Equity Ottawa
Notes from Community-Partner Discussion
Held during Welcoming Ottawa Week (WOW) 2019

June 21, 2019
Mary Pitt Building, 100 Constellation Drive

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A. Introduction

There is ample evidence that structural, systemic racism produces inequities in the daily lives and life outcomes of Ottawa residents, disadvantaging those who are immigrants or racialized.

Equity Ottawa was established in 2012 to strengthen the capacities of partner organizations to address institutional barriers to equity that immigrants and racialized people experience. Based on its work and input from community stakeholders, the Equity Ottawa partnership is developing an action plan for organizations to work collectively to advance equity and to monitor progress towards equity outcomes.

As part of the development of the action plan, Equity Ottawa held a community-partner discussion on June 21, 2019 during Welcoming Ottawa Week (WOW) 2019, at the City of Ottawa Mary Pitt Building, to share ideas on strategies needed for municipal, health, education, justice and social service sector organizations to advance equity in all aspects of their organizations.

Thirty partners and community members attended the session and contributed their observations and advice, through plenary and small group discussions. Lynne Tyler of Catalyst Research and Communications facilitated the session and produced a summary report in collaboration with OLIP.

The session was opened by Equity Ottawa co-leads Hindia Mohamoud, Director of OLIP, and Simone Thibault, Executive Director of Centretown Community Health Centre. Simone acknowledged that the gathering was taking place on National Indigenous People's Day and on unceded territory of the Algonquin people, and expressed a commitment to redressing ongoing injustices, informed by the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Hindia noted that inequities are complex and historically rooted, requiring action in a range of areas. The Equity Ottawa partnership is therefore developing a multifaceted, collective plan of action, to build a city that is free of racism and other barriers to equity. Institutions have made individual and collective progress in terms of awareness and acknowledgement of racism and inequities, and in designing and implementing actions to address systemic barriers, but inequities persist, including anti-Black racism, Islamophobia and other forms of bias and discrimination. This collective journey will help us hold each other accountable.

B. Action Strategies on Equity and Anti-Racism

Denise Deby, Equity Ottawa coordinator, introduced the draft action plan developed by the Equity partnership. The plan sets out mutually-reinforcing strategies and actions for organizations to advance equity, across several domains: governance and leadership, organizational culture, human resources and employment, service delivery, data and accountability, enabling context, and community engagement.

To frame the discussion, Faduma Yusuf, Community Health Promoter at Somerset West Community Health Centre, shared principles developed by SWCHC's anti-racism project facilitator, Yusra Osman, based on community conversations SWCHC held in 2018-2019 on participants' experiences with everyday forms of racism, the impact on their wellbeing and sources from which they draw strength and resilience:

- A framework of wellness and courage is required to discuss racism, as it is a deeply emotional topic, eliciting various emotions based on people's identities and life circumstances. Faduma expressed gratitude for the presence and contributions of all in the room: participants who hold identities often talked about as being marginalized or "othered," those who identify as allies and champions and who hold positions of power and influence in the system, and those who occupy both spaces.
- The "Triple A" framework on understanding and dismantling privilege, used in the SWCHC consultations, may be useful. It entails continually examining oppression, power and privilege through: Awareness of differences, Analysis of power and privilege, and Action, with a fourth "A" added by Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard, Allyship.
- Creating an equitable and racism-free Ottawa will require respectful mindsets, a willingness to engage in courageous conversations through comfort and discomfort, and listening to emotions.

Participants were invited to work in small groups on a domain of their choosing, and to address three discussion questions:

1. What actions are needed to overcome persistent, systemic anti-Black and other forms of racism, Islamophobia and other inequities in this domain? Participants were invited to refer to the action strategies in the draft action plan and to revise, add to or comment on these.
2. How will we know these efforts have been successful? What is important to track? What measures can we use to assess progress?
3. What can we do to create or encourage this change? (Next steps)

Based on the interest of participants, four small group discussions were held. Highlights of their discussions were shared with the full group, and are presented below.

