE ATKINSON CHARITABLE FOUNDATION is committed to social and economic justice. We have been working to make Ontario equitable, inclusive and healthy for more than 70 years. We are currently focused on creating more decent work, promoting early learning, and encouraging nonprofit innovation through advocacy, collaboration and grantmaking (atkinsonfoundation.ca).

ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE FOR SURVEY RESEARCH is a Toronto-based non-profit organization founded by Michael Adams in 2006 to promote relevant and original public opinion and social research on important issues of public policy and social change. The focus of the Institute's mandate is to survey individuals and groups not usually heard from, asking questions not normally asked (www.environicsinstitute.org).

RYERSON UNIVERSITY'S DIVERSITY INSTITUTE undertakes research on diversity in the workplace to improve practices in organizations. We work with organizations to develop customized strategies, programming, and resources to promote new, interdisciplinary knowledge and practice about diversity with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, Aboriginal peoples, abilities and sexual orientation. Using an ecological model of change, our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is driving social innovation across sectors and producing concrete results (www.ryerson.ca/diversity).

UNITED WAY TORONTO is a charity working to advance the common good and create opportunities for a better life for everyone in our city. Working in partnership with others, we mobilize people and resources to address the root causes of social problems and to change community conditions for the better. Established in 1956, United Way supports agencies that provide services to strengthen individuals, families and communities (www.unitedwaytoronto.com).

YMCA OF GREATER TORONTO is a charity focused on community support and development. Our aim is to provide every individual in our community with opportunities for personal growth, community involvement, and leadership. By making connections, collaborating, and mirroring our region's diversity, we believe we can become the network that binds our many neighbourhoods into one city, one country, and one world (www.ymcagta.org).

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OBJECTIVE AND PRINCIPLES

By exploring the lived experiences of individuals within the GTA Black community, this study aims to conduct a type of research never previously undertaken to better understand the nature of challenges, opportunities, and the factors leading to success in this community. The results are intended to provide valuable insight and direction in identifying policies and other initiatives that will contribute to the health and vibrancy of the Black community, and to improving the social and economic capital of the entire GTA community and beyond.

DESIGN AND METHODS

The study consists of three phases. Phase 1 involves extensive outreach into the Black community, including group discussion sessions with community "Trailblazers" and individuals from many parts of the GTA. The rich

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*For this study the term "community" is used in its meaning as a population with something in common but also encompassing considerable diversity (rather than a homogeneous group). This is reflected in the study's tagline, and is emphasized at various points in this report.

information captured through the first phase will guide the design of the research in Phase 2, which will consist of an in-depth survey of the Black community across the GTA, incorporating a representative sample of 1,000 to 3,000 individuals. Phase 3 will involve the broad dissemination of findings and the hosting of sessions/events to actively engage the Black community and policy makers in determining the implications and next steps of the research project. The study will be accessible to collaborating partners and other supporters-at-large.

The approach selected for Phase 1 consisted of discussions with small groups of individuals from the Black community across the GTA (encompassing the City of Toronto, and the Regions of Halton, Peel, York, and Durham). These sessions aimed to identify the issues and questions of greatest relevance to the community by consulting with community leaders, local organizations, youth leaders, and the community at-large. This process also provided opportunities for participants to contribute to subsequent phases of the project. Community engagement sessions were held with both "Trailblazer" community leaders and individuals

from diverse parts of the Black community. A total of 274 individuals took part in the community sessions (excluding volunteers), with each session including between 8 and 31 participants.

This report documents the process, outcomes, and conclusions from the Phase 1 community engagement activities.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Many themes and issues emerged from the group discussions, touching upon such areas as identity, education, mental health, media, community safety, employment, community services, culture, and community activism. Some themes that emerged, such as racial identity, revealed considerable levels of social complexity that will need to be carefully explored in Phase 2. Other themes were given comparatively less attention by participants, although this does not signify that they are less important to address. Below are the key findings from the Phase 1 engagement process.

Acknowledging and capturing the diversity within the Black community is critical.

- A majority of participants strongly supported this type of research, provided it was community-minded and reflected the community's diversity.

- Participants expressed the importance of recognizing that there is no single "Black experience," but rather "experiences." This consideration needs to be reflected in the study.

- The demographic mix of participants provided a rich source of information, especially with respect to gender and generation.

- Dedicated sessions with youth, as well as sessions with male and female elders, produced meaningful conversations on how individuals could contribute to enriching their own lived experiences, and that of others within the community.

- Elders expressed great empathy for the day-to-day challenges of young people.

Young people seem to be in a better state of preparedness for leadership and success than many elders and others initially thought.

- Youth see access to resources and other support systems as a challenge, but not as a barrier. This became evident through stories, events, and entrepreneurial pursuits, which in many cases were outside of well-known and/or formal organizations.

- Young people's entrepreneurship in the areas of arts and culture is well-documented and in many cases has become important in expressing civic engagement.

- This information was appreciated as it was shared from one group to the next, and contributed to a sense of hopefulness for meaningful progress.

Participants are positive and hopeful for change.

- Overall, the tone was notably constructive. In speaking about their lives and community, participants expressed a mix of pride, frustration, sadness, and hope.

- Most participants did not hold back on what they see as endemic problems, but there was surprisingly little dwelling on past concerns and a stronger focus on looking forward to what might be achieved.

Participants are skeptical about yet another study of the community, but acknowledge the need for increased understanding through community-based research.

- There was an underlying current of skepticism across engagement sessions about the value of this study, given previous research outcomes from which recommendations and findings have been all but ignored. But there was also broad agreement on the need for a better understanding of the community in terms of

its assets and challenges, which can in turn provide a foundation for community building and addressing long-standing issues.

- In the end, there was consensus among session participants and Trailblazers of the value of community-based research of the type envisioned by the BEP.

Collaborating partners actively endorse the need and value of this type of study.

- Collaborating partner organizations, who helped organize and host the engagement sessions, view the BEP as linking directly to their mission, vision, and values.

- These organizations see this research as providing evidence-based data that strengthens their capacity to launch conversations among organizations that work closely with the community, share best practices, and to draw upon the resulting information in order to stimulate action across the community.

COMMUNITY TRAILBLAZERS

In addition to the community sessions held across the GTA, the project also brought together community leaders and elders ("Trailblazers") to seek initial advice and input prior to going forward with the project, and to encourage further engagement to bring a complementary vision to the broader conversations with the community.

The Trailblazer sessions were convened at the beginning of Phase 1 in order to receive initial input and direction on issues and process. The Elders who participated in them were reconvened at the conclusion of these community engagement sessions and asked to provide feedback on the draft report in terms of what we heard and other issues to be identified.

Trailblazers were positive about the Phase 1 process and insights, and identified a number of additional issues that should, if possible, be addressed in Phase 2. Overall, community Trailblazers fully endorsed the importance and value of this project, and its potential contribution to the Black community.

WHAT'S NEXT

Insight gained in Phase 1 will serve as a guide to the development of Phase 2, which will entail a comprehensive, empirically-driven study of the Black community. The community's broad expectations for the upcoming research process were made clear. Research conducted by and with the community is of utmost importance. As one participant noted, "no research about us without us," meaning research that:

- Effectively captures the diversity in the Black community;
- Is conducted in a respectful way;
- Focuses on the lived experience of individuals;
- Harnesses community individuals and resources in all phases of the research process to build community capacity (e.g., to initiate further research that may be needed);
- Focuses on assets and successes within the community while identifying challenges to be overcome; and
- Contributes to action in the form of policy, programs, and community building.

Meeting these criteria provides the community with the opportunity to build and implement strategies that can be transformational for this generation and ones to follow.

INTRODUCTION

The Environics Institute, in partnership with Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, the United Way Toronto, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, and the YMCA of Greater Toronto, has undertaken a groundbreaking research study focusing on the Black community in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The Black Experience Project (BEP) aims to examine the Canadian Black experience as it applies to the GTA in order to investigate the extent to which members of this community face disproportionate socio-economic disparities.

CONTEXT

For more than two centuries, the Black community of the GTA has played a major role in the economic, social, and cultural life of the broader community. Today, the GTA is home to more than 400,000 individuals who self-identify as "Black," making up approximately seven percent of the region's population and representing the highest proportion of Blacks among any census metropolitan area and more than half of Canada's total Black population (Statistics Canada, 2013).

The Black community is highly diverse in terms of its origins (with immigrants from 130 countries and roots in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America), demographic makeup, language, subculture, and socio-economic status.

This community has made substantial contributions to the growth and success of the region, but has also experienced economic, educational, social, and political disparities that continue to this day. There are longstanding challenges facing the community that are not similarly experienced by most other immigrant or ethnic communities in the GTA. While

there have been numerous success stories in all sectors, it has been well documented that Blacks, compared with the non-Black population, earn less income, have higher rates of unemployment, suffer poorer health outcomes, and are more likely to be victims of violence (Attewell, Kasinitz, & Dunn, 2010; Brooks, 2009; Nestel, 2012; Wortley & Tanner, 2004).

The Review of the Roots of Violence Commission (Hon. Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling) was one in a long series of reports that focused on these challenges, concluding that:

> *When poverty is racialized, and then ghettoized and associated with violence, the potential for stigmatization of specific groups is high. … The very serious problems being encountered in neighbourhoods characterized by severe, concentrated and growing disadvantage are not being addressed … because Ontario has not placed an adequate focus on these concentrations of disadvantage despite the very serious threat they pose to the province's social fabric.*

While these problems and challenges have attracted considerable attention, the trailblazing achievements and contributions of the Black community to politics, law, business, sport, arts, research, education, community, and other sectors are less well-known, and the factors shaping success are seldom considered. In the House of Commons in 2008, when Black History Month was unanimously declared, Senator Donald Oliver asked that "the Senate take note of the important contribution of Black Canadians to the settlement, growth and development of Canada, the diversity of the Black community in Canada and its importance to the history of this country."

The economic and social statistics currently available simply do not tell the whole story. The representations of the Black community

in the media and general perceptions of the community are often distorted, and narratives of success are seldom heard. A deeper, more nuanced understanding of the issues and experiences of the Black community is necessary in order to address systemic barriers and stereotypes, as well as to move forward.

