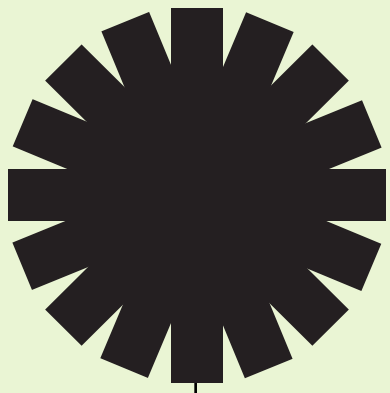


Creating Safer Spaces for Racialized Leadership & Staff in International Cooperation

Written by
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Designed by
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Call to action for organizational leaders

Organizational leaders are uniquely positioned to drive meaningful change and foster a culture of inclusivity and innovation. Leadership in the international cooperation sector demands a proactive commitment to dismantling the systemic racial hierarchies that continue to shape who holds power, whose voices are heard, and whose contributions are valued. The reality is that race plays a pivotal role in determining whose agency is validated and who gets the opportunity to lead transformative change.

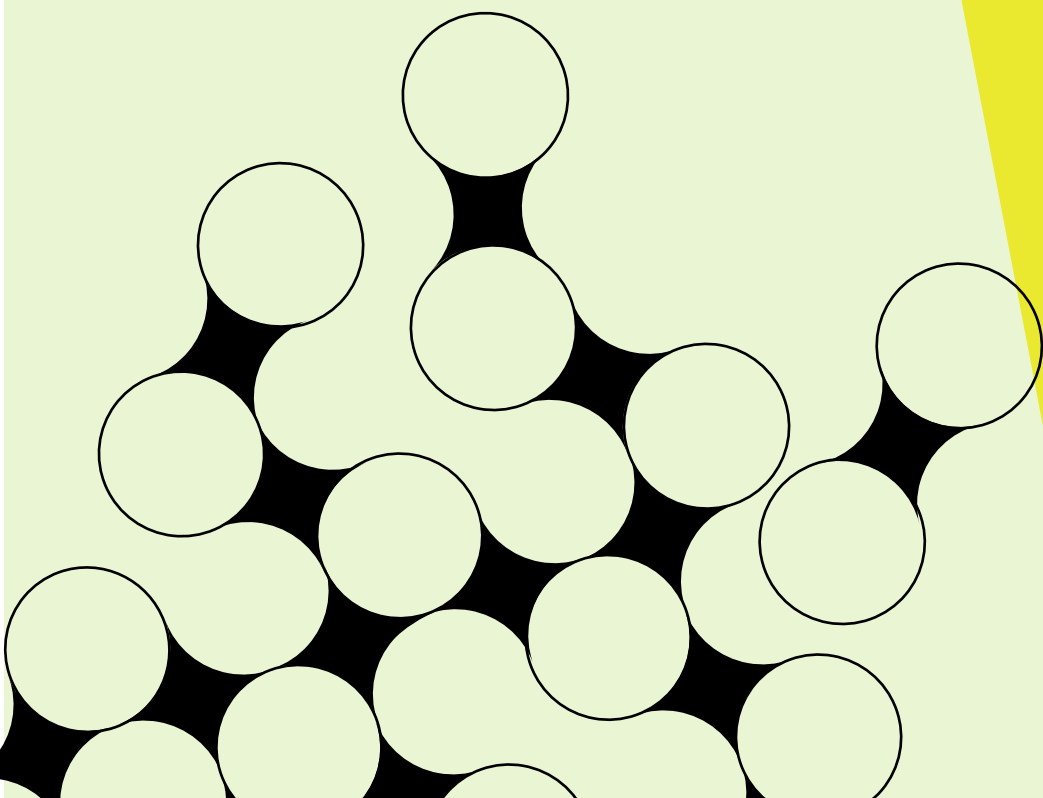
The reality is that race plays a pivotal role in determining whose agency is validated & who gets the opportunity to lead transformative change.



To cultivate safer and more equitable spaces for racialized staff, leaders must commit to continuous learning, actively champion equity initiatives, and implement accountability mechanisms across all levels of their organizations. These actions are not merely ethical imperatives but strategic necessities for creating an environment where all employees, regardless of race, can thrive.

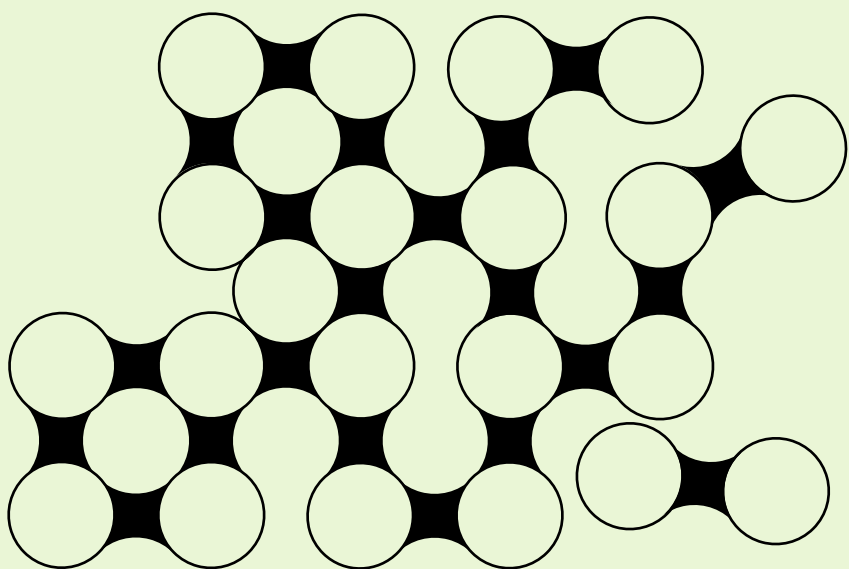
The work of international cooperation is inherently racialized, and the ability to integrate anti-racist principles is a direct reflection of an organization's effectiveness and commitment to the sustainability of their work. Despite widespread calls for change, entrenched racial hierarchies continue to hinder progress and limit our potential as a sector. True leadership is measured by an unwavering commitment to the well-being of every team member and the courage to engage deeply in dismantling these inequities.

Prioritizing anti-racist practices is not optional in our work. It is an essential driver of innovation, resilience, and the future success of our organizations. Leaders who embrace this responsibility will not only foster a more equitable workplace but also strengthen the capacity and impact of the entire sector.



What we're hearing

In the spring of 2024, the ARC Hub convened two roundtable discussions, one for racialized leadership and a second for racialized staff, from organizations working in international cooperation. The goal of the roundtables was to facilitate dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of experiences to better address shared challenges, foster mutual support, and build capacity for diversity, equity, and inclusion within the sector.



Personal stories & testimonials *[anonymized]*

The leadership roundtable highlighted issues such as tokenism, lack of representation in decision-making roles, and insufficient support for leadership development. The staff roundtable echoed these concerns, adding experiences of normalized microaggressions, inequitable workload distribution, and inadequate spaces and mentorship. The roundtables reinforced the reality that these concerns are a persistent issue, as they had also been raised in previous closed spaces with racialized folks run by the ARC Hub.

What's needed?

Based on what was heard in the roundtable discussions, the ARC Hub is offering direct strategies and tools that organizations can implement immediately to create safer, more inclusive spaces for their racialized leadership and staff. The aim is that in turn, this will lead to more sustainable and equitable outcomes in their work, and the sector as a whole.

