



NOVEMBER 2020 | VOL.1

THE BLACKNORTH VOICE

The official newsletter of the BlackNorth Initiative



Dahabo Ahmed-Omer
Executive Director
The BlackNorth Initiative

From Me to You

I am pleased to introduce the "*BlackNorth Voice*", our inaugural newsletter, which will be a way for us to keep in touch with the latest news about our collective effort to end anti-Black systemic racism.

It has now been a few months since we launched the BlackNorth Initiative, asking Corporate Canada to embark on a journey to end anti-Black systemic racism. On behalf of the Board of Directors, our various committee members and the entire team of employees and volunteers, I would like to thank the 400 organizations, across the country, that boldly took on the challenge to take action to change the lives of Black Canadians. During the last few months, we focused our efforts on structuring our organization and strengthening the framework of our strategy. Please take time to read, in the following pages, some of the initiatives we have undertaken. This is just the first step in our long-term vision. The real action is now starting, which will require your continued support and partnership. As a fundamental change to the system is necessary to enact real, long-lasting actions and to instill a social shift in our society.

By joining the BlackNorth Initiative, you have committed to break the cycle of anti-Black systemic racism with the determination, creativity, and ingenuity that has been applied to overcoming previous challenges our society has encountered. Each of you has a role to play by taking meaningful actions to dismantle the system we inherited and apply an unparalleled effort to build a better one. **By conveying our message, sharing your best-practice, implementing changes within your respective organizations, and financially supporting our initiatives, you will be an agent of change. The BlackNorth Initiative is the modern-day Canadian version of the NAACP.**

We hope you find our newsletter enjoyable and informative. As always, your comments and critiques are welcome and necessary to ensure this newsletter serves the audience in the best way possible. Please send us your valuable feedback at ceopledge@blacknorth.ca for us to keep you updated with useful information. We also encourage you to share the "*BlackNorth Voice*" with your colleagues and contacts who may be interested in the information provided. We plan to publish it quarterly, so look for our next issue in February!

**We are committed
to the removal of
anti-Black systemic
barriers negatively
affecting the lives
of Black Canadians.**



COMMITTEES

Ending anti-Black systemic racism is a complex problem that requires a holistic and comprehensive approach. That is why we have established committees focusing on the multi-layered challenges facing Black Canadians. Each committee will implement meaningful action by establishing programs to eliminate anti-Black systemic racism and barriers impacting Black Canadians. As a signatory, you will have the opportunity to align your organization's donation and sponsorship programs and participate in some of the programs spearheaded by the various committees. Please let us know, at ceoplege@blacknorth.ca, which of the following programs your organization would be interested in supporting, participating in, or hearing from, so that we can connect you with the right committee.

AT-RISE YOUTH

Mark Saunders, Chair - Chief of Police, Toronto (2015-2020)

"In Ontario, Black male youth are 5x as likely to be admitted to jail as the average youth."

The At-Rise Youth Committee aims to propose initiatives that proactively and reactively work with Black youth and develop targeted solutions to rectify systemic barriers impeding their successful transition to adulthood.

COMMUNITY SAFETY & WELLNESS

Dr. Kwame McKenzie, Chair - CEO, Wellesley Institute

"Black Canadians represent 3.5% of the overall Canadian population, but represent 18% of Canadians living in poverty in Canada."

The Community Safety & Wellness Committee will focus on investments that create communities that are healthy in mind and body, have economic, social and community stability, and equitable access to education, housing, and health care.

ECONOMIC & EMPOWERMENT

Dr. Jennifer R. Jackson, Chair - President, Capital One Canada

"Black Canadians represent 0.8% of senior executive roles, yet represent 3.5% of the population."

The Economic & Empowerment Committee will drive economic progress and outcomes for the Black community by increasing work and wages, to achieve prosperity and economic security for Black Canadians.



EDUCATION

Dr. Gervan Fearon, Chair - President & Vice Chancellor, Brock University

"Drop-out rates for Black students are ~2x that of white students."

The Education Committee will propose concrete measures and recommendations for advancing educational outcomes and opportunities for members of the Black community across Canada.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & PUBLIC SECTOR

Honourable Donald Oliver, Chair - Retired Senator

"There are zero Blacks as Federal deputy ministers or Federal court judges."