Giving voice to the experiences of the Black community residing in the GTA is sorely needed to draw attention to the full range of contributions, challenges, opportunities, capacity, and resiliency of its members. Specific gaps that need to be addressed include:

1. Deepening the understanding of the lived experience of being "black" in the GTA, which research shows is different than other racialized minorities;

2. Recognizing the diversity that characterizes the Black community and the range of its members' experiences (given the intersectionality, for example, with socio-economic status, gender, ethnic origin and age);

3. Deepening our understanding of the challenges that have been well-documented, but also identifying the successes and opportunities which tend to be neglected; and

4. Contributing to the process for building community and evidence-based action.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES

The purpose of this study is to conduct seminal research to better understand the nature of challenges and opportunities faced by the Black community. The study explores the lived experiences of individuals within this community, and the factors leading to their success or challenges. The results are intended to provide valuable insight and direction in identifying policies and other initiatives that will contribute to the health and vibrancy of the Black community, and by doing so, the health and vibrancy of the entire GTA community and beyond.

The project is founded on evidence demonstrating that survey research can serve as a powerful vehicle to give voice to individuals and groups who are not normally heard from (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Such research offers a unique opportunity to articulate positive narratives and hopeful scenarios for the future that might not otherwise be properly heard. These positive stories will encourage personal initiative, stronger policies, and investment of public, private, and philanthropic resources.

This project provides the opportunity to build on positive narratives around the GTA's Black community, effectively portraying its rich diversity, successes, and contributions, and creating a better understanding of obstacles and challenges that this community faces. Project results are expected to provide a focal point for the Black community to better harness its assets and expand its successes broadly throughout the entire community. It will help the community build on strategies to move forward, and it will also help the broader community (e.g., community leaders, decision-makers, public) understand and appreciate the vibrancy of the Black community within their vicinity.

Project's Guiding Principles

The overall research design is based on a successful approach used by the Environics Institute's Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS), a national research study conducted in 2008-2009 around another segment of the Canadian population facing a unique set of underlying challenges (see www.uaps.ca). This approach is based on the following broad principles:

• The research design and topics of focus are guided by input and direction from the community being studied, as well as established experts;

• The collection of data is done in a respectful way that provides individuals with the opportunity to tell their own story in their own words;

• The study sample is sufficiently comprehensive to provide for meaningful analysis by important subgroups of the population (e.g., by demographic, ethnic, and other relevant characteristics); and

• The conduct of the study draws upon the resources of the local community to the extent possible, and emphasizes capacity building (involving members of the communities being studied in significant roles).

PROJECT DESIGN

The study consists of three phases:

Phase 1 – Community Engagement

The study partners have a strong commitment to community engagement to ensure that the research focuses on issues and questions of greatest relevance to the Black community, so as to contribute to strengthening capacity within this community. To meet this objective, the first phase entails extensive outreach, including group discussion sessions with community Trailblazers and individuals from many parts of the GTA.

Phase 2 – Research Design, Implementation, and Analysis

The rich information captured through the community engagement process will guide the design of the research in Phase 2, which (pending the guidance received through Phase 1) will consist of an in-depth survey of the Black community across the GTA (incorporating a representative sample of 1,000 to 3,000 individuals).

Phase 3 – Post-study Dissemination and Engagement

Once the research has been completed, the findings will be broadly publicized, and sessions/events will be organized to actively engage the Black community and policy makers around implications and next steps. Collaborating partners and other supporters-at-large will have access to the study and its insights to help shape future plans and goals.

This report documents the process, outcomes, and conclusions from the Phase 1 community engagement activities.

PHASE 1 METHODOLOGY

Approach

The approach selected for Phase 1 consisted of discussions with small groups of individuals from the Black community across the GTA (encompassing the City of Toronto, and the Regions of Halton, Peel, York, and Durham).

These sessions were organized to establish a solid foundation for the research by:

- Identifying the issues and questions of greatest relevance by leveraging the knowledge, skills, and experiences within the community;
- Involving community leaders, local organizations, and the community at-large;
- Engaging emerging youth leaders; and
- Providing opportunities for participants to contribute to subsequent phases of the project.

The sessions were organized and conducted under the direction of the Phase 1 Project Director Marva Wisdom, with the assistance of a core planning team and local coordinating committees in each region (all consisting of volunteers). Collaborating partner organizations provided generous assistance and support in hosting the sessions by providing venues, refreshments, volunteers, and other key types of support.

Community Engagement Sessions

Initial Trailblazer Meeting
The initial community engagement session (CES) was held on September 28, 2012 with a select group of 35 "Trailblazer" community leaders from across the Black community. This first session provided an opportunity to get early feedback from community leaders on the project (e.g., how they saw it benefitting the community, what issues might be addressed), and the implementation of upcoming sessions across the GTA.

Community-wide Sessions
Based on the feedback received from community Trailblazers, a total of 19 sessions were hosted across the GTA between November 2012 and March 2013 to engage individuals from diverse parts of the Black community (this exceeded the original goal of holding between 12 and 15 sessions). Efforts were made to maximize coverage across the GTA in terms of geography, age groups (with several sessions devoted to youth aged 18 to 35), country of origin, and sector. Sessions spanned the GTA, from Peel Region to Scarborough (participants resided as far west as Caledon and as far east as Markham). Five of the sessions were held with YMCA employees across the region.

Each session was hosted by a collaborating partner organization in easily accessible

locations, and followed a set format of short presentations and guided discussion. The sessions provided for café conversation style discussion, with five to seven participants per table, plus a facilitator and recorder at each table. In some cases, one or two "elders" or project advisors were present to listen to the table conversations and present key messages as part of the summary wrap-up. The discussion protocol used for these sessions is presented in Appendix B.

The themes of the discussions were captured by volunteer notetakers and supplemented by audio recordings of certain sessions where participants provided voluntary consent (this was done in 6 of the 19 sessions).

A total of 274 individuals took part in the community sessions (excluding volunteers), with 8 to 31 participants in each session. A complete list of sessions (indicating date, group composition, and collaborating partner) is presented in Appendix C.

Once the sessions were completed, the notes and recordings underwent a comprehensive coding and analysis process by the Diversity Institute.

Follow-up Trailblazer Meeting
A second Trailblazer session was held at Ryerson University on June 18, 2013 with community elders who attended the first Trailblazer session, plus a few additional individuals (who were unable to attend the initial meeting). This event marked the official end of the community engagement sessions in Phase 1 of the project.

A total of 40 individuals took part in this follow-up Trailblazer event. As with the initial meeting, participants were organized around five tables, with each table addressing one of the following themes: Education and Links to

Success; Physical and Mental Health; Media Representation; Employment, Employability and Access; and Poverty and Sexuality. Participants reviewed the issues identified throughout the community sessions, and expanded discussion on these by noting additional issues they considered as priorities to be addressed in Phase 2, to the extent that this can be done within the scope of the research.

The detail and tenor of participants' table conversations were captured by Diversity Institute research assistants and other volunteer notetakers. These notes were supplemented by audio-recordings that were transcribed by the Diversity Institute.

Report Synopsis

The following sections present a detailed overview of the themes and issues that emerged from the session discussions across the GTA. For each major theme, the report includes a short literature review prepared by the Diversity Institute. This literature review links the main findings with previous research and the summary of main points provided by participants. Each theme includes selected verbatim quotes from sessions to highlight important points raised by participants.

The "Moving Forward" sections under each theme highlight the implications for Phase 2 of this research, as identified by community session participants and expanded on by Trailblazers at the follow-up meeting.

Further details are included as appendices, including research references (Appendix A), the community engagement session discussion protocol (Appendix B), a list of community engagement sessions (Appendix C), and a list of BEP collaborating partners (Appendix D).

APPROACHES TO RACIAL IDENTITY

Racial identity is influenced by a number of factors within the context of the GTA's Black community. For example, identity is influenced by the individual's own lived experience, by popular media, as well as by his or her background or country of origin. This theme addresses racial identity as both defined by the individual and imposed by his or her environment. This interplay leads to explorations of individuals' perceptions and realities as it pertains to race.

OVERVIEW

The participants' discussions of Black identity reflected the complexity of the subject. While most "self identified" as Black, some indicated that this identity was a weak link to others in the group – that the differences between someone born in Haiti versus someone born in Canada were deeper than the colour of the person's skin. This has been discussed extensively in the literature, although there has been much less empirical exploration of the ways in which the definitions and multiple levels of identity play out in the Canadian context. There was a lengthy discussion about the importance of recognizing that there is no single "Black experience," but rather "Black experiences," and that the diversity within the community needs to be emphasized. In this way, the participants echoed the research of those who have suggested that identity formation for Black people is shaped by a combination of factors related to community, culture, and environment. These include ethnic-racial socialization messages, cultural-collectivism, skin colour and/or physical appearance, language, racial classification, situational encounters, and geography (Fisher & Model, 2008; Joseph & Hunter, 2011; Plaza, 2006).

Few participants appeared to have directly addressed the question of what it is to be "Black" or how do you define "Black" identity, making this an important area for the study to further explore. Importantly, there is a need to keep the category of "Black" as open as possible in moving forward with this study. Understandably, there was ample evidence of concern among participants to being reduced to one attribute – i.e., the colour of one's skin – and many direct and indirect references to experiences of discrimination and racism. At the same time, little evidence came out of the community sessions that would suggest that race no longer matters in a supposedly post-racial society.

Indeed, contrary to the researchers who argue that analysis based on race essentializes individuals, a number of participants specifically reinforced the need to improve representation in leadership roles, whether in politics, in education, or in the media. This is consistent with shifts in opinion from marginalized populations, who have changed from fighting against to advocating for the collection of race-based statistics. This has also been documented in the work of Owusu-Bempah and Millar (2010) who write that, since the 1990s in Canada, some racial minority groups who once strongly opposed to collecting justice statistics by race have changed their position, arguing instead that the collection of these statistics can be used to redress discrimination in the Canadian judicial system. Hence, to a large extent, the debate centers around the purpose of the data collection as well as its underlying assumptions, which is an important area of sensitivity.

Similarly, there was debate about what constitutes the Black community. Participants expressed the importance for this study to move away from using a paradigm that reduces

members of the Black community to one thing and to focus instead on strengthening the community by acknowledging its racial diversity.

COMMUNITY VOICES

The community engagement sessions provided valuable insight into the ways in which peoples of African descent self-identify. There are a number of historic, as well as contemporary ways that members of the Back community have, and do, identify. In many cases, names have been externally imposed upon the community.

Findings from all sessions revealed that the vast majority of participants self-identify as "Black" and specifically as "Black Canadian."