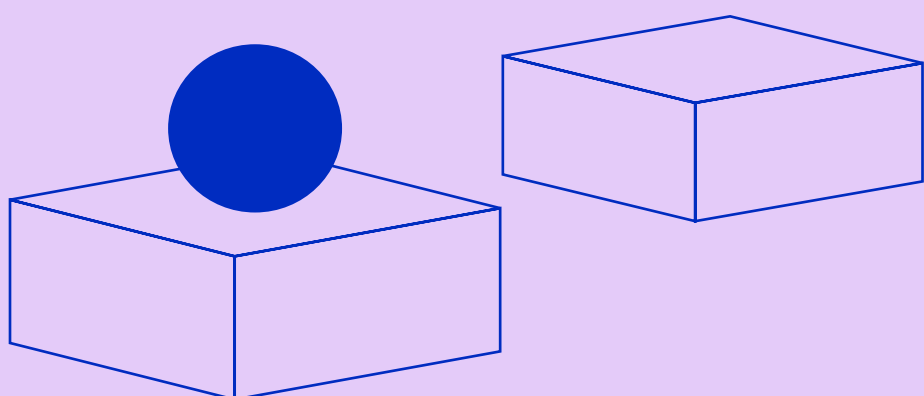
The process to understanding the barriers that racialized staff are facing must be intentional and strategic. Hearing and validating their experiences is important and foundational in these processes. When we hear the experiences of racialized staff and don't address them, we can challenge psychological safety, sense of belonging, and overall wellbeing in and beyond our workplace. Throughout the resource you will notice anonymized anecdotes from the roundtables which aim to illustrate the real-life impact of the challenges faced by racialized leaders and staff and the calls they are making for change.

how to use this resource

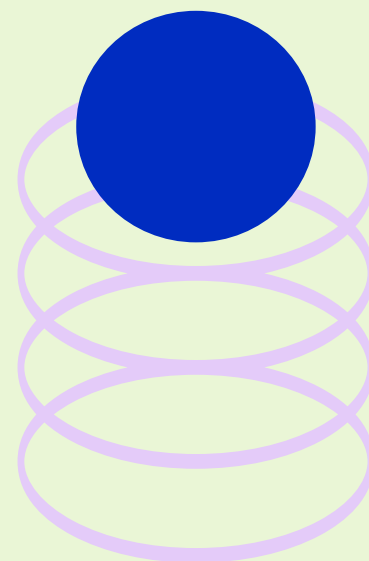
Purpose of the resource

The purpose of this resource is to provide organizations with important understandings, concrete strategies and tools to create safer and more inclusive environments for racialized leadership and staff in turn partners and stakeholders. It is designed to support efforts to address systemic inequities, improve the overall organizational efficiency and workplace experience for racialized employees. This resource is the result of collaborative efforts and feedback from racialized individuals, ensuring that it addresses their most pressing concerns and needs.

This resource is not a step-by-step guide on how to be “anti-racist”. There is no one size fits all to diversity, inclusion, or equity efforts. It’s important for those who have the power to make change to have the knowledge necessary to make good change that fits for the equity seeking groups they are engaging with. This means building something holistically from ideation to implementation with racialized communities’ leadership.



Each section can be used as a standalone resource and provides practical steps and examples that can be tailored to the specific needs of your organization. Leaders, HR professionals, and all staff can use this guide to understand and implement the meaningful changes necessary and create a supportive environment for all.



“This resource is organized into several sections, each addressing different aspects of creating safer spaces for racialized employees in the international cooperation sector but can be used across industries and sectors. It includes steps organizations can take for”

Representation & inclusion

Policy development

Prioritizing safety

Professional development

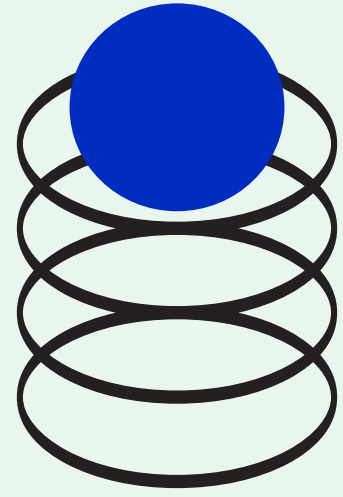
Ongoing assessment & feedback

Creating support groups & networks

Commitment & advocacy

of non-racialized folks

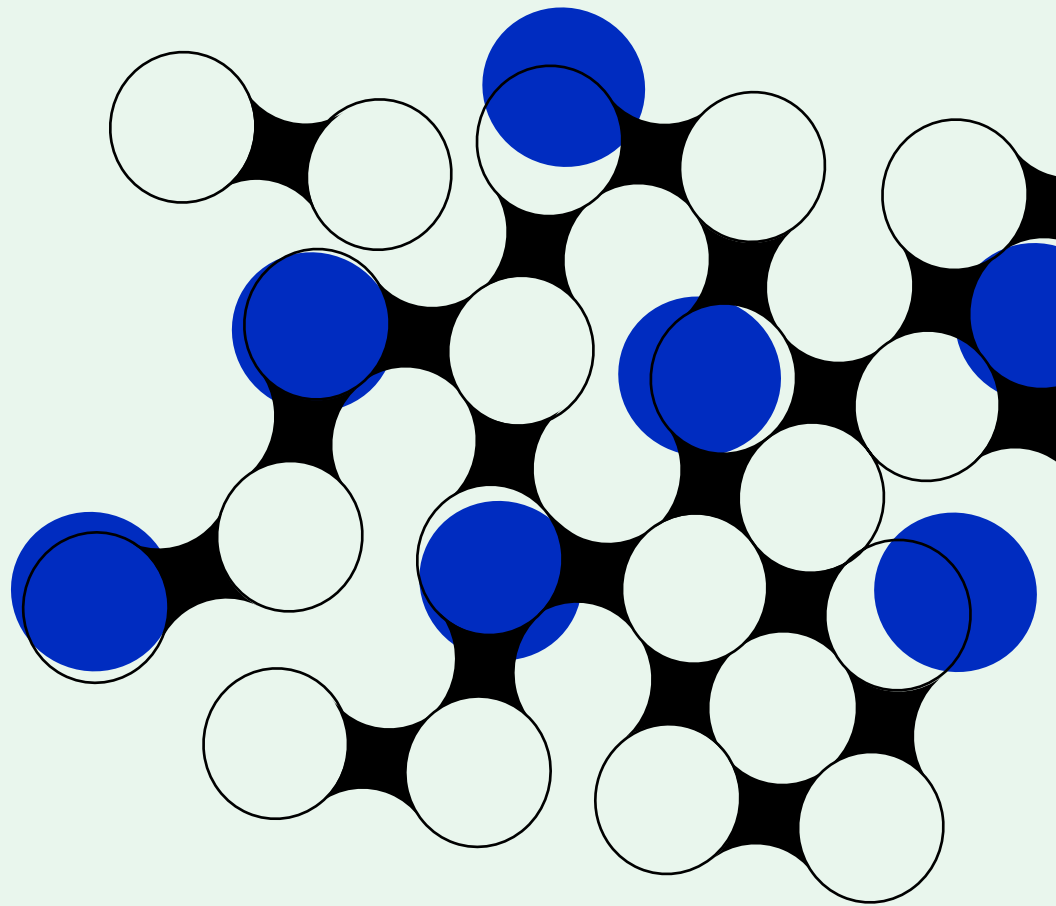
Anti-racism is, at its core, a deeply relational practice.



It is about the ethics, intentions, and thoughtful consideration of how we engage with one another, with systems, the land, and the diverse histories and traditions that shape our identities and experiences across time—past, present, and future. While this resource draws on familiar terminology from conventional structures, it should be seen primarily as a supportive tool, meeting organizations where they are in their journey today. The creation of safer spaces, especially in the workplace, must be led by those most marginalized within these spaces, acknowledging that each process will be unique.

For those working with staff and communities in other parts of the world, it is essential to shift the lens completely. We must make space for new understandings shaped by contexts we may not even begin to grasp. In these instances, humility is crucial, as it reminds us that the solutions and practices, we may be familiar with do not always translate across different cultural landscapes.