The Government Relations & Public Sector Committee will engage in initiatives that address anti-Black systemic racism in the Canadian public sector and serve as the liaison for the BlackNorth Initiative in developing and maintaining relationships with key public policy makers in government.

HEALTH

Dr. Upton Allen, Co-chair - Professor of Paediatrics, University of Toronto, & Chief of Infectious Diseases, SickKids

Dr. Kwame McKenzie, Co-chair - CEO, Wellesley Institute

"Rates of psychosis among segments of the Black population are 60% higher than compared to the general population."

The Health Committee will create sustainable, transformational change for Black Canadians within the major components of the healthcare sector through a focus on improving the pipeline, developing mentorship opportunities, and advancing mechanisms for structural change.

HOUSING

Isaac Olowolafe, Chair - Founder, DreamMaker Development

"In lower income neighbourhoods where families are most likely to rent, 69% of residents are racialized."

The Housing Committee will help bridge the racial wealth and wellbeing gap by enabling lower and low-moderate income Black households to access safe and adequate housing while building equity to support multi-generational advancement. It will create strategies for key decision-makers and influencers to improve pathways to homeownership, and opportunities to engage Black developers, Black suppliers, and Black workers in revitalization projects and in the broader development sector.

JUSTICE

Mark Persaud Co-chair - Senior Legal Counsel, Persaud Law Group Professional Corporation

Akwasi Owusu-Bempah, Co-chair - Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto

"Black people in Toronto are 20x more likely to be shot dead by the police than white people."

The Justice Committee will work towards the elimination of anti-Black racism from the Canadian criminal justice system through the advancement of appropriate transparency and accountability measures and the promotion of relevant educational initiatives.

MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP

Patricia DeGuire, Co-chair - Sr. Arbitrator/ Mediator/ Coach, Law Society of Ontario

Dr. Chika B. Onwuekwe, Q.C., Co-chair - VP Legal, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary, Trican Well Service Ltd.

"White resumes with a criminal record receive 1.5x more callbacks than Black resumes with no criminal record."

The Mentorship & Sponsorship Committee will connect mentors and mentees within and across Canadian businesses and institutions. It will increase development capacity for Black Canadians by retaining knowledgeable mentors, coaches, and sponsors across all sectors to help Black Canadians progress their careers or businesses, including ascension and succeeding in management positions, C-Suites and Boards.

PHILANTHROPIC

Daniel Lewis, Chair - Managing Partner, Orange Capital and CEO, Ascend Fundraising Solutions

"63% of leaders of color reported they lack access to individual donors compared to 49% of white leaders."

The Philanthropic Committee will collaborate with leadership and provide philanthropic expertise to develop and execute fundraising initiatives that financially enable the BlackNorth Initiative's key programming and operations.

PLEDGE

Marlon Hylton, Chair - CEO and Founder, INNOV-8 Data Counsel and INNOV-8 Legal Inc.

"Systemic racism is a serious business problem that requires a serious business solution." (Globe and Mail, September 7, 2020)

The Pledge Committee will effectively engage Canadian organizations to sign the BlackNorth Initiative's CEO Pledge, and efficiently engage existing signatories to ensure continued participation and successful implementation of the Pledge.



REPRESENTATION IN ARTS, MEDIA & CULTURE

Kai Exos, Chair - CCO, Dentsu Entertainment, Dentsu Aegis Network

"Black curators have their work passed over again and again in favour of their white male colleagues at institutions across the country." (Canadianart article)

The Representation in Arts, Media & Culture Committee will facilitate pathways to amplify Black voices at all stages of media and art, and leverage data to advise on the equitable and conscious portrayal of Black stories, content, and culture.

SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Chris Georges, Co-chair - Former professional hockey player and Head of the advisory board for the Hockey Diversity Alliance

Donovan Bailey, Co-chair - Athlete and Olympic medallist

"Only 5% of the 30 coaches in the NBA are Black, yet Black players represent 81% of the league."

The Sports & Entertainment Committee will empower generations by celebrating and elevating the accomplishments of Canadian trailblazers. It will inspire and equip our youth with the skills and courage to diffuse racism, reach for greatness, and engage in changing society's narrative of what it is to be Black.

YOUTH

Katherine Allen, Chair - Strategic Planner, MKTG Canada

"Drop-out rates for Black students for the Toronto District School Board are ~2x of white students."