There is a need to keep the category of "Black" as open as possible in moving forward with this study. This was pointed out by one male participant who noted:

> I don't think that anything will be served by trying to limit ... what Black is. I think that's the kind of discourse that other people like to impose on us.
> - Male, Trailblazer

There were also interesting sentiments revealed through these engagement sessions pertaining to perceptions of the racial conditions of Black people in the GTA. One woman expressed why she was interested in the BEP project:

> What I like about [BEP] is that [it is inclusive, in the past it] was hard for me to find ... a certain [type of inclusive] organization 'cause [many cater to the] Jamaican or [Trinidadian communities]
> - Female, Youth & Adults

This suggests that existent Black cultural groups in the GTA are perceived as highly focused upon the Jamaican, Trinidadian, and other dominant communities, which may indicate a need for cross-community engagement.

Although findings show that the majority of Black persons in the GTA refer to themselves as "Black" and that terms such as "Coloured" were used much less frequently (if at all), some African descendants do not identify as Black. One woman explains:

> Bi-racial children... they kind of have problems identifying themselves. You have kids... they're like, I'm Black or I'm White when they're bi-racial.
> - Female, GTA Central

Some people choose not to use the given terminology due to cultural, political, and other reasons. For instance, two Trailblazers lend the following insights:

> ... there are lots of ways to build community, and I would argue that skin pigment is a fairly weak reason for community. I mean it never was that. It was about geography once upon a time, or some sort of other cultural thing and we're displaced, and now we all have to be the same because of this thing.
> - Female, Trailblazer

> I'm born in Montreal and I'm of Haitian descent, I have ... nothing in common with you all like nothing, except that I'm Black and I'm here. ... It's easier for me to identify with other Blacks in Toronto on negative things... I'm having this issue because I think my boss is racist or, you know, the cop stopped me because I'm driving a – like that kind of dumb stuff, right, but these are not things that rally people together.
> - Male, Trailblazer

Another interesting issue raised was that many people who identify or could be classified as Black may not be plugged into "traditional" social hubs. One individual commented:

> We have the Black Business [Professional] Association giving away scholarships to young people every year. Some of the struggles are finding young people to give the scholarship to.
> - Female, GTA West

This exemplifies how communities are being disconnected from resources that are allotted for their benefit. This reality affects outreach as well as the potential outcomes of the project and may inform future phases of BEP.

In reflecting on what constitutes the Black community, one woman Trailblazer was led to "wonder if sometimes we make an effort to define a community, but perhaps that's an external definition just because you have black skin and I have black skin." These reflections demonstrate the need to strengthen the Black community by acknowledging its diversity.

MOVING FORWARD

The conversations around racial identity were most notable in the sessions organized and hosted by youth, for other youth. The Trailblazer session, which had strong youth voices, also contributed significantly to this topic. Discussions around racial identity were arguably the most polarizing and begged the question, 'what is in a name?' Therefore, the degree of tolerance for labels that reflect a colonial past seemed largely dependent on the level of an individual's Afrocentric identity. In the end, conversations weighed heavily on the importance of cultural knowledge, sharing stories, and education on a rich heritage.

Such discussions around racial identity provide two important lessons for Phase 2. First, the research needs to be sensitive to labels and terminology used for race and colour across the many different groups of the GTA Black community. The language used in research documents and communications must reflect the vernacular language while also being respectful to those whose experiences are being discussed.

Second, the research itself should explicitly address and explore racial identity from

individuals' personal perspectives and how they view identity and labels in formal contexts. Phase 1 brings to light many questions: What is the relevance of "typical" racial categories used in legal documents and censuses (i.e., identification as "Black," "African-Canadian," or as "visible minority")? What about the intersection of "Black" with place of birth and/or ethnic identity (e.g., Canadian, Trinidadian, Jamaican, Ethiopian, Nigerian, Somali)? How do participants understand these labels and do they apply the same labels to themselves as they do to others? Identifying when these labels advance or hinder inclusion will be relevant for the next phase of this study.

2
EDUCATION AND LINKS TO SUCCESS

Education is traditionally a vital component of the Black experience. For the Black community in the GTA, education is seen as extremely important, particularly to parents and the elder generations. This theme explores the correlations between schooling and success, the obstacles to success, and the role of the family in promoting education. It also addresses the younger generations' interest in interactive and engaging educational tools.

OVERVIEW

One of the strongest aspirations for participants was improved education for themselves and others in the community. In 10 years from now, one group hopes to see headlines such as: "Majority of college and university graduates are Black," making it clear that this was an important issue.

The study underscores that the community recognizes that education is the foundation for success and that there are currently significant and unacceptable gaps in educational attainment in the Black community, compared to the rest of the population. 2006 Canadian Census data shows slightly lower levels of education among the Black community as a whole compared to other Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2008); however, these averages mask important variances within the Black population, such as the substantially larger proportion of recent immigrants with university degrees (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Participants also stressed the importance of having more Black teachers, a call consistent with the literature, which indicates there is an underrepresentation of racialized elementary and secondary school educators and counselors in the Canadian educational system (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). Participants clearly

perceived that this gap may have an impact on how Black students are treated by teachers, as well as on their academic success. Discussion also focused on the importance of Afrocentric learning materials. Scholarship in this area also examines pedagogical choices made among teachers, as well as the role of critical race theory in the United States (Delgado, 2009; Earick, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) and anti-racist education in Canada (see Dei, 1996a, 1996b; Dei & Calliste, 2000a, 2000b; Solomon & Allen, 2001; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996, 2003). It is through theoretical perspectives such as these that methods for navigating structural inequities in Canadian schools are most often envisioned (Smith, 2010). There was, surprisingly, little discussion on the importance of Afrocentric schools, even though this has been the subject of much non-academic literature, and public (Rushowy, 2007, 2008a, 2008b) and academic debate (Gordan & Zinga, 2012).

Within literature examining academic achievement in higher education, various social factors impact completion rates for Black students. Kodrzycki (2004) suggests that these social factors include socio-economic status, high school achievement, and affordability of post-secondary education; however research in Canada is limited (see Braithwaite, 2003). Although experiences of Black teachers and university professors in the academy have been documented (Braithwaite & James, 1996; Henry, 1993, 1998, 2000) there was little in the consultations on this issue. In addition, there was little discussion of the examples of educational achievements among members of the Black community; most of the focus was on the deficits.

In the consultations there was plenty of discussion about the role of family in reinforcing school success, but there is limited research in this area.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Participants across all sessions expressed the need for improved education and discussed at great length potential strategies and solutions to rectify this gap. Specifically, many participants indicated a deep interest in improving high school and university completion rates within the Black community. As a male retiree expressed, "You can reach the majority through education."

According to participants, an important key to success was parental involvement and advocacy. Both GTA East and GTA West Elders felt that family involvement makes a significant difference on children's success rates in school:

> *You have a percentage of parents that are very involved with their kids.*
> *- Female, GTA West*

> *Get parents involved... in doing the outreach at the schools.*
> *- Female, Retirees, GTA West*

> *In terms of assisting parents to help their kids, you know, through education or whatever, so more parenting training for example, to assist them to support their kids through the education system.*
> *- Female, GTA East*

The suggestion was also made by several male Elders that improving familial support through increased parent training was one way of strengthening relations between youth and older members of the community, which will in turn help to improve relations between youth and law enforcement.

Participants expressed concerned over the lack of Black teachers and university professors in the GTA and the impact on youth's career choices. One individual in the Trailblazer plenary noted:

> *Professors - where are they? They were in my PhD class. We recruit globally, so what's happening? [...] It's really hard for me to motivate students to go on and do their PhD when they tell me, like I come out when I finish can I become a prof? And they look around at all the universities and I go, you could try. I can help you. I can tell you, but they're seeing the evidence, so I think that's really, really important.*
> *- Male, Trailblazer*

Similar to the other themes that came out of the engagement sessions, education touched upon various aspects of the Black experience such as media, outreach, and political activism. A retiree expressed the following views about education as it relates to political activism:

> *We first have to get the community engaged and educated and understanding what politics is all about and what being elected in Canada is all about... And I think that [the] education is not there.*
> *- Female, GTA West*

Participants in the sessions offered more than just conventional educational solutions. Exploration into more adaptable and fitting approaches to educational engagement seemed in order. As a youth worker from the GTA East voices:

> *I think another challenge with connecting with young people is how do we make this engaging for young people? To be honest... this sitting down thing will not work for every young person, so how do we incorporate different... ways of doing facilitation.*
> *- Youth worker, GTA East*

Young people in this session felt strongly that emergent forms of media and technology may be key:

> *I agree with it too, because as I was saying with emphasizing youth, media pays a huge part in youths' lives because they're either on Twitter, Facebook, watching TV, anything important they're connected to it, so if we could get the message across through media, it would make a difference.*
> *- Male, Youth, GTA East*

Young participants felt that an interactive approach to engaging young people would be most effective. This insight may inform future phases of research, as well as the eventual dissemination of findings to the BEP partners.

One youth worker stressed the importance of getting youth 'out of their seats' and encouraging physical activity while engaging with them. This sentiment is aligned with the views of an Elder contributor to the community engagement sessions. The individual was disillusioned by his perceived lack of results as it pertains to projects that are started within the Black community and left unfinished. As a solution, he suggested that "matching up"

youth with elders through sport may offer a means of disseminating generational knowledge and values.

As was noted by many participants in one of the GTA West sessions, a contemporary revision of traditional culture knowledge sharing may prove useful in disseminating these values. One woman expresses:

> *Go back to that village that we all are used to growing up in, and develop that sense of the village.*
> *- Female, GTA West*

Mentorship and funding were also identified as strategies to increase success. One woman explained the sentiments that were discussed in a breakaway group:

> *We thought, first of all, that we can look at the youth, the youth themselves. And maybe look at youth programs and the mentorship within the community, [as well as] educating parents.*
> *- Female, GTA East*

Multiple communities were also concerned about improving the successful acquisition of varying forms of education that are not traditionally taught, such as the teaching of financial literacy and money management at a young age, and the dissemination of cultural values from generation to generation. There was deep concern over the perceived breakdown in bridging cultural and generational knowledge and experience, especially among older participants in the community.

MOVING FORWARD

Education emerged as an overarching topic of discussion that cut across all sessions, spanning the range of demographics, regions, and organizations.

Participants' discussions covered a range of issues including: reinforcing the need for education; improving the current curriculum to reflect all segments of our society; improving access to education; and promoting culturally relevant education and representative leadership in the educational field. In all cases, the topic of education was approached with passion and optimism that progress in addressing the current challenges would make a significant difference in leveling the playing field.