Governance and Leadership

- To address persistent and systemic anti-Black racism and other forms of discrimination, we need leadership that is representative of Ottawa's diverse population; otherwise, our progress will be limited. We need to create a system where racialized people in Ottawa have equal opportunities to successfully run for public office. The City could fund programs such as Equal Voice at the municipal level that facilitate this. Employment, mentorships and internships with councillors are another option to raise awareness, knowledge and skills.
- Establish a unit at the City of Ottawa with responsibility for equity and inclusion and anti-racism, including anti-Black racism, to provide oversight and support, as well as having people responsible for equity in various departments. City Council is accountable overall for monitoring and implementation of equity and inclusion. This should engage community leadership and expertise on equity and anti-racism.

- There is a need to monitor progress to hold institutions accountable, and take corrective action if progress is slow. There is a need for safe spaces and processes for complaints and concerns to be raised and addressed.
- Consider incentives for institutions to adopt and achieve the common framework, recognizing that different organizations have different accountability frameworks. For example, create a prestigious award to recognize organizations that adopt the framework and implement the collective action plan, or include it in institutions' accreditation requirements; require contractors to achieve equity standards and conditions before being awarded contracts; and hold managers accountable in their performance evaluations for progress toward specific goals.
- Rather than using terms such as equity and inclusion which have many understandings, use plain language and action verbs to describe what the problem is and what we will do about it. For example, rather than "improving equity in governance," say "we will increase the number of racialized people in leadership positions in the organization," or "we will create an external committee to advise the head of the institution on how to eliminate racism in our organization."

Organizational Culture

- We need to address the "pink elephant in the room," the environment and climate of fear and discomfort that prevents people in all parts of an organization from directly and honestly talking about racism and addressing it. Ongoing learning and training is essential.
- Intentionality is key: actions by leaders and by individuals throughout the organization need to be based on clear intentions to understand and end racism. Listening and acting with authenticity is also part of this intentionality.
- Discussion of systemic racism and discrimination sometimes lets individual white people "off the hook" from being accountable for their individual actions because the system is at fault. We understand that it is a shared, individual and organizational responsibility.
- Hire racialized people at all levels of the organization. We need a critical mass of people throughout the organization to shift the culture, both racialized people and allies, recognizing the burden that people carry who are racialized and in leadership positions.
- The Anti-Black Racism Forum was good but there has been insufficient follow-up.
- Terminology can be challenging. For example, public debate on the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has focused on the term "genocide" rather than the issue of genocide.
- Tracking our progress involves a combination of data and stories, so that we can understand the context of people's experiences.

Community Engagement

- Sometimes community engagement is seen as its own marker of success: people came, therefore we engaged. However, underlying community engagement is monitoring and accountability, and trust; and ongoing, meaningful engagement is itself an important element of addressing the issues. In the first Addressing Anti-Black Racism Forum, there was a methodology to community engagement to ensure that a diversity of voices were

present. There is an art and science of community engagement and we need to draw on the expertise of those who know how to design effective forums.

- Community engagement is often under-funded and not given the importance it is due. We need to invest the energy and effort it deserves.
- A framework or handbook of best practices could distil some of this expertise in a format that is easy for organizations to use.
- We need to do a stakeholder analysis: who are we hearing from and who is missing? Not everyone will come to a community forum so we need to offer multiple avenues of community engagement. We need to think creatively about how reporting back to communities can be done, through forums or other activities. It is important to understand how communities view progress.

Data and Progress Measurement

- Data collection and reporting are all done in a particular climate and environment – political, cultural, organizational. We need to be cognizant of the environment in which the data are being understood, analyzed and acted upon. There is a need to balance openness with privacy and confidentiality; qualitative and quantitative data; etc.
- OCDSB is engaged in the second round of their identity-based data collection process. Identity-based data will be used to develop "Disproportionality Indices", e.g. on suspensions or academic achievement. This is always a learning process and highlights the challenges of data collection, analysis and reporting.
- The data tell us that the future of our city is a city of immigrants and racialized people.