The emphasis should be on setting aside ego, assumptions, and preconceived ideas, allowing for engagement that transcends colonial and traditional frameworks. For some, this may involve debriefing in connection with the land or incorporating storytelling into discussions. For others, it may mean centering elders, gathering in community circles around food, or prioritizing community-led reparative protocols. The focus is on embracing diverse approaches that honour the voices, needs, and wisdom of those most impacted.



Disclaimer:

A *relational approach* **to**

anti-racist

&

safer *space*

Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge that this resource could not have been made possible without the generous contributions of racialized staff and leaders across the sector.

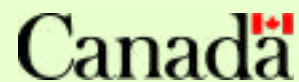
We do not take for granted the intention, trust and vulnerability with which we were met in the generative contribution of your time, insights, and personal stories. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to those who generously allowed us a glimpse into the realities they navigate on a day to day. While the contributions remain anonymous, we hope to have honoured the truths and perspectives that were shared with us. It is our sincere hope that the reflections and strategies presented in this resource resonate with those who entrusted us with their experiences and that they feel their voices have been represented with the respect and integrity they deserve.

We would also like to acknowledge the voices that for various reasons were not able to be a part of this dialogue. To those individuals we hope that the themes and insights captured here speak to your experiences and contribute to the development of more space in our sector for you to feel seen, heard, and validated.

This resource is a testament to the brilliance of racialized individuals who continue to shape and enrich our work and workplaces. Although often imposed, the **resilience, courage, and leadership** that they continue to display serves as a crucial reminder of the importance of committing to progress, challenging norms, and creating spaces where those who have historically been erased and oppressed feel heard and valued.

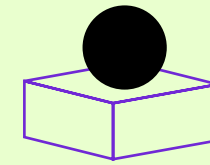
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Creating safer spaces for racialized leadership staff

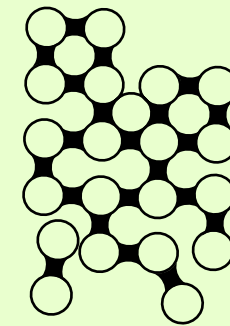


01

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05 Understanding the challenges

Strategies for creating safer spaces

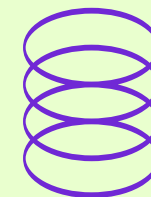


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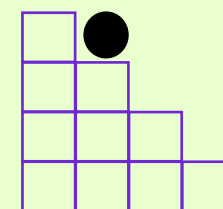


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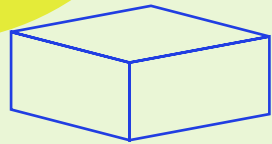
Additional resources



27

- 27 Books, articles & websites for further reading
- Contact information for organizational support

Understanding



the challenges

Experiences by *racialized* leadership & staff

The roundtables highlighted the fact that racialized leadership and staff face several common barriers in the workplace, demonstrating that race has a noticeable impact on the functioning of the power structures in the workplace. While there were many similarities shared between the two groups in their respective roundtables one of the main differences that were made apparent was the effect of power both on how participants experienced these similarities and the highlighted differences.

Experiences that came up in the discussions include:

“ It feels as though we are called upon because of our identities more than our knowledge & experiences ”

Representation & inclusion

In decision-making

Racialized voices are frequently overlooked in important organizational decisions. Even when they are in positions of leadership, their perspectives or expertise don't feel integrated. This lack of representation reinforces ineffective and harmful hierarchies and results in a continued feeling of erasure, disenfranchisement between the staff and the organization, sometimes going as far as questioning its mission and effectiveness.

Tokenism

Where racialized individuals are represented in decision-making, they are often the only ones or one of few in leadership roles and more often in the organization as a whole. This creates undue pressure and isolation. Feelings of being invalidated in their knowledge and only seen for their identity were echoed. This brought up the observation that intersectionality is not well understood in practice and often not truly even in theory. It was also noted that when there were higher numbers of racialized folks, tokenism was still present in how leaders and staff were engaged and integrated meaningfully, or rather not, within their organization.

Note: Definitions for these terms are diverse and plentiful. This section will highlight how they were presented in conversations.

01 For the sake of this document, the word Leader means those who hold positions of power in organizational hierarchies. We recognize that Leadership exists outside of hierarchies, and people who play leadership roles may not officially be recognized as Leaders in their organizations, due to the systemic barriers mentioned throughout this resource.

02 In this document, 'racialized' refers to the shared experiences of racialized individuals, while acknowledging the diverse ways in which different racialized groups face discrimination. It is crucial to recognize the specific and pervasive impact of anti-Black racism, which remains central to understanding broader systems of discrimination. Anti-racist efforts must address the needs of all racialized groups, with particular attention to anti-Blackness to avoid perpetuating existing divides in this work.

Understanding the challenges

Discrimination

"Microaggressions"

It was noted that this term was often used to diminish the gravity of the harm caused. Within the workplace, racial aggressions were still regular occurrences, and their impact is deepened by the lack of accountability measures or structures to address harm. Policies and the processes around them were found to be invalidating and unreliable.

Gaslighting

Racialized staff who share their experience of racism are often met with feelings of the discomfort from those who receive their stories. When that discomfort leads to people responding in ways that minimize the racialized person's experience, this is gaslighting. Often this is about not wanting to feel challenged or recognize problems, and this type of resistance often comes from those who feel their power, privilege, or worldview is being threatened. This pushback often results in denial, downplaying the importance of racism, accusations of overreacting, or retaliation.

Commitment deficit

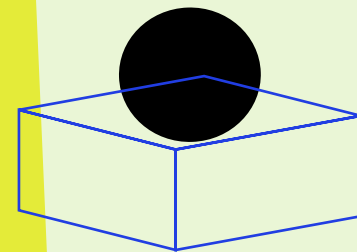
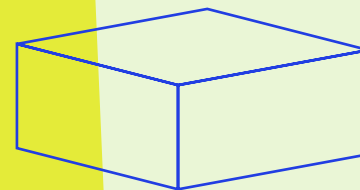
Organizations often start and stop anti-racism efforts with very little progress and commitment over the years. This breeds resentment and a racialized staff complaint that feels discarded and disenfranchised. The sector being increasingly risk averse, both in the process of engaging in these efforts and then in being accountable when harm is done, continues to force racialized staff to bare the brunt of ineffective structures and sometimes push staff as far as having to choose between their job and their wellbeing. Roundtable participants highlighted that this reality also exists in the way organizations manage projects and racialized program participants.

Inadequate support & mentorship

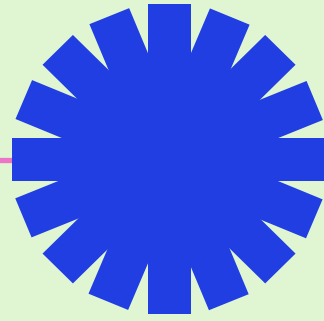
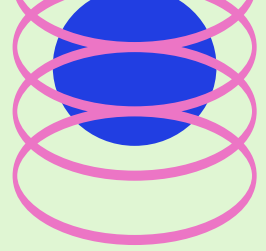
This hinders professional growth and advancement in a society and workplace structure that are already under-resourced. The lack of support invalidates the expertise of racialized staff, especially in the international cooperation sector where so much of the success of our work depends on the knowledge and expertise of racialized communities.

Sustainability

The failure to address challenges faced by racialized employees severely impacts their retention and career sustainability.