These conversations suggest the research should further explore the community's experiences with education. Specifically, it should look at community members' perceptions of factors influencing success and challenges, perceptions of Afrocentric schools, and the role of increasing the proportion of Black teachers and leaders in the education sector. Focusing on the factors that have made a difference or promoted success in the lives of individuals would also be pertinent. Other questions to be explored include the role of parents in supporting their children's education, and how various forms of communication (traditional and emerging) facilitate or impede the engagement of both parents and students in the schooling process.

Community Trailblazers at the follow-up meeting also discussed the role of Afrocentric schools, focusing on the overarching question of whether or not they are supported by the Black community. It was noted that these schools would increase the number of Black educators teaching across the GTA, but at the same time there was agreement that Afrocentric schools are not the solution to addressing the range of challenges facing Black students in the current education system. Trailblazers stressed the need for public schools across the GTA to implement culturally relevant curriculum to students of all racial backgrounds.

Trailblazers identified other key issues relating to education and links to success that merit attention in the Phase 2 research and to an extent within the scope of this research:

1. The importance placed on post-secondary education, in terms of affordability, knowledge, and role models, from the perspective of Black youth and their parents;

2. The experience and perceptions of elementary schools, with respect to how they are managing such issues as behavioural problems, streamlining of Black youth into behavioural programs, learning disabilities, systemic racism, access to language, and parent advocacy;

3. Awareness and use of existing resources, programs, and grassroots organizations in the Black community that are engaging with youth around education; and

4. Black youth perspectives on the implications of parental involvement in education.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

The role of physical and mental health in the Black community was a prominent topic in some of the sessions. While both were discussed, mental health in particular was acknowledged as an underlying issue that is now making its way to the forefront of discussions. This theme explores the interconnected relationships between health and social well-being, and highlights the disconnect between community priorities and previous research.

OVERVIEW

The literature exploring the experiences of Black community members and the healthcare system is widespread. However, consultations focused less on physical health and more on mental health issues. This raises questions about whether physical health concerns are perceived as a pertinent issue, whether there is a lack of awareness surrounding physical health, or whether such issues are implicit and therefore not discussed.

Research in the United States suggests there are significant discrepancies in health outcomes (Harper, Lynch, Burris, & Smith, 2007), access to quality healthcare (Do et al., 2010; Nestel, 2012; Shi & Starfield, 2001; Winslow, 1992), and access to specific treatments (Winslow, 1992) among Blacks and Whites. However, Canadian research suggests that these disparities are less pronounced in Canada in part due to universal health care coverage, which offsets the impact of socio-economic disparities (Prus, Tfaily, & Lin, 2010; Veenstra, 2011). Despite these trends, studies have shown that the Black population in Canada experiences significantly poorer health outcomes, more racism during interactions with healthcare professions (Nestel, 2012), and less

access to prevention and intervention initiatives (Newman, Williams, Massaquoi, Brown, & Logie, 2008; Williams, Newman, Sakamoto, & Massaquoi, 2009).

Although there are racial disparities that specifically impact the Black population in the GTA with regard to certain diseases like HIV/AIDS (DA Falconer & Associates Inc., 2008), these issues were seldom raised in the community discussions.

Scholarship in the area explores the links between physical and mental health by connecting the intensity of physical health issues faced by Black individuals to psychological or mental health needs of Black populations across North America (Jarvis, Kirmayer, Jarvis, & Whitley, 2005; Nestel, 2012). Jarvis et al. (2005) found that most African Canadian patients suffering from psychosis are brought into hospital by police or ambulance, leading Nestel (2012) to argue that social factors affect both the physical and psychological well-being of Black populations in Canada. Overall, however, there is limited Canadian literature on mental health that specifically addresses the Black community.

Scholarship on the mental health needs of Black community members in the United States suggest that more focused attention is needed to address ongoing concerns. Based on interviews conducted with Black patients who have suffered physical injuries due to violence, Liebschutz et al. (2010) argue that Black male victims of violence not only cope with having little access to quality care (due, for instance, to distrust of the healthcare system, unaffordable treatment for injuries), but also often deal with emotional issues associated with their lifestyle (e.g., expectations that they will die young; fears for safety if they use public transportation to

get to emergency room). All of these issues significantly affect psycho-social well-being. More importantly, violence is a major public health issue that puts the Black community disproportionately at risk. Canadian research suggests that public attention is more likely to be focused on violence affecting middle-class neighbourhoods or White victims compared to violence affecting poorer neighbourhoods or Black victims (Cukier & Sheptycki, 2011).

COMMUNITY VOICES

The Trailblazer Elders were the most concerned about health issues among their cohort. Physical and mental health were identified as major issues that need to be discussed at the community level:

> Health is a major issue that we have to think about and I'm thinking specifically around mental health. Mental health is, and will become, a major, major issue as the population gets older. I sit on the ... Board and I do hearings, and I'm seeing a growing number of our people in crisis. They

> have mental health issues, and sometimes you don't even see them because it's a stigma in our community [.]. The only time you hear about them is when they have interaction with the police, they've been shot, then they realize that the person had a mental health issue.
> - Male, Trailblazer

Participants acknowledged that mental health is an underlying issue and expressed the challenges in addressing it due to its stigma in the community.

Many Trailblazers in the sessions stressed the need for further research on Afro-centric physical and mental health:

> I'm thinking of a couple of key areas that we talked [about] in the past. I'd like to see the research done... on African health - overall health... both physical and mental health of African - or the Black community in Canada.
> - Male, Trailblazer

> Not [much] research has been done on African health, overall health... so those are the questions

that we'd like to see. Why there [are] no studies being done in African overall health, and we've seen a couple of reports that you mentioned, Roots of Violence... you know and then we see that Stephen Lewis report [Lewis, 1992] and so on - that specifically talked about youth in these areas. No researchers that talk about areas - physical health, mental health, poverty...
<div align="right">*- Male, Trailblazer*</div>

Two other Trailblazers went a step further to stress the importance in asking the difficult questions surrounding mental health and openly discussing these issues:

I think that's a huge point, and for me, I would like to see a lot of questions around mental health, so you're right about don't ask about racism, but ask about depression and ask about those sorts of things.
<div align="right">*- Female, Trailblazer*</div>

Participants noted that mental health issues within the Black community often go untreated, as culturally these issues are not often talked about. Through organizations like the TAIBU Community Health Centre (one of the project's collaborating partners), preventative health and expert care for persons at risk for diseases that disproportionately affect the Black community (e.g., sickle cell anemia/trait, diabetes and high blood pressure) has brought heightened awareness and action to improve overall health outcomes, including mental health.

MOVING FORWARD

The discussions revealed that both physical and mental health are important issues for the Black community, and deserve a particular focus in the upcoming research. Mental health needs to be studied as its own separate category, apart from issues like criminalization that further stigmatize mental health issues and silence their presence.

Participants at the follow-up Trailblazer meeting stressed the novelty of this discussion on physical and mental health, remarking that mental health in particular has been stigmatized in the Black community and has only recently (as of the early 2000s) become less of a taboo subject. Trailblazers noted the following data gaps (which may fall outside the scope of the BEP):

1. The need for more Canadian- and GTA-specific literature on the health outcomes of the Black diaspora community, that focus less on diagnoses and more on the provision of support for understanding and coping with mental health issues;

2. The need for more data on health disparities, and a better understanding of the impact of immigration trends and patterns of cultural assimilation on Black newcomers' experiences with physical and mental health issues; and

3. How violence (e.g., physical and sexual abuse) and racism affect the health outcomes Black Canadians living in the GTA.

4
MEDIA REPRESENTATION

The impact of the media is increasingly pervasive and influential. For the Black community in the GTA, traditional mass media continues to reinforce stereotypical racial representations, while social media is seen as an opportunity to challenge these damaging notions. This theme explores common stereotypes, the impact of media portrayals on the Black community, and the role of Black media.

OVERVIEW

The participants talked about representation in the media as a major area of concern. Their comments echoed the empirical research, which suggests that media portrayals perpetuate stereotypes of Black people, marginalize Black youth (especially boys) and shape assumptions about what they can and cannot do (Diversity Institute, 2007; James, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Tucker, 2007).

The impact of such portrayals of Black people in the media is far reaching and participants acknowledged this. During consultations, there was discussion about the disproportionate representation of Blacks in sports and entertainment and the effect on youth's career choices. In this way, participants paralleled the literature of those who have documented the widespread impact and effect of media portrayals on lived experiences. For example, studies have shown that an increase in stereotypical imagery of Black people in prime time television programing is positively correlated with unemployment (Brooks, 2009), and stereotypical representations of Black people in American entertainment influence perceptions of "Blackness" in Canadian contexts (Lindo, 2011).

To influence or challenge stereotypes in the media, scholars have suggested that media literacy be taught in schools and that organizations ensure visible minorities are represented in advertising campaigns (Collins, Doyon, McAuley, & Quijada, 2011; Diversity Institute, 2007; Stack, 2010; Tisdell, 2008). Similarly, participants highlighted the power of representative media ownership, which reflects scholarship on the importance of diversity and visible minority representation in newsrooms (Mahtani, 2009).

There was some discussion on the role of ethnic media generally, and Black media specifically, in objectively reporting the Black experience in the GTA, although little research currently exists in the area. Overall, discussions focused on moving the agenda forward.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Community engagement sessions revealed that community members often perceive that they are victims of media stereotypes especially when, as one female Trailblazer participant pointed out, "we don't get media coverage" thereby leading her to conclude that, "a lot of people don't know us". Participants agreed that the media's impact on truthfully representing their realities was distorted by the over-representation of Blacks in association with crime, and other negative factors in media coverage that are present in news and media outlets. Both the youth and elder groups provided revealing examples of these circumstances:

In the news... the other day... [There was a shooting that was reported. I...] automatically thought it was Black people, and when I looked in the car, it was Asian people.
- Female, GTA West

I'll say the media - there's too much of negative and not enough of positive - positive thing[s] we contribute.
- Male, Elder, GTA East

This call for more positive media coverage was echoed in a GTA Central session where the negative portrayal of Somali youth was likened to the perceived negative media that Jamaicans received in previous years. A man from the Somali community expressed a significant dissatisfaction with the way young Somalis in Toronto are being depicted.