The Youth Committee will represent the youth voice throughout the BlackNorth Initiative and help capture and amplify youth voices for anti-Black systemic racism in Canada. It is committed to identifying problem areas that matter most to Black youth, proposing solutions for a more equal Canada, and developing opportunities for youth to be changemakers in their communities.

Our Committees in Action

MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP

Mentorship, coaching, and sponsorship are pivotal to achieving diversity, equity and inclusion within and outside the workplace. The Mentorship & Sponsorship Committee's mandate is to build and sustain an effective pipeline of mentors, coaches, and sponsors across all sectors to help Black Canadians grow their careers or business, including ascension and succeeding in management positions, C-Suites and Boards. The Mentorship & Sponsorship Committee will work with newly appointed C-Suite Executives and Board members to provide mentorship to them so that they can be successful in their roles.

The Mentorship & Sponsorship Committee has five focus program areas or sub-committees:

- Mentorship, Coaching, and Sponsorship
- Talent and Leadership
- Research and Training
- Youth Engagement
- Small Business and Entrepreneurship

In the next three to five years, the Committee aspires to become the go-to source for mentors, coaches, and sponsors for Black Canadians. Our objective is to forge partnership with all departments within our signatory organizations to be able to match participants with companies and C-Suites executives.

In the last few months, the Mentorship & Sponsorship Committee has already completed, or is in the process of completing, partnerships with organizations such as Basketball Canada, the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce, Rotman's MBA and Global Esquire Canada, to mention a few. The Committee also collaborated with Sobeys, on their diversity, equity and inclusion policies, strategies and action plans. These partnerships focus on providing experienced mentors, coaches, and sponsors to assist with these organizations' internal mentorship and sponsorship programs. In the months to come, the Committee will work with other BlackNorth Initiative Committees to implement virtual focus groups, workshops and other tools to share best practices with signatories.

“70-85% of open positions are filled through networking and relationships”

TESTIMONIAL



Sara Bond, LLB, LLM, TEP

In the legal area, academic training given in the United Kingdom makes it possible to enhance one's international knowledge, while getting acquainted with common law. Many students therefore seize this opportunity to stand out from other candidates at the gates of the largest Canadian law firms. The disadvantage, however, is that when they return to Canada, having studied abroad limits their access to career opportunities as they are unknown within the Canadian legal industry. This is particularly true for Black students, who often lack a strong network.

To address that exclusion, Global Esquire Canada, a mission-focused social enterprise, was founded. The objective of launching the "Global Esquire Canada Mentorship Program" is to provide 25 aspiring Black Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) students per academic year with mentoring and counseling. Sessions will focus on promoting the value-add of international legal education and guidance on the way to access law firms, corporate legal departments and law-related organizations upon their return to Canada. This should translate into meaningful transformative pathways to successful legal and law-related professional careers for the BIPOC community.

Global Esquire Canada has a strategic partnership with the BlackNorth Initiative, which has led to guidance from the Mentorship and Sponsorship Committee. This guidance has been instrumental in helping get this ambitious initiative into operational mode by providing strategic advice to Global Esquire Canada on how to add value to its mentoring and counselling model.

Global Esquire Canada was founded by Sara Bond, LLB, LLM, TEP, a Canadian lawyer employed with RBC Wealth Management.

TESTIMONIAL



On behalf of the Molson Coors Beverage Company and as President in Canada, I signed the BlackNorth Initiative Pledge in our pursuit of building a fully inclusive culture and remaining accountable for exactly that. We're on a journey to learn, unlearn and act. Having a network of approximately 400 BlackNorth Initiative Pledge signatories, who are our Canadian corporate colleagues, likeminded in their willingness to accept the need to change and in their dedication to make it happen, brings us together in a way that can spark change at the speed we need it – right now, today. Through the BlackNorth Initiative, we're not competitors or customers or suppliers – we're a collective, and we benefit from sharing all best or unsuccessful practices, having difficult conversations, setting new bars while tearing down existing barriers (whether we realized they existed or not).

The BlackNorth Initiative represents the power of example. In Canada, companies and brands have a responsibility and opportunity to set an example for our communities – and it starts inside, with our employees and through our culture. If our employees feel the impact of an inclusive culture, one that not only rejects but denounces anti-Black systemic racism, they can adopt and spread that culture outside of the workplace and into their families, networks, and communities. The ripple effect is powerful – and we need to influence the right kind of ripple. We have work to do, and we're up for it. I encourage companies across Canada to join Molson Coors and all other Pledge signatories to make better within our walls.