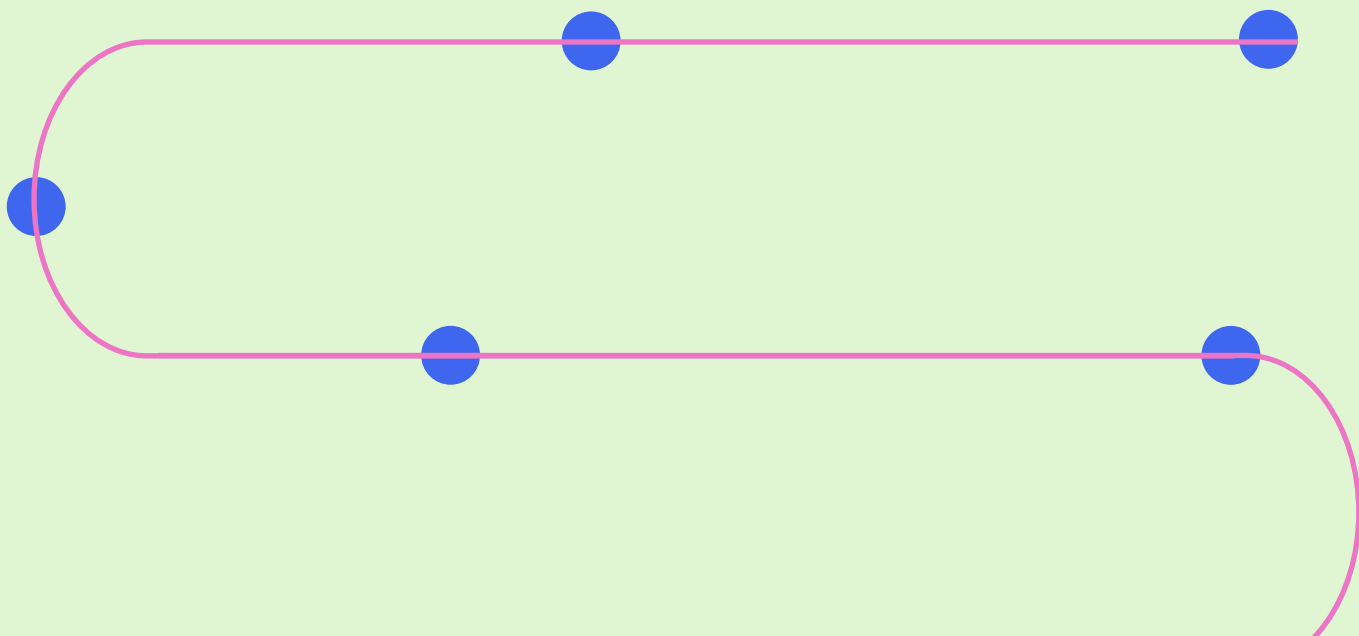


Institutional barriers



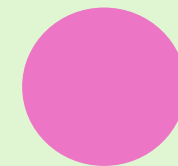
Strategies for creating safer spaces

Creating safer spaces for racialized individuals is not just a moral imperative, it's essential for fostering more inclusive, equitable, and high-performing workplaces. These safer spaces require a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic inequities and promote a sense of belonging and agency.

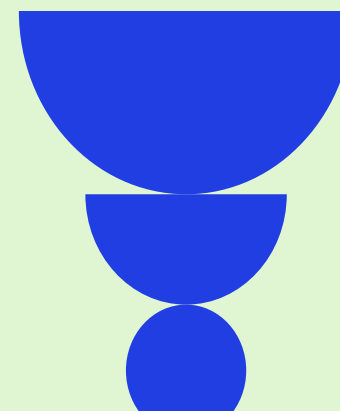


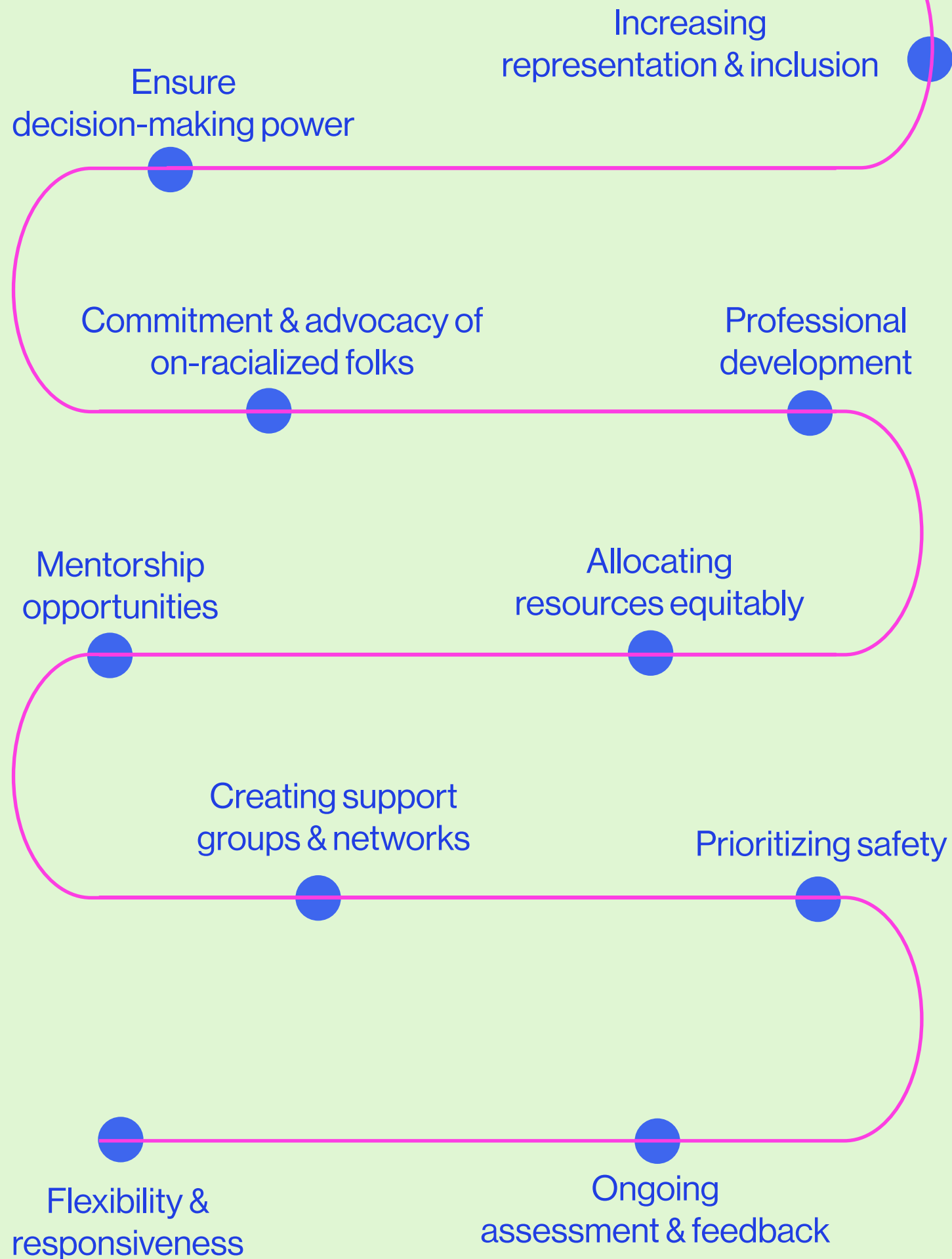
Systemic racism & inequity continue to permeate organizational cultures,

often in ways that are subtle and deeply harmful. These issues can have significant impact on the well-being, job satisfaction, and career advancement of racialized employees. By addressing these challenges head-on, organizations can not only enhance employee engagement and reduce turnover but also improve overall organizational performance. Moreover, fostering truly inclusive workplaces benefits everyone, cultivating shared responsibility, an effective, respectful, and collaborative culture.