Outside of crime, it was mentioned that Blacks are disproportionally represented in the areas of sports and entertainment. Community members inferred that this has led to an increased number of young people who choose to focus on these fields at the expense of school. As an elder mentioned, youth are preoccupied with sports but they should be:

More engaged in education and think about… sports more like a back-up plan rather than the main plan, 'cause a lot of kids, they're more concerned getting into professional sports than their education.
- Male, Elder, GTA East

Findings also revealed a perceived opportunity for Black communities to utilize new media technologies such as social media in order to more effectively reach out to the communities they are seeking to engage with – one of them being the youth cohort. A male elder provides a possible remedy:

One other point is the media. If you can get the media to structure the right way, to give the positive news content.
- Male, Elder, GTA East

An attendee at a Trailblazer session goes a step further to say:

I actually think more in the form of taking back how we're presented through the media… but if we were to flip that around and actually take control of … the images that are projected …[instead of disproportionally being represented as] entertainers or football players or … criminals.
- Male, Trailblazer

Young people in some sessions agreed with the notion that the media can also serve as a tool for challenging negative media portrayals within the Black community as well as externally. One young person expressed:

…the medium is the message, and the people are its content, and we should be aware of that. I'd rather emphasize on [this] idea because it's complete

– look at the best sitcoms – Cosby show, Fresh Prince of Bel Air, I mean they did not only reach out to the Black community, they reached out, to, like a world-wide audience, and they showed the Black community in a positive way…
- Male, Youth, GTA East

Youth were very clear about the potential of positive media portrayals of Black people, as well as the potential of increased engagement with young community members:

The media is a key - 'cause everybody is in front of a screen these days.
- Male, Youth, GTA East

I agree with it too, because… with emphasizing youth, media plays a huge part in youths' lives because they're either on Twitter, Facebook, watching TV, anything important they're connected to it, so if we could get the message across through media, it would [be good].
- Female, Youth, GTA East

MOVING FORWARD

All groups agreed to a greater or lesser degree that the media has a significant impact on how the Black community is perceived, and influences how the community perceives itself. Most participants concurred that there are pockets of positive stories, but these are not significant enough to balance the sensational stories that monopolize the public's attention. Youth consistently expressed the belief that social media has the potential to better disseminate the community's message.

Trailblazers at the follow-up meeting suggested that the BEP research might address this theme by exploring individuals' perceptions of how the media portrays their specific communities and the broader Black community at large, as well as how they believe this coverage affects their lived experiences. The scope should cover traditional and social media, as well as the regions' ethnic media that may provide a more balanced voice of the Black community. Also relevant would be specific explorations of perceptions of the importance of media literacy as a tool to teach students and the public to think critically about stereotypical racial representations perpetuated in the media. This group also suggested that it might be worthwhile to examine where and how Blacks across the GTA are getting and consuming news (through traditional and social media).

5
COMMUNITY SAFETY

Community safety is central to a successful and fulfilling living experience for Black people in the GTA. This theme explores the formation of Black criminal stigma – particularly for young people – and its damaging impacts on the community. It also addresses legal representation in the GTA, the community's relationship with the police, and the importance of non-criminal interactions between Black community members and the police.

OVERVIEW

One of the strongest concerns for participants was the importance of safe, respectful, and just communities, where Black community members do not feel threatened by violence or by the police. Consultations revolved around the need to build more positive relationships between Black people and the police, as well as engaging law enforcement agents in community discussions as a way to break down stereotypes and improve police perceptions of, and engagement with, the Black community.

Participants identified barriers to positive experiences of Black people with police, including stereotypes associating Black men with criminality and current issues of systemic racism. These findings are aligned with the work of numerous scholars examining the particularly difficult negotiation of common stereotypes for Black men (Howard, 2008; James, 2012a, 2012b), many of which include perceptions of Black men as criminals. Similarly, research in Canada has also focused on stereotypes of criminality (Yoshida, Peach, Zanna, & Spencer, 2012) and, consequently, the experiences of Black people and the police. Related literature indicates the stigma of Black criminality may also

be perpetrated by the disproportionate media coverage of violent crimes involving Blacks, as well as the pervasiveness of stereotypical images of Blacks as gangsters and hoodlums within popular culture (see Brooks 2009; Donohue & Levitt, 2001).

Participants also acknowledged the lack of representation of Black professionals in the criminal justice system and stressed the importance of having Black police officers in their communities. This is consistent with the literature indicating the underrepresentation of racialized officers in the GTA (Anderson, n.d.), the racial composition of law enforcement agents, and its impact on arrests of Blacks (see Brooks, 2009; Donohue & Levitt, 2001). Participants clearly viewed the visual representative of justice as a key factor in community safety.

Racial profiling - particularly of Black youth - was of great concern for participants, which echoes studies that have found that a large proportion of Black youth in the GTA believe that members of their racial group are more likely to be stopped by the police (Wortley & Tanner, 2003). Scholars argue that Blacks receive more police attention than any other racialized group and they are more likely to be detained for criminal behaviour than Whites for the same type of behaviour (Mosher, 1998; Wortley & Tanner, 2004). Research indicates that Black people disproportionately account for the number of crime arrests and convictions in the United States and Canada (Rankin & Winsa, 2012), and that this stigma of criminality has been used to justify racial profiling (Welch, 2007). In fact, young Black men aged 15 to 24

are "documented at a rate 13 times higher than what they represent in the [GTA] population" and the number of contact cards for Blacks in Toronto is three times higher than the total Black population in the city (Bailey & Rankin, 2010, p. 4). Participants stressed the importance of improved police community relations as a way for police officers to be exposed to youth's stories outside the criminal context and break down stereotypes. In this way, the individuals echoed the research of those who argue that racial profiling "serves to further alienate Black people from mainstream Canadian society and reinforces perceptions of discrimination and racial injustice" (Wortley & Tanner, 2004, p. 200).

Participants clearly acknowledged the importance of a relationship of trust between police and Black youth, and the need for further outreach as key issues. There was limited discussion around concrete intervention strategies aimed at mitigating negative encounters with the criminal justice system.

There was little discussion during consultations about the experiences of Black women and the police, although the limited body of literature in this area (e.g. Anderson, n.d.) exemplifies the need for more exploration of the intersection of race and gender.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Across sessions, participants echoed the importance of safe and just communities. There was great concern regarding Black on Black violence, and the impacts of the phenomenon upon individuals and the community. One male Trailblazer stated, "Black on black violence creates a trust issue," while another Trailblazer posed the question:

> Why are Black men killing each other at such a rapid rate? Why are... our young people [dying] at [the] hands of each other, so there is [a] trust factor and trust issues to be dealt with too.
> - Male, Trailblazer

The issue of representation in the criminal justice system was also prominent among discussions. Two women at the Trailblazer engagement session illustrated a perceived shift

in Black criminalization and stigmatization of young Black men:

> ... the point is that I worked in the court and when I started for a good number of years, there were no Black people – none. Never saw a Black person in criminal court. ...I'm talking about the accused – I'm talking about none. And the change came about – I know what did it – they talk about it, but all of a sudden, kids were lining the walls.
> - Female, Trailblazer

> ...and in the criminal justice system, we are more over-represented than any other group, given our numbers in the population.
> - Female, Trailblazer

Also of concern were perceptions and reported experiences pertaining to police interactions with the Black community. A female participant reflected upon a break away session:

> One thing that came up was also the kind of negative relationship between community and the youth and law enforcement personnel. What was mentioned was a different kind of involvement in the community, so [the police should] not only come into the community when a crime has been committed, but talking at schools.
> - Female, GTA East

Participants expressed a strong need for improved police outreach and community relations. For example, a GTA West participant told the researchers:

> I remember I attended one function... There were young people there... and some of these young people... were voicing their opinions on what they felt the police-, what they were doing wrong.... And they were nobody-, there were four police officers... And two of them-, the Black police officer and another (inaudible) stayed. They stayed... And the other two officers [were] so

angry; they walked out of the meeting because they did not want to listen to what...the young people have to say. And I'm saying, if you're trying... to get the community together, you have to... listen to what they have to say... I was very disappointed really... I'm thinking why did they even bother to come if that's the attitude? Listening to good and bad, because...there are different... experiences... the young people were-, they were asking legitimate questions.
- Female, GTA West

However, examples of effective police outreach were also given:

And [police outreach was present at] our function and I made sure I got a picture of it... it does show that these are two police officers who are surrounding themselves with six kids that just received scholarship from the Black community.... There is something to be said about that when this received good media coverage [occurs].
- Male, GTA West

In contrast, a few individuals expressed concern over a lack of respect for the law on the part of young Black youths. One elder stated bluntly that, "the kids do not have any respect for the law."

Despite this, community members clearly expressed the belief that there is an opportunity to ease this tension. It was suggested that police need to further engage with the Black community and be exposed to their stories outside of the criminal context. One participant suggested that this could change the way police officers perceive and engage with the Black community on the job.

MOVING FORWARD

The engagement process revealed a willingness on the part of both the police and the Black community to improve on the status quo. The BEP is seen as a new opportunity for improved communication and engagement between both groups, an occasion to enhance mutual understanding of each other's perspectives, lived experiences, and a forum to establish an effective strategy toward lasting change.

The research could also explore individuals' own experiences with respect to community safety (and its absence) in order to understand what role it plays in their lives and its impact on other areas (e.g., health, education, identity, employment).

EMPLOYMENT, EMPLOYABILITY, AND ACCESS

Jobs and employment are important elements of the Black experience in the GTA, perceived by the community to be strongly influenced by education, access to resources, networks, and relevant work opportunities. Investment in these areas today translates to better employment rates for Blacks in the GTA tomorrow. This theme explores the labour force experiences of Black people, determinants of workforce experiences, social employment programs, employment and unemployment factors, and access to resources in the Black community.

OVERVIEW

Consultations on employment and employability revolved around determinants of workforce experiences. Although there was little discussion about personal labour force experiences, the literature suggests that Black Canadians generally have worse labour market experiences in comparison to White workers and other visible minorities (Adams, 2011), including lower reported salaried wages (Fearon & Wald, 2011; Jimenez, 2009; Picot & Hou, 2011), fewer employment prospects (Boyd, 2007; Coleman, 2003), lower reported levels of career satisfaction (Cukier, Holmes, Rodrigues, & Yap, 2009), and have over double the unemployment rates (Picot & Hou, 2011). Canadian Blacks had an unemployment rate of 10.7% in 2006, compared to all visible minorities (8.6%) and all Canadians (6.6%) (Mensah, 2010). Among immigrant respondents living in Peel Region, Blacks reported the highest level of discrimination (19.2%) compared to Whites and other minorities (The Peel Region & Diversity Institute, 2010).