Cheers,

Frederic Landtmeters
President, Canada
Molson Coors Beverage Company

PLEDGE

The BlackNorth Initiative launched with more than 200 signatories this summer, and we continue to build on this amazing initial response. The Pledge Committee is working towards a target of 500 signatories before the end of 2020, with a focus on ensuring our representation is truly pan-Canadian and across all our major industries.

We have a wonderful team of volunteers helping us, but we need your help to make this a reality. Here are three ways you can help us meet our goal.

- If you are a CEO Pledge signatory, send a letter to your suppliers, partners, peers and competitors telling them why it was important for you to sign and that you'd like them to consider signing, too. We can help with a template if needed. The full list of signatory organizations is found [here](#).
- Help us reach more people through social media. Invite them to join this community through LinkedIn and Twitter posts.
- If your organization is part of an industry association, help us reach people at scale by organizing a webinar to introduce the BlackNorth Initiative and talk about anti-Black systemic racism.

We have approximately 400 signatories today. If each one brought one more organization into the fold, our impact and reach would multiply accordingly!

The Pledge Committee is here to help. Please contact ceopledge@blacknorth.ca if you have questions about how to help us reach out to more organizations. We can provide draft materials.

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Companies and brands have a responsibility and opportunity to set an example for our communities – and it starts inside, with our employees and through our culture.

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HOUSING

In Canada, homeownership is a proven path to household wellbeing, financial independence and multi-generational advancement with 68% of Canadians owning their own home. Unfortunately, in one generation (1990 to 2020), homeownership in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has gone from affordable (4x average income for a family-sized home) to virtually out of reach (15x average income) for all but the higher income households – or young adults who are able to get help from “the bank of mom and dad” (46% of Canadian first time home buyers).

In Toronto, in particular, homeownership is highly correlated with race:

- In higher income neighbourhoods where most housing is homeownership, 73% of residents are white.
- In lower income neighbourhoods where most housing is rental, 69% of residents are racialized.

Systemic racism has left most Black households out of homeownership and with an impossible gap through which to access it:

- In Canada, incomes for Black males are approximately 65% of average white males' and there is limited improvement in Black incomes from one generation to the next.
- With lower incomes and lower homeownership, average Black household wealth to support advancement of the next generation is a fraction of that of white households. While Canadian data is limited, US data shows Black household wealth at 10% that of white households.
- In parallel, Black and other racialized citizens are disadvantaged with racialized GTA tenants having 3x the rate of over-crowding as non-racialized tenants.

In response to these dynamics, the Housing Committee has been in the process of developing a proposed BlackNorth Initiative "Homeownership Bridge Program". This program is intended to provide a bridge to enable lower income Black households to secure adequate housing for their families while creating a better base to build their own incomes and to build wealth for their family's future. The proposed program will be a stacking program partnering all three levels of government together with working, lower and low-moderate income Black households together with lenders, philanthropists, developers and non-profit homeownership providers. The Committee is currently in discussions with all levels of government and early signs are positive around the program's viability. We expect to roll this program out across Canada.



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We saw the business world come together to bring gender diversity to boardrooms across the country. It's time to do the same for Black Canadians – and much more

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ECONOMIC AND EMPOWERMENT

The Economic and Empowerment Committee will focus its efforts on the following areas:

- Create improved support frameworks for Black entrepreneurs, as well as small and medium-sized business owners.
- Create and distribute a "playbook" for removing systemic hiring biases within organizations.
- Develop a framework to facilitate stronger connections between financial institutions and Black communities.
- Develop a recognized repository of qualified Black candidates for employer access.
- Create a best practices "blueprint" for companies to foster improved Black professional development.
- Identify, support and scale mentorship programs.

In the last few months, the Committee has developed or launched several early efforts with an early emphasis on Black businesses and the development of Black professionals, including:

- Development of Small Business Owner/Entrepreneur profiles to establish a framework and connection points for subject matter expertise from key sponsors/signatories. This was done in partnership with the Black Chamber of Commerce and the DreamMakers organization.
- Mentorship profile development and mentor matching for Black business owners, with over 40 mentors identified, which was done in collaboration with the Mentorship and Sponsorship Committee.
- Launch of a professional development pilot program targeting early professionals, which connects them with established business leaders for advisory seminars on relevant topics (e.g., investment portfolios, professional advancement).
- Attending initial input sessions for the federal government's Black Entrepreneurship Program, which was announced last September.