This resource guide is designed to offer organizations actionable strategies for creating safer and more supportive workplaces for racialized communities. It outlines the importance of developing robust anti-racist and equity centred policies, enhancing representation and inclusion, offering tailored professional development opportunities, and establishing supportive networks and inclusive spaces. The guide also emphasizes the need for ongoing assessment and feedback to ensure these initiatives are effective and to make necessary adjustments that keep pace with evolving needs.





Proposed solutions

Each ● will take you to a proposed solution

● Problems

● Proposed solutions

The following are some suggested ways to create safer workplaces for racialized individuals. These build on what was shared at the roundtables by racialized staff, as well as best practice offered by the ARC Hub. This resource is intended to aid organizations move from intention to impact, creating safer, more equitable workplaces that empower racialized employees, benefit the entire organization and the work of the sector.

Problems

Discrimination

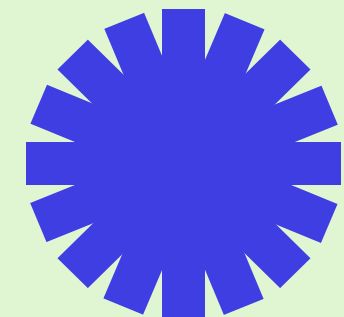
- “Microaggressions”
- Gaslighting

Lack of representation

- In decision-making
- Tokenism


Institutional barriers

- Commitment Deficit
- Inadequate Support & Mentorship

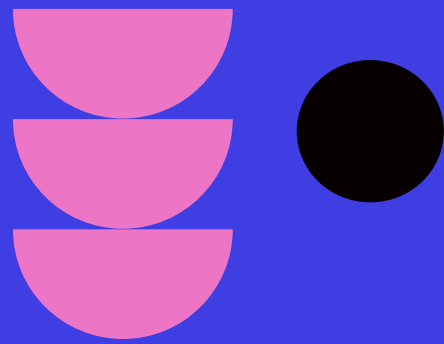


Representation & inclusion

Conversations around representation and inclusion often imply that racialized employees are less capable or that organizations must make compromises in employing racialized staff. This could not be further from the truth, especially in the international cooperation sector. This sector engages with and seeks to address the devastating effects of racial hierarchies deeply rooted in geopolitics, global economies, access to resources, environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, land rights, displacement, and more. It should be understood that racialized peoples bring a wealth of essential expertise to this work, rooted in lived experiences of the present, past, and future that provide invaluable insights into the complex dynamics at play.

“I would like to be seen and recognize for the things that I know, for the things that I have  experiences and what I can bring to the table as opposed to just thickening a box because I happen to be brown”

However, improving representation and inclusion doesn't end or really start at recruitment. It's important that formal and informal processes be developed to ensure that racialized staff at all levels feel represented in decision-making processes and outcomes across the organization. This means intentionally involving racialized colleagues in everything from project development and policy review to organizational budgeting and strategic planning. This is especially important when leadership is not yet diverse.



This expertise is so often overlooked or undervalued in traditional organizational settings. The racialized staff that come to our sector frequently have personal connections to the work or the contexts in which international cooperation operates. These connections should not only be acknowledged but actively nurtured and leveraged to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of our work. By doing this organizations can better support their racialized colleagues ensuring that their contributions are being recognized as essential to achieving the organization's mission.

The bridge between diversity and inclusion is intention. Representation and inclusion initiatives should account for the systemic barriers historically created to hold racialized folks back. While improving representation and inclusion, organizations should adopt diverse hiring practices and create pathways to achieving career goals for racialized employees. . This includes intentionally setting concrete diversity goals, expanding recruitment efforts to diverse talent pools, and implementing unbiased hiring processes.



Additionally, **creating formal programs** that support the career advancement of racialized employees, such as leadership development initiatives and succession planning, is crucial in ensuring that communities are represented at all levels of the organization. These programs must be conceptualized with the understanding that the historical and ongoing marginalization of racialized people requires a deliberate, care-centred, and sustained effort to dismantle existing power imbalances.

Steps organizations can take to increase representation & inclusion

Acknowledge & address implicit explicit biases 01.a

Ensure that staff at all levels are attending regular training and engaging in conversation on equity principles and anti-racist action to build collective awareness and understanding. It is important to acknowledge that these trainings should continue whether outcomes have improved or not and should continue to push staff to think deeper and act on knowledge acquired.

Offer bias training

Set diversity and inclusion goals that intentionally mitigate the risk of tokenism 02.a

Ensure that they are clear and intentional, and aligned with the needs and expectations of racialized staff in your organization. It's important that the goals you set be in line with the change that you are willing to make. There should be honesty, transparency, and dialogue around goal setting.

Define clear goals

Engage staff in safer space

Ensure that staff at all levels, but especially those who are not often given decision making powers in organizational hierarchies, feel empowered and resourced to fully engage in initiatives and in open dialogue about experiences within the organization to build a reflective view of what needs to be addressed.

01.b

02.b

Ensure regular monitoring and reporting on progress towards goals and ensure that there are reviews of monitoring and reporting processes to ensure accountability.

Monitor progress

Ensure decision-making power 03.a

Ensure that racialized employees are intentionally represented in decision making committees and leadership teams and that there are structures in place to ensure that they are properly heard and represented in organizational decisions.

Inclusive committees

03.b

Develop transparent and accountable processes in decision-making, ensuring all voices are invited to be heard and feel heard and represented.

Transparency

Allocate resources equitably 04.a

Consider how your budget and resources are being distributed. Build processes and policies to ensure that staff feel represented in organizational priorities, that equity initiatives in the organizational structure and the work of the organization are well and consistently resourced.

Implement equitable budgeting practices

04.b

Establish a committee tasked with overseeing the equitable allocation of resources across the organization aligned with anti-racist principles and practices.

Establish resource allocation committees

Expand recruitment experts 05.a

Intentionally seek to recruit from diverse talent pools prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and racialised communities. It's important to seek out other job boards and build relationships with community organizations.

Diversify your hiring panels

05.b

Prioritize making sure that there are equity considerations in your job postings. This includes language considerations, educational considerations, diversified considerations on experience, use of language, specifically explaining how and why the organization wants to diversify applicant pools and offering transparency on the organization's commitment to equity and inclusion. Regularly review job descriptions to ensure they are growing with community calls as well as organizational and societal transformation.

Inclusive job descriptions

Address bias in hiring process 05.c1

Use intentionally structured interview styles with standardized questions to reduce bias. Ensure that equity principles are considered when doing this, including different communication styles, invisible disabilities, transferable skills, etc. Also consider having specific EDI questions for all job interview processes to ensure that those who are coming into the organization can meaningfully contribute to the organizational transformation.

Standardize interviews

05.c2

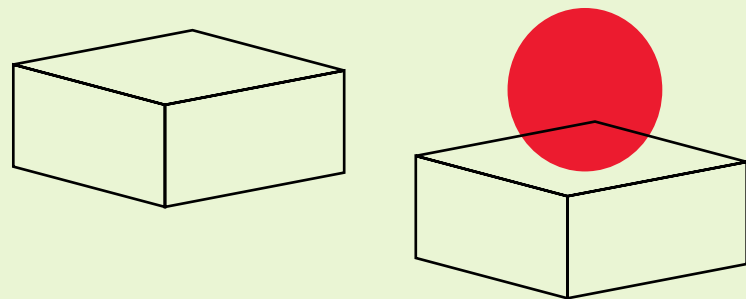
Include diverse members on your hiring panels from different levels of the organization to provide varied perspectives. This can also offer a moment of reflection for your organization in terms of representation within your organization.

Diversify your hiring panel

Note - your organization should be prepared to welcome diverse staff into a safer environment before trying to attract diverse talent, otherwise they are being put into harm's way.

