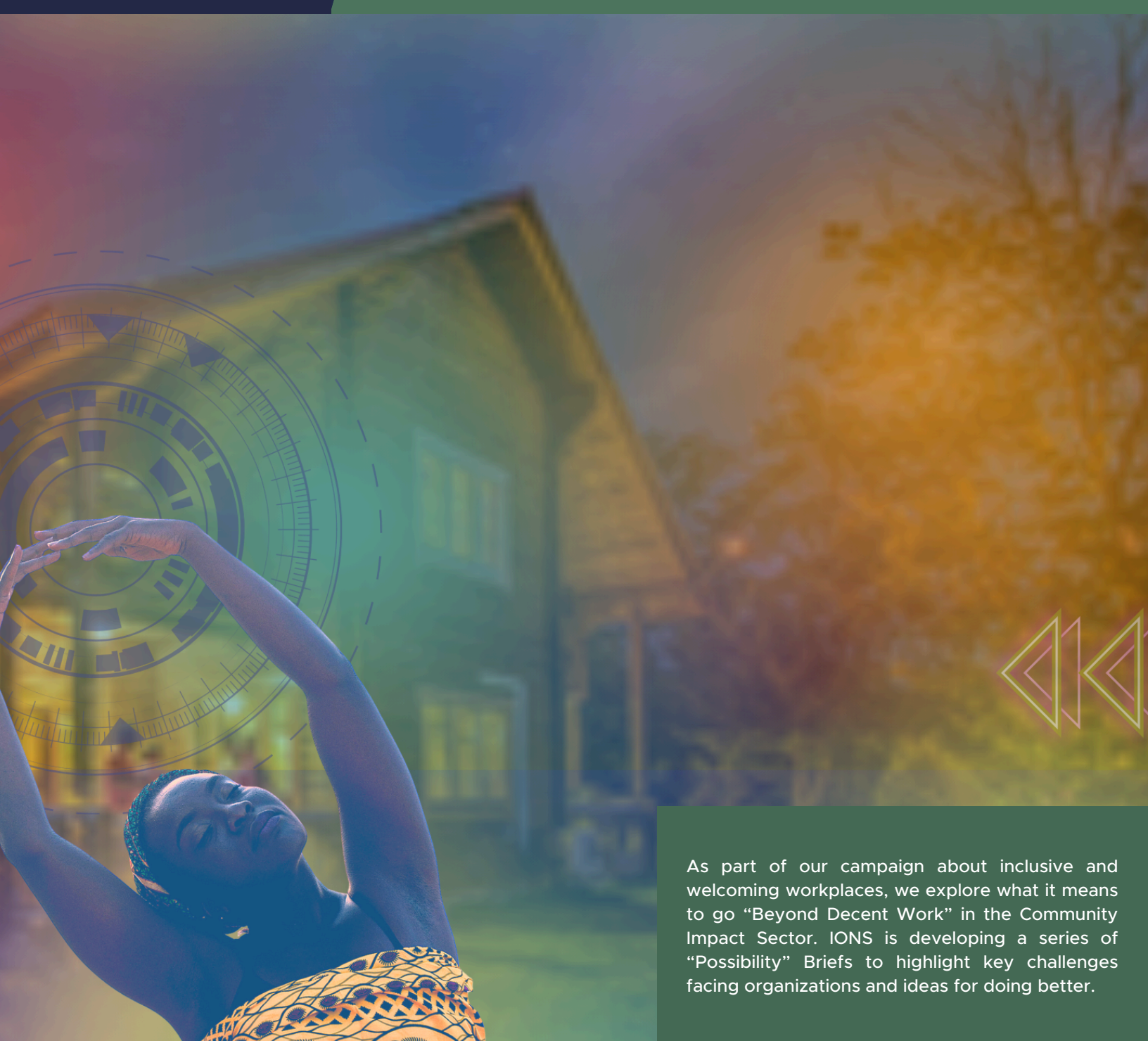


# LIBERATORY PRACTICES FOR PRO-BLACK WORKPLACES



As part of our campaign about inclusive and welcoming workplaces, we explore what it means to go “Beyond Decent Work” in the Community Impact Sector. IONS is developing a series of “Possibility” Briefs to highlight key challenges facing organizations and ideas for doing better.