Within the literature examining race and entrepreneurship, various disparities and barriers to success are highlighted. The small body of scholarship on Black women and entrepreneurship in the United States indicate that female-owned businesses are far less successful than male owned business (Lee & Rendalli, 2001), and that Black women place more importance on non-economic indicators when defining entrepreneurial success for themselves (Blockson, Robinson, & Robinson, 2007; Blockson & Robinson, 2006).

There was little discussion of entrepreneurial issues among members of the Black community, as most of the discussions focused on alleviating poverty through employment in general. Concurrent with literature on the importance of organizational commitment to diversity (Diversity Institute, 2007), participants noted the underrepresentation of Black members on employee councils in the GTA and the resulting lack of power and advocacy within organizations.

During consultations, Black parents also expressed concern with the high dropout rates of Black youth, and stressed the importance of education in employment and employability. This is consistent with literature in the area that highlights the importance of labour market conditions which rewards education combined with premarket educational inequalities, as factors that impact the magnitude of the wage gap between Black and White women (Pettit & Ewert, 2009).

One of the employment and career-related concerns raised by participants was the uneven

playing field for Black women and their lack of representation in leadership and senior roles, specifically in the corporate sector. This reflects current research on leadership representation in the GTA, which highlights the underrepresentation of visible minorities in leadership positions in the private, public, voluntary, education, and elected officials sectors (Diversity Institute, 2009, 2010, 2011). Participants also voiced their concern with Black women's access to networks and mentors, echoing literature that suggests that visible minority women are faced with more informal and formal barriers to advancement in organizations than non-visible minority women. For instance, visible minority women have fewer mentors and senior executive networks (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Hopkins, Hopkins, & Mitchell, 2008), are promoted less often than both men and non-visible minority women, and report lower levels of career satisfaction (Cukier, Yap, Hannan, & Holmes, 2010; Yap & Konrad, 2009).

Participants also acknowledged the limited funding opportunities and difficulty in accessing scholarships.

COMMUNITY VOICES

As discussed previously, some individuals believe there is a disproportionate number of young Black people investing in entertainment and sports at the expense of school. High dropout rates were of great concern to Black parents who felt that education significantly informs employability. There was also a perceived under-representation of Blacks in leadership positions in politics, academia, the sciences, and in the professional world. As one woman commented:

> *Why is it that Chinese, Indians, Blacks are not getting the opportunities to be in management or senior levels?*
> *- Female, GTA Central*

The impact of perceived employment and funding options was found to be a significant factor for young people. In one case, it was mentioned that a particular grant that is available to fund schooling went repeatedly unclaimed. Such cases of unclaimed scholarship, along with the reported generational disconnect, suggest that there are significant opportunities to align young people with existing employment and funding resources already in place. Another topic raised includes the diversion of young people from criminal activities such as drugs, in order to improve employability. One woman mentioned:

> *What can jail offer you? What could the real world offer you? 'Cause pretty much once you go to jail they're labeled. And it's like they can't get any jobs. That's why it's just a circle of continuation. So they come out of jail, they're still hustle and do drugs because, guess what, Walmart won't even take them anymore, McDonald's won't even take them anymore.*
> *- Female, GTA Central*

Another participant expressed the view that:

> *Maybe [the project] will allow the younger kids coming up to get a better understanding of why it is important to go to school, to have higher education so you can be successful and not end up in jail by the time you're 15, 16.*
> *- Female, GTA Central*

Youth participants (and those sharing concerns about youth) noted the lack of access to jobs, career paths, and affordable education. All conversations were passionate about developing solutions and leveraging the successes within the community to assist those who face barriers.

MOVING FORWARD

One conversation among participants dealt with the lack of employment for youth, and how difficult it was to be able to get by and keep up with peers who have 'stuff'. One youth present said that there is a lot of money to be made selling drugs. He was asked further what weekly income would deter someone leaning toward this lifestyle to seek employment. This exchange highlights the need for honest and open conversations about opportunities, 'at risk' behavior, and trade-offs. This research should further explore the role of education in employment and employability, especially among youth, and identify key factors that facilitate success as well as root causes leading to experiences of perceived challenges. It is important to determine the role of family, mentors, peer groups, and the media in helping or hindering individuals in their journey to get an education and become gainfully employed.

Participants in the follow-up Trailblazer meeting emphasized the need for the Black community to ask itself if it is doing all that is necessary to ensure that Black youth attains success. They suggested that the Phase 2 research should consider exploring the role of Black entrepreneurship in the community, as well as the success stories of these entrepreneurs, particularly from a gender perspective. In this regard, participants stressed the importance of hearing from both successful and non-successful Black entrepreneurs to explore barriers to economic success.

COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The diverse nature of the Black community in the GTA introduces challenges in access to services, outreach efforts, and living conditions. This section of the report explores the role of community engagement, barriers to access, and creative approaches to engaging children, youth, adults, and elders.

OVERVIEW

An important focus of this study is to help define and build the community. Participants strongly believe that despite ongoing barriers, challenges, and lack of access, their community consciousness reinforces a strong collective presence in the GTA. However, one of the biggest concerns for participants was the need to strengthen the community and improve outreach.

The literature on community organizing shows that efforts among Black Canadians in Toronto appear to be influenced by Blacks' perceptions of the relative scope and strength of the White Torontonian population (Gooden, 2008), whereas community organizing dynamics between Black and White Americans point to differences in the financial and emotional supports offered by each of these ethnic groups (Gooden, 2008; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004).

During discussions, the faith community was identified as one point for increased outreach and awareness. Scholarship in the area of engagement among Black community members identifies the role of the church as historically significant (Gary & Leashore, 1982; Ginwright, 2007; Tomlinson, 2011; Winks, 2000). For example, the development of new forms of critical social capital for Black youth in low-income communities is positively connected

to the efforts of Black community churches (Ginwright, 2007). Participants also stressed the importance of reaching out to the business community and agencies, schools, and politicians, as other essential outreach strategies necessary for effective community engagement.

There was also a great deal of discussion about diversity within the Black community itself and its impact on community services: the variety of countries of origin, languages, religions, and ages associated with Black identity. The Canadian context has further illuminated varied degrees of concern over aggregating different ethnic groups under the umbrella term "Black" and/or "African Canadian," as the experiences of each ethnic group can vary in significant ways (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). As a result of this diversity, participants discussed the impact on access to services and opportunities for many Blacks who do not associate with "traditional" social hubs, but as discussed above, there is limited practical research on the ways in which various meanings and layers of identify play out in the Canadian context.

COMMUNITY VOICES

The topic of community and community services recurred in all sessions, as it informs and is informed by all of the other themes of this study. Every group was concerned with outreach, whether it be intergenerational, educational, or with the aim of improving the political influence of the Black community and/or their particular group within the Black community.

Various engagement sessions spoke of the need for a village. One elder asked:

How can we build that village to raise a child, the way we had a village that helped to raise us?
- Female, GTA East

It was equally apparent from these sessions that social events, hubs, and institutions need to be established and connected in order to service the range of Black people who live in the GTA. Primarily, it was recognized that Blacks within the city need an information centre, or as one man at the Trailblazer session suggested:

A repository for data, information in a variety of forms that pertains to the [B]lack community in this place. [This centre] would be some place that we could all come to and feel comfortable accessing that information.
- Male, Trailblazer

Not only do Black people have diversity in countries of origin, languages, religion, and ages, as was mentioned previously, but many people who identify (or could be classified as) Black may not be plugged into "traditional" social centres. Importantly, as per the suggestion of one individual, this project:

Need[s] to engage the people who are working within those communities at the grassroots level [but who] are not perceived as "leaders" in the wider community, but they are leaders and change agents within their communities.
- Male, Trailblazer

This suggests that research and programs that aim to serve the community at large need to use a range of outreach methods and involve a large cross section of community hubs in order to achieve maximal outcomes. The point previously noted by one woman in the GTA East session, that funds and other opportunities may be available to the Black community in general (and to young people in particular), suggests that

there may be an opportunity to significantly improve the Black experience in the GTA through networking and efficiency.

MOVING FORWARD

Participants advocated prioritizing active cross-collaboration on issues of importance in the next steps of this research. This study should further explore perceptions about what contributes to community building, what outreach strategies need to be adopted, and which organizations/groups to target in order to improve community engagement. Research that might highlight effective outreach mediums and methods would be relevant.

Community engagement session discussions revealed that this research should better engage the faith community, particularly among elders. The need for balanced, inclusive, and respectful outreach across a diverse range of faith communities was also noted.

8
CULTURE, POLITICS, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Engagement in culture, politics, and community activism are crucial for Blacks in the GTA to assert their voices and achieve positive change. This theme is guided by a review of areas that are in need of improvement, as well as positive examples of social and political action. Institutions and icons that have made a mark in the social conscience of Blacks in the GTA are addressed.

OVERVIEW

Participants spoke strongly about the lack of Black political leaders at all three levels of government, and the resulting lack of political influence and decision-making power across Black communities. This is consistent with the literature focusing on the political engagement of the GTA's Black population, which indicates that Blacks are underrepresented among political candidates and elected officials relative to their population in the GTA (Pieters, 2010; Siemyaticki, 2011). As Pieters (2010) remarks, "In the City of Toronto, the most diverse city of Canada, where I live and work, there is only one Black city councillor." In spite of this, some Black political activities have included the rise of Black judges in Canada who, though under-represented, are positioned in strategic ways to help support racial equity through judicial decisions (Aylward, 1999; Bacal, 2012; Diversity Institute, 2012; Hamalengwa, 2012; Henry et al., 2000).

Discussions emphasized concerns pertaining to the perceived lack of interest on the part of young Blacks in civic and political engagements, as well as the importance of encouraging youth to see themselves as influential activists. Scholarship in this area challenges the role of Black youth, and shifts perceptions of who can be included in the role of "activist" and/ or "trailblazer" fighting for racial equality and equity (Verrall, 2011a, 2011b).

