



Working Together to Do Right for Black Youth

Content taken from *Doing Right Together for Black Youth: What We Learned from the Community Engagement Sessions for the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan*

Between March and July 2017, Ontario's Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) conducted 15 community engagement sessions to inform the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan. Over 1500 community members participated in the engagement sessions. The MCYS shared anonymized data (without any identifying personal information) captured at these community engagement sessions, as well as written submissions, with YouthREX to analyze, interpret, and summarize.

Community members were asked to reflect on the best way to work together to ensure that the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP) works for Black youth and builds the capacity of Black organizations.

Centering Black Youth Voice and Leadership in the BYAP

What are the best ways to engage Black children and youth to hear their voices and learn about their experiences?

Youth have a unique voice and are finding imaginative and creative ways of telling new stories, participating in political activity, responding to complex social problems, and advocating for change.

01. Nothing About Black Youth Without Black Youth

The strong representation and meaningful involvement of Black youth within the BYAP, as well as within the community projects supported by the BYAP, is crucial.

02. Communicate WITH Youth, Not AT Youth

It is important to understand how youth communicate. Black youth are online and can be engaged through social media.

03. Reduce Barriers & Provide Accessible Information

Engage Black youth voices within youth spaces by providing accessible information and reducing barriers that limit participation.

04. Create Opportunities for Storytelling & Representation

Create opportunities to engage and hear Black youth voices through storytelling and representation in the public sphere, including in the media.

05. Prioritize Black Youth Voices and Develop Black Youth Partnerships

Black youth need to be included in the governance of the BYAP and community projects, to ensure equity in program design and delivery. Black youth must be seen as experts and their leadership, expertise, and skills must be supported. The BYAP should also ensure mentorship opportunities for Black youth with peers and role models who reflect their own identities.

Five Characteristics of Organizations That Meet the Needs of Black Youth

Describe the characteristics of an organization that meets the needs of Black children and youth.

Community members identified five key characteristics.

01. Black Leadership and Direction

An organization where there is Black leadership and a majority of staff and clientele who are Black. Such an organization will also have culturally-relevant services and well-defined parameters for engaging non-Black allies.

02. Diverse Authentic Representation

Diverse and authentic representation of Black communities goes beyond having Black front-line staff to having Black representation at all levels within the organization – and within all guiding mandates, visions, and missions. This type of organization would take direction from the community.

03. Sustainability

Sustainability is crucial for organizations focused on serving Black communities, and is challenging for an organization dependent on grants. Sustainability involves both trust and support from the community, and requires connections to other organizations. There is also value in having long-term outcomes and ongoing capacity-building, particularly for smaller organizations.

04. Responsiveness and Accountability

There is a need for coordinated responses across sectors and between organizations.

Black organizations must also be responsive to current and emerging trends amongst different demographic groups within Black communities. Continuous education and awareness of evidence-based outcomes that inform work with Black communities were described as important for achieving results.

05. Youth Development

Meaningful engagement invites Black youth to leadership roles on conversations about their development, gives them access to mentors and role models, and exposes them to activities and environments they wouldn't normally have access to.

Organizations must move past conventional ways of speaking and working with Black youth by exploring and addressing how systemic barriers and histories of oppression impact their present-day conditions. Organizations must ground their work in strong Black identities, while providing youth with meaningful roles.