Policy development

Developing and implementing robust anti-racism policies is a crucial step in creating safer spaces. We often reference policies only after racialized staff have already experienced harm, leading to reactive rather than proactive approaches. However, these policies – like laws – have their limitations. These limitations can be glaring, particularly when they fail to acknowledge their participation in the deeply rooted presence and preservation of systemic racism and anti-Blackness. When policies that are unfit for purpose are imposed on the experiences of racialized staff, there can be significant risk of their experiences being invalidated, misunderstood, appropriated, or in the worst-case lead to retribution. These realities not only leave folks feeling disenfranchised but also feed cycles where the organization – and more broadly the system – is seen and experienced as being unsupportive, unsafe, and untrustworthy.



To address these challenges, organizations should establish clear and intentional policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on race, ethnicity, and other protected characteristics. These policies should be developed under the guidance of organization staff belonging to affected communities. Equally important is the creation of transparent, accessible, and anonymous reporting mechanisms that allow employees to report incidents without fear of retaliation in the way that makes them the most comfortable. These policies and mechanisms should be living documents that are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they remain effective and relevant particularly as organizational dynamics and societal contexts evolve.

Steps **organizations** *can take to develop policies*



Before you start

Examine organizational hierarchies

Review existing power dynamics within the organization and their effect on racialized employees and beyond. Identify and plan to address existing inequities and communicate plans to staff.

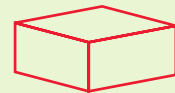
Prioritize empowering affected communities

Resource racialized staff in the organization to build and facilitate a committee that will oversee policy development. The most important part is to ensure the committee has decision-making authority and as much autonomy as is desired and protects effectiveness.

Leadership accountability

Consider transferring responsibility and leadership to racialized members of the organization. Simultaneously train all leaders on anti-racism and best practices on supporting racialized staff throughout this process.

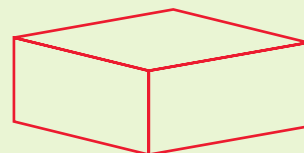
1 Shifting power & building trust



Ensure a holistic rollout accountability

Make sure there is accessible implementation of the policy including communication strategy and information sessions. Make sure that staff are trained and resourced to be able to participate in ensuring positive outcomes.

3 Policy implementation



Next

Gather input from affected

Allow space such as listening sessions and/or surveys to gather input and use this input to develop priorities and structure for the policy. Taking on this step means that you are committing to integrating what you hear meaningfully even if outside of your expectations and/or the norms of policy development.

Draft the policy

Ensure that the focus is on proactivity and prohibiting discrimination and harassment based on race and ethnicity and challenging the inherent existence of racism in the organizational structure. Racialized staff should have the opportunity to define racism, discrimination, harassment etc. Outline employee rights, responsibilities, and accountability structures.

Develop transparent reporting mechanisms

Develop accessible reporting channels (virtual and in-person). Ensure mechanisms are easy to use and well-known. Organize regular check-ins to see if staff feel safe, comfortable, and engaged to use them.

Prioritize anonymity & protection against retaliation

Implement anonymity protections for reporters. This means going beyond the methods of providing feedback by also considering who is reviewing feedback and through what lens. Ensure there are policies in place that protect individuals from retaliation.

2 Developing the policy

Regular policy review

In collaboration and with the leadership of the committee of racialized staff, host regular reviews throughout the organization and update policies in response to feedback.

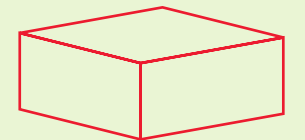
Continuous feedback mechanisms

Ensure that there is space between the regular policy reviews for folks to share their feedback in intentional ways with plans for continuous improvements.

Public reporting

Periodically share progress reports within your organization and beyond (i.e. with your Board of Directors, staff, members, stakeholders) maintaining transparency and commitment to building trust.

4 Monitoring & review



Steps organizations can take to **develop** policies

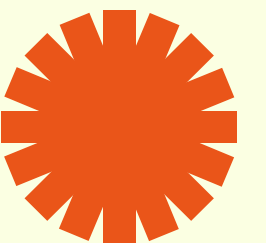
Commitment & advocacy non-racialized folks

Due to the effects that racial hierarchies have had on our systems and structures,

most often those who have the power to make change or decisions on the establishment of anti-racist policies, practices, and principles are not racialized. Historically, systemic and structural power has been concentrated in the hands of non-racialized individuals placing them in positions to significantly influence change. It's for this reason that their commitment to anti-racism and active advocacy for racialized colleagues in the workplace is crucial to creating inclusive and equitable organizational cultures. This is particularly true in our sector where traditional power structures often reinforce inequities, and where true genuine solidarity must extend beyond mere compliance to become core values in the organizational culture.

Non-racialized staff must be equipped to recognize their privilege and understand how these privileges influence their interactions and decisions within the workplace. There should be a capacity in identifying various forms of aggression and how to address these issues appropriately and effectively. This education should push past sitting in feelings of guilt and rather foster action, awareness and responsibility. Non-racialized staff must understand that their positions of privilege and power come with the responsibility to advocate for and support racialized colleagues actively especially in our sector.

Allyship and solidarity push past passive support. They require concrete actions that genuinely contribute to a more inclusive workplace culture. In the international cooperation sector, where the work often involves engaging with diverse racialized communities across the world, it is crucial that non-racialized folks be able to embody a deeper level of commitment to racial equity and anti-racism. This looks like going beyond expectations set by traditional power structures and engaging in continuous learning, self-reflection, and advocacy. Solidarity with racialized colleagues, program participants, and partners as well as active participation in equity initiatives should be seen as a non-negotiable aspect of professional conduct, essential to the ethical execution of their roles and woven into job descriptions and performance evaluations.



Steps

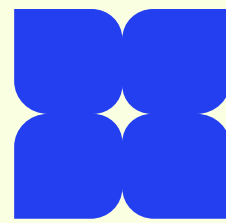
organizations
can take to foster the
commitment & advocacy
among non-racialized staff

Comprehensive training on racism & aggression



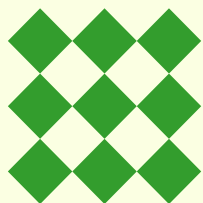
Regularly offer ongoing training programs that educate non-racialized staff on various ways racism and aggression manifest in everyday organizational structures. These trainings should be coupled with taking practical steps and strategies to address and dismantle these issues fostering a more inclusive workplace environment.

Bystander intervention training



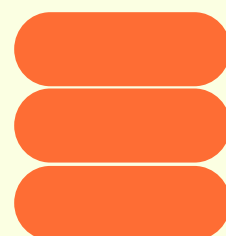
Implement training sessions focused on understanding and recognizing the bystander effect, highlighting the responsibilities of non-racialized staff in both calling-in and calling-out behaviours that perpetuate inequities. These sessions should emphasize the importance of intervention while providing clear guidance on how to effectively support and “disburden” racialized colleagues in challenging situations.

Institutionalize participation in equity initiatives



Ensure that non-racialized staff are actively involved in organizational equity initiatives by integrating these responsibilities into job descriptions, performance reviews, and other formal organizational structures. This could include participation in trainings, conversations, diversity committees, supporting equity-focused projects, or contributing to the review and revision of organizational policies and practices.

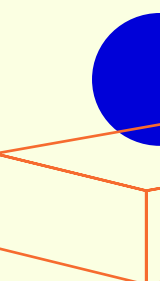
Encourage feedback & continuous improvement



Establish a culture in which non-racialized staff are encouraged to seek regular feedback on their advocacy efforts. This should be coupled with opportunities for staff to reflect on and improve their advocacy efforts.