Participants also stressed the importance of grassroots involvement, faith communities, family, and schools as ways to further engage Black community activism. This is congruent with the scholarship documenting activism among Black community members outside of the political arena, where the church has played an important role (Gary & Leashore, 1982; Ginwright, 2007; Tomlinson, 2011; Winks, 2000). Activism within the Black community has also focused on educational initiatives (McIntyre, 2008; Obidah, 2008; Pollock, 2008). Scholars examining activism and resistance in the context of the GTA focus on responses to youth and crime in the city (McMurtry & Curling, 2008a, 2008b), often through grassroots organizing (Abebe & Fortier, 2008), rather than through more pro-active measures of resistance. Although sports in general, and cricket specifically – a sport linked to "home cultures" (Joseph, 2011) – were echoed by participants as ways to further engage young Blacks, there was little discussion of the role of cultural expression, music, dance, literature, and art in social and political activism.

Influential political leaders like Barack Obama were perceived by participants as a motivating factor toward political and community engagement for Black communities. In agreement with scholarship on American political activities, literature on the civil rights movement and the experiences and activism of iconic social and political figures were also perceived to be important. Prominent figures like Malcolm X (Marable, 2011; X & Haley, 1964), Martin Luther King Jr. (Carson, 2001; Ling, 2002), Baynard Rustin (D'Emilio, 2003), Kwame Ture (a.k.a. Stokely Carmichael) (Carmichael & Thelwell, 2005), Huey P. Newton (Hilliard, Zimmerman, & Zimmerman, 2006), and Rosa Parks (Parks & Haskins, 1999), who have fought publicly for racial equality in social and political realms, have been thoroughly examined and

documented as instrumental in impacting the social and political activism of Black communities. Group discussions also echoed the impact of political interactions as an important tool for Black people in improving living conditions and access to resources, although there is limited research on this issue.

COMMUNITY VOICES

The issue of under-representation in politics was of deep concern for many individuals. As one male participant noted:

[An] erosion in terms of Black representative[s] as it was 10… 15 years ago. We had more Black MPs in Ottawa. And…even in the provincial level and the municipal level, then we have now…it seems to be that we're falling…I would like to see a return to some senior Black representative in all levels of government.
- Male, Trailblazer

Furthermore, distrust of new community-based initiatives was expressed:

Community-based initiatives have [already] harvested a lot of knowledge around what are the challenges in communities. […] I think that [there's] value to name that [the harvesting of knowledge] in terms of beginning a new study, and what does it mean as opposed to creating new information but asking more questions as to why that knowledge hasn't been implemented in the ways that it's most valuable.
- Female, Trailblazer

Some participants noted that people are tired of projects that start up and then disappear or do not reconnect with communities or show tangible outcomes: "there's been so many studies," voiced one male participant in the Trailblazer session. "There comes a point," he continued, "where the community has been an amoeba in the laboratory."

The importance of using engaging and creative means of interacting with Black youth as a way to improve community activism was highlighted throughout the sessions. One male elder noted, after expressing a deep dissatisfaction in talk with no action, that as a cricket player, he would like to engage with young people in that context.

It was also noted that increased political interactions would be an important tool for Black people in improving living conditions and ameliorating access to services:

How could this [study] be useful? … to build capacity within our community – to equip the community with tools, 'cause I think it's impossible that someone in the provincial or federal government will look at this report and say I'm going to make a serious policy change based on this. That's not how political leaders respond. But if this information helps community activists and groups to advocate better to those policy makers [then] that's good to hear.
- Male, Trailblazer

Participants expressed the view that developing a community-initiated strategy that increases political influence would make a difference in bringing about transformative change. Some participants cited how other communities have been able to positively influence public policy through their engagement, involvement, and leadership representation, reflective of and responsive to their communities.

MOVING FORWARD

Issues to be addressed in Phase 2 of this research include exploring youth perceptions of effective ways to engage them in community activism, and identifying racial barriers and key issues that need to be overcome within the social context of Black legal and political participation. This might be addressed by exploring community members' career aspirations, mentorship opportunities, and role models.

The GTA Black community's contribution to arts and culture was not given much attention in group discussions. But young people's entrepreneurship in these areas is well-noted and in many cases has become important in expressing civic engagement. Organizations such as NIA Centre for the Arts, Manifesto, Obsidian Theatre, and Black Arts in Dialogue (a BEP collaborating partner) are transforming how art impacts popular culture. Their engagement in the project can contribute to and translate the findings in a creative way that reaches a diverse audience and demographic.

9
OTHER THEMES

POVERTY

Understanding the intersection of race and socio-economic conditions is critical when exploring the Black community's experiences of everything from education, to health, to employment, to justice and policing, to housing, and many other aspects of the lived experience. While the impacts of racialized poverty are far-reaching, these issues were not extensively discussed during consultations.

OVERVIEW

There was little raised in the consultations on the issue of poverty and its impact on the Black community, even though this has been the subject of much academic literature. Canadian research indicates higher rates of poverty and poor living conditions for visible minorities and other vulnerable groups in Canada, which often result in negative impacts on health (Rodney & Copeland, 2009).

COMMUNITY VOICES

Poverty was one of the least covered themes during group discussions. Participants, and especially Trailblazers, recognized that it was an important issue within the Black community, but as one male put it:

> This project is not going to solve policy issues. It's not going to solve poverty issues.
> - Male, Trailblazer

The majority of participants did not see this project as a solution to the condition of poverty that some members of the Black community in the GTA are forced to confront. However, it was perceived that this project can help ease societal tensions by pointing to employment programs

and employability resources that Blacks are able to better utilize in order to improve their socio-economic circumstances.

MOVING FORWARD

This study should further explore community perceptions of the various programs and resources aimed at improving socio-economic conditions and increasing future employment opportunities. It might also consider why members of the Black community do or do not apply to programs that increase chances of employment and/or equip individuals with additional resources to improve employability and, by extension, their socio-economic conditions.

The exhaustive research and dissemination of the impact of poverty on one's lived experience may be an indication that its impact is well-understood. Trailblazers and other project participants have emphasized that this research need not re-invent nor repeat what is already known, but rather explore possible solutions that reduce poverty.

The conversations seem to point to a readiness for a narrative change that leads to sustainable strategies in poverty alleviation and asset building.

Trailblazers at the follow-up meeting stressed the need to look at the "intersectionality" of the Black experience with respect to poverty, homelessness, and mental health.* This would involve a closer examination and understanding of intergenerational poverty in the Black community. Participants emphasized the need to highlight positive examples within the Black community as a way of celebrating the economic accomplishments and success of its members.

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*"intersectionality" is the study of intersections between different disenfranchised groups, or groups of minorities.

SEXUALITY

Sexuality adds another level of intricacy to the issues of access and outreach in the GTA's Black community. In this study, the theme of sexuality is used as an umbrella term to discuss issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and the LGBTQI community. Academic literature often suggests that LGBTQI groups are insufficiently inclusive towards Black members of the community (e.g., Rimmerman, Wald, & Wilcox, 1998). LGBTQI groups are often not considered as it pertains to outreach within the Black community.

OVERVIEW

While discussion centering on issues of sexuality was sparse, mentions of sexuality occurred mostly in the context of identity formation. Concurrent with the literature on the development of Black identity, sexuality is considered an important identity category; however, given the social pressures and barriers surrounding sexuality and "coming out" as an identity category, it is often the most fraught. In order to understand the role sexuality may play in relation to one's overall identity and social positioning, scholars stress the importance of intersectionality in order to understand inequalities caused by race, gender, class, and sexuality as considered in tandem rather than distinctly (Veenstra, 2011).

Scholarship in this area found that Black members of the LGBTQI community often experience psychological, emotional, and physical harm due to homophobic attitudes, and that these negative perceptions can be perpetuated by other Black activists who attempt to uphold and perpetuate a heteronormative vision of "Blackness" (Asanti, 2010). Theorists further note that Black LGBTQI members risk being rejected by the Black community as well as from LGBTQI activist groups (Roy, 2012; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). However, while there is abundant research focused on homophobia, identity, and "coming out" with the LGBTQI community at large, research on the particularities of Black LGBTQI members' experiences remain understudied (Brockenbrough, 2012).

COMMUNITY VOICES

Sexuality was also among the least covered of themes on which participants commented. This raises questions about whether sexuality and the experiences of LGBTQI members are perceived as pertinent issues, whether community members are aware of these realities, or whether this reflects the taboos surrounding open discussion about issues relating to sexuality.

In spite of this, the LGBTQI community was referenced during community engagement sessions, and sexuality was acknowledged as a defining characteristic of identity. Two women expressed these thoughts:

> Within the Black community, we may be on [Ontario Works], many of our young people are not given information about different resources that's across the city based on their skin colour, based on the fact that they're males, based on the fact that they may be [LGBTQI] - their sexuality.
> - Female, GTA East

> ...the LGBTQ community 'cause they're always forgotten and I'm all about inclusivity.
> - Female, GTA East

This suggests that particular attention should be paid to including LGBTQI community members when engaging members of the Black community.

MOVING FORWARD

This study should further explore questions around sexual identity and the experiences of individuals who identify as LGBTQI, as a way to capture another dimension of diversity within the Black community. This will represent a challenge, given the personal nature of the topic and the final survey methodology employed.

Trailblazers noted the importance of exploring sexual inclusion and exclusion within the Black community. Reaching out to Black individuals from the LGBTQI community, including those in positions of influence, was suggested as an important step in determining how best to ensure that voices from this part of the Black community are represented in the Phase 2 research.

10
PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND THE BEP

In addition to the issues facing the Black community, the sessions also sought participants' recommendations and views about community research generally and the BEP in particular.

OVERVIEW

Participants felt that enough research had been done and that there was a need for action, and many were concerned that another study would not address the need to move forward. At the same time, there was strong support for this particular study provided that it was about the community and reflected the diversity within it. Action orientation was critically important in order to ensure that the research might lead to meaningful change, rather than becoming yet another study ending up on a shelf.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Some participants across the GTA were extremely vocal in expressing their thoughts about the direction that the project should take. One female emphasized the importance of the community identifying the issues that the project needed to address and making recommendations based on these needs.

What do we need to do to make sure this study does something? It doesn't have to end up still being on a bookshelf somewhere or having a week of great media play and then boom, nothing changes.
- Female, Trailblazer

Participants articulated the desire to see tangible results from the BEP in several ways. One of these came from a woman who echoed the deep concern felt among the vast majority of her elder peers over the apparent breakdown in the passing on of cultural and generational knowledge and experience. She noted:

This study has to help with the intergenerational or the multigenerational themes.
- Female, Trailblazer

Participants also felt that dominant as well as marginalized and underrepresented groups should benefit from the outcomes of the BEP.