C. Conclusion and Next Steps

The facilitator highlighted some of the main points arising from the discussion:

a) A number of specific actions and strategies were proposed for consideration in the action plan, including:
   1.1. Create a framework on what meaningful community engagement looks like, setting out principles, methodology and/or best practices. This can be created through a working group, and co-created with communities, drawing on community expertise. It should incorporate multiple engagement strategies to reach diverse groups, and be clear about expected outcomes.
   1.2. Establish a unit at the City of Ottawa responsible for equity and inclusion, and creating an anti-racism / anti-Black racism secretariat.
   1.3. Strengthen the incentive system for organizations to adopt and implement the collective framework and action plan, such as an award that recognizes organizations' progress.

b) We need to equip ourselves to have authentic, uncomfortable discussions on a continuing basis.

c) Accountability for achieving results is key to the success of the action plan. It will be important to build regular and clear reporting to the community, and ongoing feedback from the community about where there is progress and where there is not.

d) Follow-up is needed to the Anti-Black Racism Town Hall, ensuring representation of diverse perspectives and authenticity in our interactions with each other.

e) As community members raise issues, institutions need to ensure they are not defensive and that they listen from a place of deep concern. Honest conversations, leadership and a sense of urgency are essential. Appreciation was expressed for the courageous and meaningful contributions of participants and the perseverance of those who are trying to change the system.
f) Some organizations would find it helpful to have a matrix or other tools that their employees could use on a regular, even daily, basis to integrate equity considerations into their ongoing work.
g) The action plan needs to build on reports and recommendations already developed by community groups.

Participants requested that notes from the session be circulated, to ensure accountability and continue to build momentum.

Hindia Mohamoud and Simone Thibault thanked the participants for their expertise and insights, and indicated that the input gathered would be used to further refine the draft action plan.

Appendix A: Notes from Small Group Discussions

Governance and Leadership

1. What is needed to overcome persistent, systemic anti-Black and other forms of racism, Islamophobia and other inequities in this area? (Actions)
   - Need for leadership to represent the diversity of Ottawa's population
   - Creation of an equity and inclusion unit within the city that includes anti-Black racism – hold leadership accountable
   - Develop a new vocabulary for "diversity" "inclusion" "equity" "leadership" and "governance" so that we are clear on what these terms specifically mean and what actions they represent
   - Consult with existing organizations and invite these organizations/their leaders to be part of the diversity and inclusion unit and collective plan
   - Have specific and direct actions to address systemic racism, with organizations involved and engaged in their own way, and the common goal of an equitable city

2. How will we know whether these efforts have been successful? (Measures)
   - Develop a system of accountability whereby stakeholders can hold city officials accountable for non-enforcement e.g. Reporting mechanism similar to UN human rights treaties
   - Increase opportunities for racialized people to be elected. Examples:
     - Equal Voice initiative at the municipal level
     - Internships for racialized youth to become politically engaged
     - Create programs for adults to participate in elections

3. What can we do to create or encourage this change? (Next steps)
   - Incentivized system
   - Awarded for what they are doing
   - Standardized framework
   - Accreditation body
   - Community education and engagement to hold city officials accountable

Community and Public Engagement

1. What is needed to overcome persistent, systemic anti-Black and other forms of racism, Islamophobia and other inequities in this area? (Actions)
   - Create processes to create awareness as to existence of equity issues and follow up plans (accountability)
   - Consider timing of engaging racialized and immigrant residents (timely response) as well as overcome barriers. Use diversity of engagement (give other options, e.g. transportation and other days of the week etc.)