Establish & adhere to accountability mechanisms

Build strong accountability mechanisms that hold non-racialized staff responsible for their roles in promoting equity and inclusion. This could involve setting clear expectations for behaviour, regular check-ins, and transparent processes for addressing any failures to meet established standards. Adherence to these mechanisms should be non-negotiable, ensuring that the commitment to anti-racism is not just performative, but deeply ingrained in the organizational culture.



As long as racialized people have been integrated into workplaces, they have been severely and systematically under-resourced. This normalization has hindered their representation at many levels across organizational structures and further entrenched racial hierarchies and power imbalances into our workplace norms and cultures. Providing robust and tailored professional development opportunities is essential for supporting racialized employees who seek to grow and advance in their careers. Furthermore, the intention to bring these efforts to full fruition by creating opportunities for advancement for racialized employees must be equally important. This process requires of us to confront and challenge our personal notions of who deserves power, who should be prioritized in our work, and our personal relationship to established racial hierarchies and their impacts in our workplaces. Understanding how the process of uplifting those who have been historically marginalized can be personally challenging and is a critical part of this work.

Mentorship programs can pair racialized staff with experienced mentors who can offer guidance, support, and advocacy. They can be crucial in helping employees navigate the complexities of their careers within environments that may not have been traditionally supportive of their success when done in a way that prioritizes equity and safety. Professional development initiatives specifically designed for racialized employees can help them develop the skills and confidence needed to advance in their careers breaking through barriers that have historically limited their progression.

“ BIPOC staff need to think about taking paths that enable them to be more independent professionally ”

Organizations should always work to ensure that these opportunities are not just available but accessible and intentionally promoted to all racialized employees, particularly those at what are considered the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. There should be a consideration of these opportunities in the staff's workplans, and a holistic approach should be prioritised to ensure that staff are given a true opportunity to benefit from these resources. This will involve acknowledging the additional emotional labour often asked of racialized staff in navigating these spaces and providing support to mitigate these challenges as they arise.

By making these commitments to their staff, organizations begin to uproot and dismantle deeply engrained racial hierarchies within their structures and create more equitable

Professional
development



Steps organization can take to support professional development for racialized staff

1 Conduct a needs assessment



Survey

Engage racialized employees intentionally across the organization to understand their professional needs and aspirations in and beyond their role in the organization.

Analyze

Do an audit of your organization's existing resources for professional development and integrate the findings into the surveying process to gauge if they have been accessible and/or effective.

2 Develop professional development programs



Mentorship programs

Establish an intentional pairing system based on guidance, support, and advocacy. It's important that mentors that are not racialized be trained, resourced, and equipped to address the unique challenges faced by racialized colleagues. It is also important that mentors and mentees have the time, space, and resources to engage effectively.

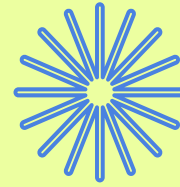
Leadership training & workshop

Opportunities should be designed specifically for racialized staff to build skills and confidence by ensuring that the curriculum is inclusive and addresses the unique experiences, needs, and challenges faced by racialized employees.

Accessibility & promotion

Use internal communication channels available to all to promote professional development opportunities and incorporate participation into workplans, allowing folks the time and resources to participate. Ensure that there is specific attention put into reaching staff at every level of the organizational hierarchy or who would not usually have access to these opportunities.

3 Support implementation



Resource allocation

It is important to the success of these initiatives that there be budget, resources, and time strategically allocated for professional development of racialized employees and that there be support structures such as peer support groups, and access to external resources to promote sustainability.

Holistic approach

Engage racialized employees in the creation of individual workplans that align with their career goals. It's helpful to integrate discussions around professional development in regular performance reviews to ensure holistic and effective evaluation of staff. Involve staff in building the standards to which they will be held, to ensure alignment and true progression.

4 Strategic monitoring & evaluation



Track participation

Ensure the maintenance of records on participation in programs, trainings, workshops. Regularly check-in with staff to understand their experience and level of engagement prioritizing using feedback to improve participation.

Measure outcomes

Track whether career progression of racialized employees who participate in these initiatives is matching communicated hopes and expectations. Build systems to assess their impact on overall representation at various levels throughout the organization.

Commit to continuous improvement

Ensure a regular process for reviewing and refining professional development programs based on feedback and outcomes and the perspectives of racialized employees. Ensure consistent adaptation of these programs to the ever-changing needs and challenges faced by racialized employees.

5 Remain committed to establishing a culture of inclusion & support



Commitment by leadership

Ensure that there is continuous commitment from senior leaders to support and prioritize the professional development of racialized employees. Develop and implement accountability mechanisms that can be used when this isn't the case.

Ongoing engagement

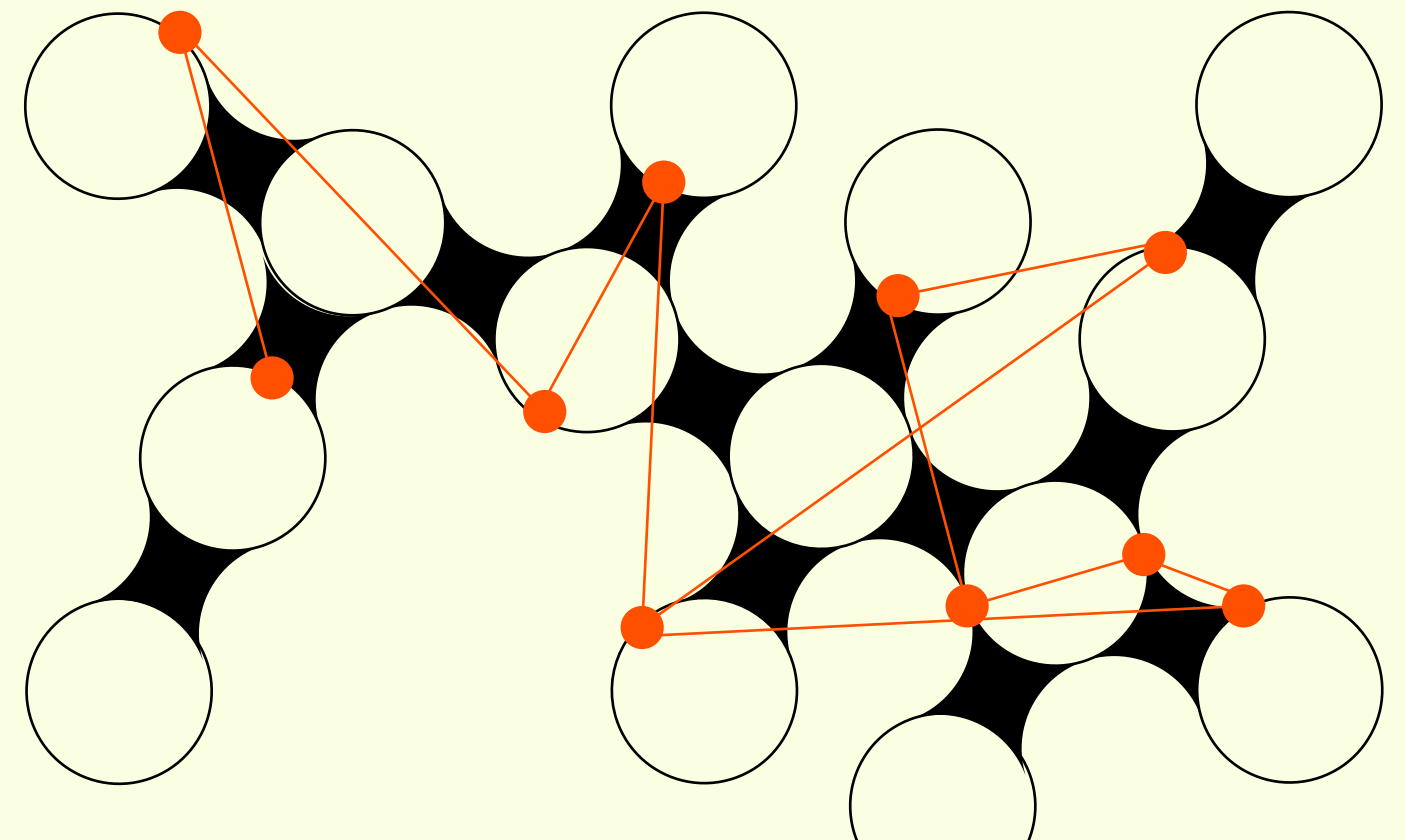
Create space and resources for racialized staff to build capacity in community building and the establishment of support systems such as networking spaces, peer support groups etc.