THE PLEDGE IS SIGNED... WHAT'S NEXT?

Once an organization has signed the Pledge, the BlackNorth Initiative has a growing number of programs to onboard and support their journey. These include:

- The Welcome Kit, to help Pledge signatory organizations start their journey.
- A survey to help us understand how to support organizations in their implementation of the Pledge.
- Webinars, so that signatories can hear, learn from, exchange information and engage with one another.
- A newsletter, to keep signatories and related parties up to date with the BlackNorth Initiative developments.

We're excited to announce that work has also begun in earnest on the design of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Playbook that will become a go-to for the BlackNorth Initiative signatory organizations at all points on the journey toward realizing our Pledge commitments. Our vision is to create a tool that can be both shared with, and co-created by the BlackNorth Initiative community, to bring together our collective experience and enthusiasm into best practices, strategic models, case studies and learning. Stay tuned for more, as we will update you on the progress of our work and invite BlackNorth Initiative community members to both contribute content and to trial the initial programming. We will also be launching a new program this winter to support those responsible for operationalizing the Pledge within their organizations. The BlackNorth Initiative will be curating small advisory groups, which will come together with a facilitator for regular information sharing, support and collaboration. More details on the program including how to apply, will be sent to you early in the new year. We are currently looking for experienced, volunteer, facilitators to support this program. **If you, or someone you know, is a facilitator and interested in facilitating a small advisory group, please reach us at ceoplege@blacknorth.ca.**

HOW CAN SIGNATORIES HELP?

- **Donate to the BlackNorth Initiative to help us finance our programs and initiatives**
- **Help us raise awareness**
- **Share our news on your social media platforms**
- **Encourage your employees to volunteer as mentors and coaches**
- **Attend and promote our events**



MEDIA COVERAGE AND EVENTS

MEDIA COVERAGE

Click on the title of the article to read

CPA CANADA - OCTOBER 10

["Wes Hall: 'Racism is our pandemic'"](#)

HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR - NOVEMBER 11

["BlackNorth Initiative recognizes Canadian commitment to change"](#)

CORPORATE KNIGHTS - NOVEMBER 11

["Leading while Black" \(featuring Wes Hall\)](#)

MNI ALIVE - 2020 AFROGLOBAL TELEVISION EXCELLENCE - NOVEMBER 18

["Awards: 2020 LEADERSHIP AWARD Goes To Wes Hall Founder, Kingsdale Advisors KSS Group and BlackNorth"](#)

TORONTO STAR - NOVEMBER 22

["Black families are being left out of home ownership"](#)

By Isaac Olowolafe and Ene Underwood, Chair and Member of the BlackNorth Initiative Housing Committee



EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

Welcome Kit

Please, take time to read this document, which will provide you with information and tips to start your CEO Pledge signatory journey. Please contact ceoplege@blacknorth.ca if you have not received it.

Online Survey

We are reaching out to the growing community of organizations that have signed the Pledge to start building a deeper understanding of our shared and unique Diversity, Equity and Inclusion needs, activities, programs, priorities and challenges. Your participation is an important step in helping the BlackNorth Initiative team develop programs and services to support every signing organization in achieving our common goal. Please, [click here to access the survey](#). We need to hear from you!

BlackNorth Initiative Webinar – December 8, 2020

Join our first online event during which an organization that signed the CEO Pledge a few months ago will share what it has done to implement the CEO Pledge; what has worked and what has not. [Click here to register](#).

NETWORK OF SIGNATORIES

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Thank you to all Pledge signatories

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PLEASE HELP US HELP YOU!

- To best facilitate keeping you and your organization apprised of our events and activities, please provide ceopledge@blacknorth.ca with the contact (name, title, email and phone) of your representative, who will be in charge of implementing the CEO Pledge.
- Please contact ceopledge@blacknorth.ca to share best practices, materials and tools. These materials will all be stored on the signatory portal to be launched in the course of 2021.
- Would you consider participating in a BlackNorth Initiative webinar as a speaker to share your experiences with other signatory organizations? Please contact us at ceopledge@blacknorth.ca.

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Thank you to our more than 100 volunteers!

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