**Land Acknowledgement:** As beneficiaries of ongoing colonialism, we recognize the privilege in being able to build a life here in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded land of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the Peace and Friendship Treaties. This land is also the birthplace of Black heritage and culture in what is now known as Canada following the forcible displacement of people of African descent. We are committed to carrying out the long overdue, vital reconciliation and anti-oppression work.

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# POSSIBILITY BRIEF: LIBERATORY PRACTICES FOR PRO-BLACK WORKPLACES

Written by:  
The Black Futures Project Team

## 30%

of racialized staff quit their jobs due to racism in the workplace (COCO, 2018).

## ~50%

Of Black employees report feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome in the workplace (Benefits Canada, 2024).

## 2x

Black employees are twice as likely to feel held back in their career or excluded from PD due to their race (Benefits Canada, 2024)

## 26%

of Black leaders felt more harshly judged than their white colleagues (Benefits, Canada 2024)

As a continuation of the successful Black History Learning Journey – an online series to explore the history and legacy of African Nova Scotians – the Black Futures Project is a community-led initiative supporting belonging and organizational leadership for Black and Afro-Nova Scotians in the Community Impact (nonprofit) Sector.

Rooted in principles of Afrofuturism, Black liberation, and decolonization, the project was co-designed by community for community with learnings for the wider sector. Through gatherings, storytelling, and a blended learning journey cohort, the project deepened awareness of systemic barriers and supported organizations to create policies framed in justice, belonging, and culture.

Led in partnership with the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent (ANS DPAD) and Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia (IONS), the Black Futures Project centers community voice, intergenerational leadership, and bold imagination to transform how Black people are seen, supported, and celebrated across Nova Scotia.

### The Issue:

Anti-Black racism is embedded in organizational culture due to deeply rooted systems affecting the Community Impact (nonprofit) Sector. Despite the sector employing more Black Canadians than other sectors, Black staff report high rates of burnout, discrimination, exclusion and mental health related issues.

### Why it Matters:

Anti-Black racism and discrimination result in low wages, burnout, career stagnation, lack of leadership representation, isolation, dissatisfaction, and quitting. Less diverse organizations means a limited ability to address complex social issues with an equitable, culturally informed, community-led lens.

### The Possibility:

When impact organizations implement liberatory practices that can counter these barriers it builds more leaderful organizations. This in turn supports retention, reduces burnout, and greatly improves well-being. Bridging the equity gap means moving from the current state to reimagined futures.

### What is Afrofuturism?

Afrofuturism is a cultural and artistic movement blending African/ diasporic history with science fiction, technology, and fantasy to imagine liberated Black futures. It reimagines the past and present to challenge current narratives, often emphasizing themes of technology, liberation, and cosmic agency. It spans literature, music, art, and film. Some examples of Afrofuturism are seen in movies like Black Panther and by writers like Octavia E. Butler and N.K. Jemison.

## CALL TO ACTION:

Join the movement to reimagine and create a future rooted in joy, culture, and liberation by implementing pro-Black policies and prioritizing liberatory practices at work.

## THE NONPROFIT CONTEXT:

Systemic underfunding of Black-led and Black-serving organizations reinforces wider socioeconomic barriers. Compared to other sectors, nonprofit employees are more likely racialized. Despite greater levels of workforce participation, Black staff are underrepresented in leadership roles within organizations and boards - and more likely to be precariously employed, and in entry level roles. But research shows that more diverse organizations not only positively affect social outcomes, community trust, program delivery, but also financial performance.

- Black employees face discrimination and racism in the workplace that negatively impact mental and physical health ([source](#)).
- Black nonprofit workers are paid 12% less than their non-racialized colleagues ([source](#)).
- Black-led and Indigenous-led organizations are underfunded ([source](#)).
- Black and Indigenous employees often take on extra equity work and emotional labour within workplaces.
- Black, Indigenous, and racialized employees are subject to experiencing microaggressions and tokenism in the workplace.