- Community engagement is underfunded. This is where the real work is, though. Needs more time and resources. Community members need to be there to help support initiatives but how are they compensated? (social capital/embodying the work)
- Community consultations need to reach more diverse populations and have results. How do we engage with a wide spectrum of people including grassroots?
- Create a standard to have actionable results (measurable results)
- Community engagement often becomes a measure of its own success
- Need to find representatives and key people from marginalized communities who understand and can have input in institutional policies and feedback sessions
- How information is used and timeline of response sent to community prior to consultations. What is meaningful engagement – some people to consult on this – and commit to it as using it as Equity Ottawa partners
- There's an art and science in doing engagement
- Create a framework – "gold standard"
- The organization may report back on progress, but community may not see it that way
- Be mindful of hiring practices

2. How will we know whether these efforts have been successful? (Measures)
   - Effort and time spent on community engagement becomes its own success
   - Assess impact of community engagement
   - Feedback from community itself
   - Follow up communication, continuation

3. What can we do to create or encourage this change? (Next steps)
   - Encourage sense of open-mindedness – all experiences need to be addressed
   - Report back on how and what changes have already been made
   - How do you want outcomes and reporting back presented (you being city or institutions such as OPS)
   - Come back with activity to reinforce engagement
   - Centre the community rather than the organization
     - Community engagement can feel long and arduous in this
     - When it is chaotic – it is good
   - Stakeholder analysis – who is being consulted and why

Organizational Culture

1. What is needed to overcome persistent, systemic anti-Black and other forms of racism, Islamophobia and other inequities in this area? (Actions)

- Concern that call on systemic racism is providing an "out" for white people i.e. not taking responsibility. E.g. "Birth Alerts" at CAS for Indigenous and racialized parents example of form of racism. Advancement of racism is by white people. Policies and procedures are written by white people.
- Concern about "allyship" – it only goes so far, can be misleading, and further marginalizes and becomes paternalistic. How to acknowledge systemic racism exists – could use an anti-oppressive lens that continually challenges ourselves and our own bias. Allyship is something asked of you. Responsibility goes with it—you see injustices and you intervene. Co-conspirator.
- Racialized leaders carry a heavier load due to lived experience. It can be a lonely job. You need a critical mass to shift change in your organization. Need to let staff prepared to use their power of influence, as well as allies.
- Need strong connections with and good communication with the people you are serving, and they need to see themselves in your organization. Intentionality is key and visible.
- Use a matrix – for checking our biases
- Anti-Black racism forum was helpful, and disappointing in terms of follow-up and communication
- With regard to the TRC and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls:
  - Commonalities between Indigenous and anti-Black racism
  - Start by acknowledging racism for both and the land
- Leaders can express commitment but it may not trickle down to HR and program delivery
  - Accountability goes back to the leader
  - Racialized staff of organizations may become the token person to deal with the issue. Hard to carry it all. This supports systemic racism. We all need to share the burden
  - Personal and systemic racism

2. How will we know whether these efforts have been successful? (Measures)
   - Monitoring and measuring – how can we do this?
     Triple A framework – change in culture is a long-term engagement and embedded practice
   - How do we measure increase in awareness and engagement?
   - The desired result? Policies in addressing inequities, diverse leadership, governance diverse, values of inclusion, how we evaluate our leaders.
   - What are the stories your staff and your community / the people you serve are telling about your organization? How are we listening to those complaints with deep concern, and without defense? Shift the narrative, and dig deeper into the words. Show people you're listening and care what they are saying.
   - People in the organization need to feel included, which is a good measure. Multiple streams are required: the hard data and the stories with your ambassadors to speak the reality. The organization has to show authenticity and vulnerability. Reputation is affected. People who are disenfranchised get angry and they lash out to frontline. Sense of urgency.

- Organizations must reflect the people they serve. In HR / hiring at all levels of organization and programs, intentionally recruit for diversity and measure progress
- Diversity/equity audits, and setting targets – has its pitfalls and good aspects
- Leadership diversity needs special intense attention
- We're not sophisticated in our measurement. We need data and nuance through dialogue.