Similarly, participants spoke strongly about the importance of the community taking ownership of the BEP once the project is completed. Two Trailblazers made compelling statements about community research:

I started to ask myself what's the validity of the project and so on, and what was material for me was actually the idea that the questions of the project should actually be shaped by the community itself.
- Male, Trailblazer

I feel that this study should be seen and perceived as if it belongs ... to the community and it should be by us and for us.
- Female, Trailblazer

Participants across many sessions expressed the challenge of reaching the diverse cross-sections

of Black people in the GTA, some of whom may not identify as Black or may lack the "loudest voice in the market," as one male Trailblazer put it. It was also suggested that political channels such as councillor newsletters might be effective channels for promoting the interests of the Black community (Female, GTA West).

MOVING FORWARD

This research needs to be clearly different (and seen to be different) from previous studies on the GTA Black community in order to be accepted by the community and taken seriously by both internal and external stakeholders in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Being different means the research must be conducted by and with the community, unlike top-down scientific research, which values objectivity and distance between the researcher and subject. In essence, the community is a partner in the research and actively participates in all phases, from design to implementation to analysis to dissemination. This provides an opportunity for capacity building in that it creates a foundation upon which the community can build future research, as it may be appropriate.

Feedback from the sessions confirmed that the principles and premises of the BEP are on target, in terms of focusing on capturing the broad diversity of the GTA Black community, conducting research in a respectful way, prioritizing the lived experience of individuals, equally emphasizing successes as well as challenges, and developing a research design that will yield actionable results that can be used in future policy, programs, and community building.

CONCLUSIONS

Phase 1 of this study provides a valuable picture of the hopes and aspirations, concerns, and priorities of the GTA Black community. While many complex issues were discussed, the input shows a clear need for increased community-based research on the Black community in this region.

This will be the first study of its kind as an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of individuals within the GTA Black community, to better understand the nature of challenges, opportunities, and factors leading to success in this community. Community engagement in Phase 1 sets the stage for the research in Phase 2 that will entail a comprehensive, empirically-driven survey of the Black community across the GTA.

The purpose of the BEP Phase 1 is to actively engage the GTA Black community early in the research process in order to introduce the initiative to community members and invite their involvement in guiding its development. The process began with a meeting with Trailblazers to learn from those in positions of leadership in the community and who have been witness to previous studies. Their input was invaluable in designing our subsequent outreach in terms of:

- Casting the net as wide as our resources would permit.
- Connecting with a broad cross-section of the diverse voices in the Black community across the GTA.
- Working closely with collaborating partner organizations and volunteers to host and organize sessions.
- Structuring sessions to invite open discussion that did not presuppose peoples' priorities and concerns.

The process took place over six months of planning and five months of implementation, and involved hundreds of hours of time committed by scores of dedicated volunteers.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Many themes and issues emerged from the group discussions, covering such areas as identity, mental health, media, culture, and education. Some themes stood out, such as racial identity, which revealed considerable complexity that will need to be carefully explored in the Phase 2 research. Other issues were given comparatively less attention by participants, although this does not signify that they are less important to address.

Acknowledging and capturing the diversity within the Black community is critical.

A majority of participants strongly supported this type of research, provided it was of the community and reflected the diversity within it. The demographic mix of participants provided a rich source of information, especially with respect to gender and generation. Dedicated sessions with youth, as well as sessions with male and female elders, produced meaningful conversations on how they could contribute to enriching their own lived experiences and that of others within the community. Elders expressed great empathy for the day-to-day challenges of young people.

Young people seem to be in a better state of preparedness for leadership and success than many elders and others initially thought.

Youth see access to resources and other support systems as a challenge, but not as a barrier. This became evident through stories, events, and

entrepreneurial pursuits, which in many cases were outside of well-known and/or formal organizations. This information was welcomed as it was shared from one group to the next and lent to a sense of hopefulness for meaningful progress.

Participants are positive and hopeful for change.

Overall, the tone was notably constructive. In speaking about their lives and community, participants expressed a mix of pride, frustration, sadness, and hope. Most did not hold back on what they see as endemic problems, but there was surprisingly little dwelling on past concerns and a stronger focus on looking forward to what might be achieved.

Participants are skeptical about yet another study of the community, but they acknowledge the need for increased understanding through community-based research.

There was an underlying current of skepticism across engagement sessions about the value of this study given that past research recommendations and findings were perceived to have been all but ignored. However, there was also broad agreement on the need for a better understanding of the community in terms of its assets and challenges, which can in turn provide a foundation for community building and addressing long-standing issues. In the end, there was consensus among session participants and Trailblazers about the value of community-based research.

Collaborating partners actively endorse the need and value of community-based research.

Collaborating partner-organizations who helped organize and host the engagement sessions, view the BEP as linking directly to their mission, vision, and values. They see this research as providing evidence-based data that strengthens their capacity to stimulate conversations

among organizations that work closely with the community, to share best practices, and to draw upon the resulting repository of information that can be shared across the community.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Insight gained in Phase 1 serves as a guide to the development of Phase 2, which will entail a comprehensive, empirically-driven study of the Black community. While the engagement sessions aimed primarily to hear and learn from participants, they also prompted the community to start thinking about itself in a new way, as well as to consider the various ways in which this research might be of value.

The community's expectations for the upcoming research process were made clear. Research conducted by and with the community is of utmost importance. As one participant noted, "no research about us without us," meaning research that:

• Effectively captures the diversity in the Black community;

• Is conducted in a respectful way;

• Focuses on the lived experience of individuals;

• Harnesses community individuals and resources in all phases of the research process, which builds community capacity (i.e., to initiate further research that may be needed);

• Focuses on assets and successes within the community while identifying challenges to be overcome; and

• Contributes to action in the form of policy, programs, and community building.

Meeting these criteria provides the community with the opportunity to build and implement strategies that can be transformational for this generation and ones to follow.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A – RESEARCH REFERENCES

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APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSION PROGRAM & DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

Program

1. Review program agenda
2. Introductions and welcome
3. Session purpose and objective
4. Session introduction and instructions
5. Table conversations
6. Plenary - table presentations to larger group
7. Plenary Summary
8. Closing Remarks
9. Next steps
10. Special thanks and acknowledgements

Suggestion Questions

Warm-up:
Cast forward and write a news headline for 10 years from now – if this was a successful project, what would your headline say?

Questions proposed for table conversations:
1. In what ways could the study be of benefit to the community?
2. What are the main issues/questions that should be addressed?
3. What do you see as the main challenges for this project and what advice would you offer for overcoming these challenges?
4. Who should we engage? How can we most effectively engage them in:
5. What are other thoughts, ideas or advice you would offer as this study moves ahead? Please note those not covered by the listed questions.

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C – LIST OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

Session Date	Collaborating Partner/Host	Region Location	Group Composition
Nov. 3, 2012	Midanyta Immigrant Settlement & Somali Immigrant Services	GTA Central	Somali community
Nov. 10, 2013	United Black Students Conference	GTA Central	Students – male and female
Feb. 13, 2013	YMCA Greater Toronto	GTA West	YMCA staff
Feb. 14, 2013	YMCA Greater Toronto	GTA Central	YMCA staff
Feb. 14, 2013	Redemption Reintegration Services	GTA East	Youth – male and female
Feb. 19, 2013	YMCA Greater Toronto	GTA East	YMCA staff
Feb. 19, 2013	YMCA Greater Toronto	GTA Central	YMCA staff
Feb. 21, 2013	YMCA Greater Toronto	GTA Central	YMCA staff
Feb. 25, 2013	TAIBU (Community Health Centre)	GTA East	Women
Feb. 25, 2013	Region of Peel	GTA West	Inclusive of all ages demographics
Feb. 26, 2013	Region of Peel	GTA West	Inclusive of all ages demographics
Feb. 27, 2013	Region of Peel	GTA West	A cross-section of participants with significant elder/retiree presence
Mar. 1, 2013	Macauley Child Development Services (More than a Haircut Project)	GTA Central	General: Barbershop – walk-in clients and barbers
Mar. 2, 2013	Macauley Child Development Services (More than a Haircut Project)	GTA Central	General: Barbershop – walk-in clients and barbers
Mar. 2, 2013	Macauley Child Development Services (More than a Haircut Project)	GTA Central	General
Mar. 4, 2013	TAIBU (Community Health Centre)	GTA East	Men
Mar. 6, 2013	TAIBU (Community Health Centre)	GTA East	Youth - female

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D – BEP COLLABORATING PARTNERS

The following organizations are helping to promote the study and/or hosting community engagement sessions - providing volunteers, venue space, and other resource assistance. Additional partners are being added on an ongoing basis.

- African Canadian Development Council
- African Canadian Legal Clinic
- Black Artists Network in Dialogue (BAND)
- Black Business Professional Association
- Black Leadership Health Network
- City of Toronto
- Heritage Toronto
- Jamaican Canadian Association (JCA)
- Midanyta Immigrant Settlement and Somali Immigrant Services
- Ontario Black History Society
- Macaulay Child Development Centre "More Than a Haircut - The Barbershop Project"
- Region of Peel
- Redemption and Reintegration Services
- TAIBU Community Health Centre
- Toronto Police Service
- Tropicana Community Services
- United Way Peel
- United Black Students Conference
- Urban Financial Services Coalition (UFSC)
- York Centre for Education and Community
- York Regional Police
- Youth Challenge Fund

ABOUT THE BLACK EXPERIENCE PROJECT

The Black Experience Project (BEP) is a groundbreaking research study focusing on the Black community across the Greater Toronto Area. The purpose of this study is to create the first-ever comprehensive understanding of the diverse communities that make up the region's Black population through exploring the lived experiences and views that speak to individual and collective strengths, contributions, challenges, opportunities, capacity and resiliency.

The results are intended to identify policies and other initiatives that will contribute to future success. This study is led by five Founding Partners, with the active support and guidance of many Collaborating Partner organizations, community advisors, and leading academic experts.

The project includes three phases:

1) COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: to proactively engage the Black community to ensure that the research focuses on issues of greatest relevance, and contributes to capacity building;
2) RESEARCH DESIGN AND EXECUTION: to conduct an in-depth survey with a representative sample of individuals across the GTA; and
3) POST-STUDY DISSEMINATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: to broadly publicize the research findings and actively engage policy-makers and the community around implications and next steps.

This report presents the findings and conclusions for Phase 1.