## A JUSTICE & EQUITY LENS

Burnout and poor mental health outcomes are shaped by social factors, including race and identity. Anti-Black racism has a negative effect on well-being, as Black employees frequently experience discrimination, microaggressions, unrecognized emotional labour, and exclusion in the workplace. These conditions are compounded by structural inequities— wage gaps, lack of representation in leadership, and lack of access to cultural supports and care. These systemic issues carry organizational consequences, with research suggesting that workplace discrimination can significantly reduce productivity and retention—highlighting the urgency of addressing anti-Black racism.

	How/ Why this happens	Implications	Shift to Promising Practices
Leadership gap / Burnout	<p>Black leaders held to higher expectations but not given enough support</p> <p>Less access to health and wellness supports</p>	<p>Glass Cliff: a precarious position where Black leaders are appointed during times of organizational crisis and often blamed.</p> <p>Burnout</p>	<p>PD, mentorship and leadership development for Black Leaders that recognizes unique challenges and burdens they face in leadership</p>
Lack of representation	<p>Cultural cues, recruitment and retention challenges</p>	<p>No models of leadership, masking to fit in</p>	<p>Leadership that is representative of population, many styles of leadership welcome</p>

# A JUSTICE & EQUITY LENS (CONTINUED)

	How/ Why this happens	Implications	Shift to Promising Practices
<b>Surveillance / Time Culture</b>	Culture of urgency, detailed tracking of hours.	Hypersurveillance, performance management, burnout  Reproduced belief that production = value	Co-created outcomes, process and relationships valued Time flexibility / Rest integrated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four day work week</li> <li>• Seasonal operating rhythm</li> </ul>
<b>Tone Policing</b>	Language, emotional expression and cultural expression that is allowed  Culture of organization gives cues that prioritize dominant culture	<b>Codeswitching, masking</b> = emotional labour  <b>Performance management</b> – e.g. “not professional” Less likely to be promoted or selected for leadership experiences	Expansive definition of professionalism  Clear job roles / performance management expectations  Meeting redesign for greater cultural expression
<b>Tokenism</b>	Only one or few Black staff members, challenges with recruitment and retention, Lack of awareness / or shared language and training on racial equity / Microaggressions	Emotional labour – having to teach others, valid concerns (esp re: racial equity) are minimized  Microaggressions Imposter syndrome	<b>Affinity Groups</b> Or Professional Networks  PD training  Staff wide training on racial equity
<b>Systemic Barriers / Pay Gap</b>	Lack of transparent pay scales  Black applicants don't negotiate to same degree as white applicants, or are penalized  Glass Ceiling: bias and discrimination that impacts promotions	Perpetuates economic inequity, lower salary, no leadership positions	Transparent pay scales  No negotiation policy (to level the playing field)



# IDEAS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Addressing anti-Black racism in the workplace is essential for fostering a welcoming environment where everyone feel respected, supported, and able to thrive and advance. Implementing policies that confront systemic inequities improves staff well-being, while strengthening recruitment and retention activities. When organizations take meaningful steps toward racial equity, they also see gains in job satisfaction, engagement, innovation, and overall productivity. Below, we’ve outlined some ideas to support implementation of liberatory practices and pro-Black policies in the workplace:

IDEAS	PRACTICES	POLICIES	RESOURCES
<p><b>READINESS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training for shared language, engagement, and PD</li> <li>• Working with experts (hire equity consultants) to provide recommendations</li> <li>• Anti-Racism Pay Equity Audit: Conduct a yearly audit comparing Black employees' salaries to their white peers in similar roles. Adjust as needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create Anti-discrimination Policies</li> <li>• Safer Spaces policy</li> <li>• Bereavement policy to be more inclusive of chosen family, friends, even pets. Consider how bereavement and grief are defined by time</li> <li>• Additional PTO (Cultural days of importance)</li> <li>• Diversify vendor choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Black History Learning Journey</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Pathway to Actions Tool</a> to deepen commitments to justice and equity</li> <li>• <a href="#">Anti-Black Racism Policy Framework</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Template for Anti-racism policies</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Decent Work and Challenging Systems of White Supremacy</a></li> <li>• Blog: <a href="#">How urgency Culture Polices our Work</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>RECRUITMENT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go to the people, networking and engagement in community</li> <li>• BIAS reduction (using rubrics for hiring), creating criteria</li> <li>• Reverse references (allowing the interviewee to have candid conversations with staff)</li> <li>• Review language, posting and networks where its shared</li> <li>• Consider remote/ flexible work through an equity lens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent sharing in advance about salary and organizational culture, as well as where the equity work is currently at</li> <li>• Not requiring “Canadian experience” whether for work or education</li> <li>• Policies to support remote and hybrid work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide: <a href="#">Shifting Power Dynamics in the Hiring Process</a></li> <li>• IONS’ example: <a href="#">Pre-Interview Package</a></li> <li>• Possibility Brief: <a href="#">Job Satisfaction, Well-being and working Remotely</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>RETENTION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesigning organizational perception on time and productivity</li> <li>• Support affinity Groups (peer-led groups who share a common identity, interest, or goal, often formed to offer support, foster inclusion, and build community)</li> <li>• Support cultural expression</li> <li>• Meeting redesign for greater psychological safety</li> <li>• Mentorship opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible dress codes that allow for variety of cultural expression and comfort</li> <li>• PD funds: Equitable approaches to PD might mean additional funding for opportunities</li> <li>• Provide access to culturally appropriate health services to address discrimination-related trauma</li> <li>• Consider a ‘seasonal’ flow to work and provide time for rest, reflection, and learning following busy program periods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibility Brief on the <a href="#">Four-day Work Week</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sector-wide Employee Group Benefits Program</a></li> <li>• Resources and templates: <a href="#">Beyond Decent Work</a></li> <li>• Black Professionals Canada offers a <a href="#">mentorship program</a></li> <li>• Resource: <a href="#">PD Policy Development Considerations</a></li> </ul>



## LIBERATORY LEADERSHIP

The Liberatory Leadership cohort was designed as a learning experience where participants engaged in reflection, skill-building, and community dialogue to reimagine leadership through the lens of equity, justice, and collective liberation. Participants explored their identities, values, and leadership practices while developing tools to challenge oppressive systems and create meaningful change. This cohort emphasized peer learning, collaboration, and building supportive networks that extend beyond the program. Overall, the cohort aimed to empower emerging leaders to lead authentically and contribute to more decolonized and liberatory practices.



[DOWNLOAD THE WORKBOOK](#)

### In summary:

Implementing anti-Black racism policies and practices is essential to both workforce well-being and organizational health. Addressing systemic underfunding of Black-led organizations, investing in equitable hiring and career advancement pathways, and embedding culturally relevant supports reduces burnout, improves retention, and strengthens impact.

Research shows that more diverse organizations—particularly those with diverse leadership and boards—demonstrate stronger governance, greater innovation, improved community trust, and better program and financial outcomes. The implementation of pro-Black policies and liberatory practices is both a just and strategic initiative. Reimagining Black Futures in Nova Scotia's Community Impact Sector means equitable representation in leadership, funding Black organizations and projects, closing wage gaps, and prioritizing the well-being of Black staff.

### References that informed our work:

- [Half of Canadian BIPOC employees feel uncomfortable or unwelcome at work: survey](#) (Benefits Canada, 2024)
- [People First: A Portrait of Canada's Nonprofit Workforce Data and Trends](#) (Imagine Canada, 2025)
- [Canadian non-profits face barriers to advancing equity, York U study shows](#) (York U, 2026)
- [The "Problem" Woman of Colour in the Workplace](#) (The Centre for Community Organizations, 2018)
- [Unfunded: Black Communities Overlooked by Canadian Philanthropy](#) (Pereira et al., 2020)