3. What can we do to create or encourage this change? (Next steps)
- Need to address the "pink elephant" in the room, which is fear. Language needs to be addressed. People don't understand and fear loss, both for white and racialized people. Information is needed.
- Training and ongoing learning is essential. Perception without information. We have content without context.
- Data are critical – and how we analyze them. Data can be misleading.
- Acknowledge that our community has changed and needs to be at the centre.

Data

1. What is needed to overcome persistent, systemic anti-Black and other forms of racism, Islamophobia and other inequities in this area? (Actions)

- Race-based data is a "double-edged sword."
  - Data analysis is useful, but does not create "truth," or can serve to reinforce opposing "truths" and exacerbate the situation. The context into which data are brought needs to be understood and data need to be presented in relation to that context. Data collection & reporting are all done in a particular climate/environment – political, cultural, organisational.
  - Using data to support the argument that the future demographics of the city of Ottawa will need to rely heavily on immigration can be interpreted in different ways.
  - Using data to build a business case – e.g. for sustained immigration – can be a useful and relatively objective exercise.
  - Data need to be analyzed and interpreted carefully to address the nuances. Immigration is a broad topic, and needs to be understood not just in terms of race and religion, but in terms of educational and employment status and outcomes over time.

- Identity-based data collection:
  - The ODCSB has embarked on an Identity-based data collection exercise. It builds on the 2011 employee census and student survey. The 2011 results generated a lot of push-back related to questions about gender identity and sexual orientation. OCDSB worked with the Privacy Commissioner to rework the survey.

- OCDSB is now aiming to integrate results of the new planned survey into other operational areas of the organisation. More effort will also be placed on data visualization in order to more effectively convey results.
- Why do this survey? In order to build an evidence base around systemic barriers, and to understand intersectionality of identity-based barriers.
- Simply having the numbers is an important starting point for measuring workplace diversity. A related step is to establish targets.
- Identity-based data will be used to develop "Disproportionality Indices". Examples include suspensions or academic achievement.
- OCDSB relies on www.thoughtexchange.com, a licensed tool for enabling dialogue around priority setting and idea sharing.

2. How will we know whether these efforts have been successful? (Measures)

- Community engagement is determining what needs to be measured is essential
- There is always a need to strike the right balance between goals of anonymity/privacy and building a detailed evidence base to address important issues.
- There is also a need to rely on a mix of quantitative and qualitative.

3. What can we do to create or encourage this change? (Next steps)

Appendix B: List of Participants

Ivana Vidien	Ottawa Public Health
Shannon Leung	Ottawa Public Health
Zhaida Uddin	Ottawa Public Health
Jacqueline Lawrence	Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Michèle Giroux	Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Dorothy Baker	Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Naini Cloutier	Somerset West Community Health Centre
Faduma Yusuf	Somerset West Community Health Centre
Siffan Rahman	Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre
Simone Thibault	Centretown Community Health Centre
Valerie Stam	City for All Women Initiative
Debbie Hoffman	Children's Aid Society Ottawa
Mohamud Hassan	City of Ottawa
Rahmat Shahidi	City of Ottawa
Manuela Popovich	City of Ottawa
Paul Burnett	Ottawa Police Service
Laurie Fenton	Ottawa Police Service
Gina Hill Birriel	Diversity in Leadership Ottawa
Ebyan Hussein	Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, community member
Bob Dawson	Community member
Mante Molepo	Parents for Diversity, community member
June Girvan	Community member, Every Child is Sacred and Black History Ottawa
Chelby Daigle	Community member, Muslim Link
Joycelyn Glover	Business Radiance
Michel Frojmovic	Acacia Research and Consulting
Lynne Tyler	Catalyst Research and Communications
Hindia Mohamoud	OLIP
Denise Deby	OLIP
Chidera Eke	OLIP
Yara Rossi	OLIP