Creating *support groups & networks*

Establishing support groups and networks can be a powerful way to foster a sense of community, belonging, and empowerment for racialized staff in your organization. They often provide space for folks to share experiences, build mutual support, and discuss challenges, without having to filter their personal narratives through the dominant cultural lens. These spaces can also provide a safe space that allows racialized staff to exercise their agency and autonomy in ways that the broader organization may not be prepared to support. By nurturing these spaces, organizations can help themselves build stronger more resilient organizations where all employees feel valued and heard.

It's important for organizations to recognize that the process of establishing these support groups may highlight underlying issues that need to be addressed before the groups can have the space to function effectively. For example, if the organization has not yet cultivated an environment of trust or has not even begun dealing with issues related to systemic racism, the creation of these groups and network may inadvertently place additional burdens on the participants. This is why organizations should do the work of assessing their own readiness and be prepared to undertake foundational work to create a supportive environment before establishing them.

A crucial aspect of these groups being established within your organization is respecting and supporting their autonomy. These groups must have the freedom to operate independently of the organization's influence if that's what they desire. In other words, while the organization should provide the necessary resources and support to ensure the success of these groups, they must also be willing to step back and allow the group to function without undue oversight or interference. The organization's role should be to facilitate and not to control, understanding that sometimes the best support is allowing these groups the space to develop and thrive on their own terms.



Steps

organizations can take to create & support groups & networks for racialized staff



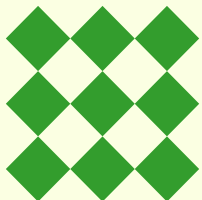
1 Gauge interest & leadership potential

Survey the organization to see if there are racialized staff interested in leading the process of establishing any support groups or networks. When these individuals are identified, it's important to provide them with the support and resources to be successful. Ensure that this process is voluntary and driven by the needs and desires of racialized employees.



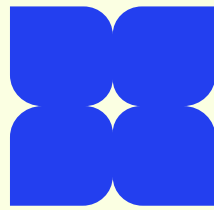
2 Provide education & training

Offer training or information for staff and leadership on the importance and function of closed spaces for racialized employees. This training should cover the benefits of such groups, the principles of confidentiality, and the reasons why these spaces must remain autonomous. It should also include discussions on the potential challenges and how to overcome them.



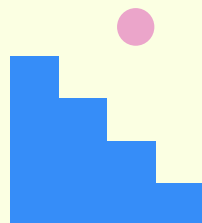
3 Conduct needs assessment

Facilitate discussions to identify what, if any, support is needed from the organization.



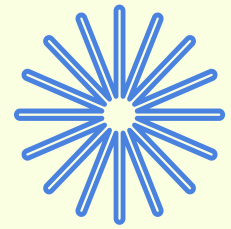
4 Allocate resources equitably

Ensure that resources are allocated to support these groups/networks to operate effectively. This might include dedicated meeting times during work hours, spaces (virtual or in-person), funding for activities or materials, access to communication tools, psychological supports, and/or external facilitators. Additionally allocating budget that the group can use at their discretion and decision-making power to execute transformational change further reflects the organization's commitment to their success.



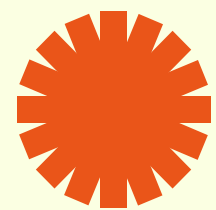
5 Prioritize confidentiality & comfort

The success of these support groups hinges on the level to which participants feel safe and secure in sharing their experiences. Organizations have a responsibility in guaranteeing confidentiality and creating an environment where racialized staff feel comfortable engaging without fear of reprisal or being monitored.



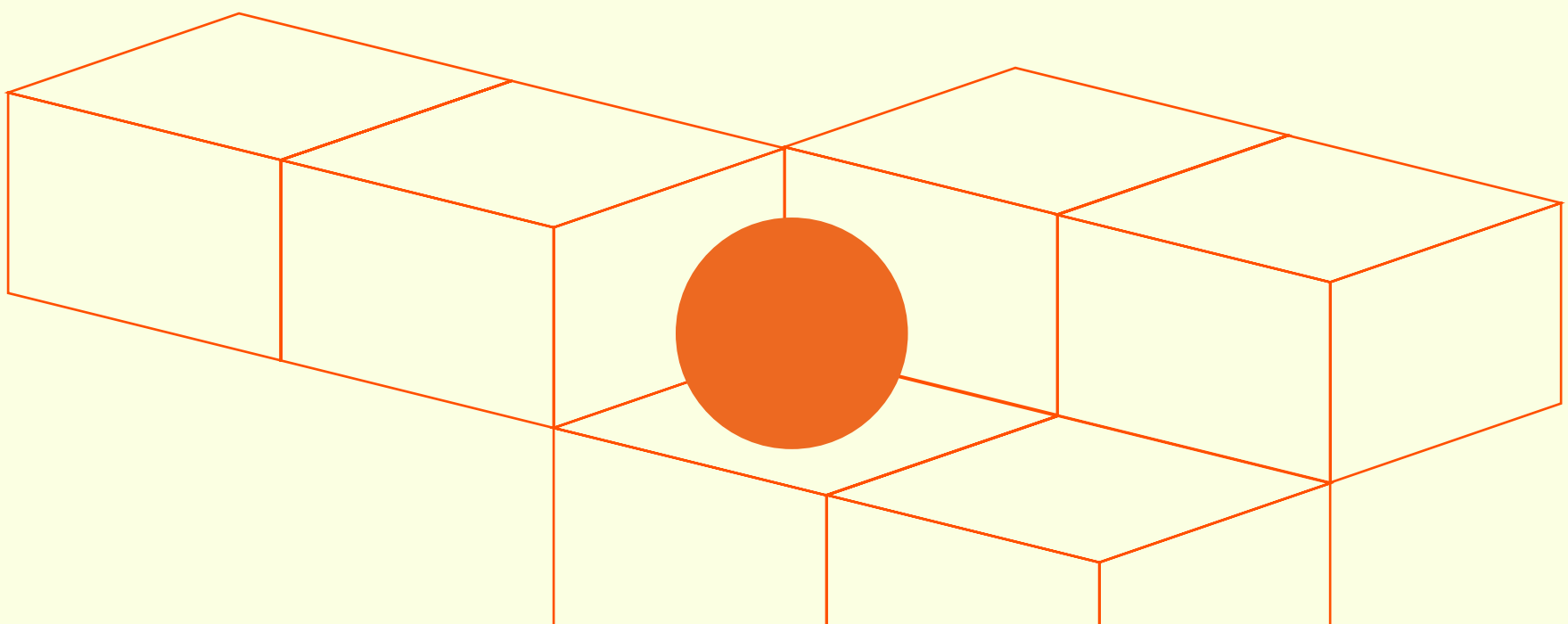
6 Respect autonomy & independence

It's important to respect the autonomy of the group – allowing the group to operate independently, make decisions about its activities, goals, and membership without interference from the organization. However, remain open to offering support if and when it is requested, understanding that the needs of the group may evolve over time. One should not be leveraged for the other as that is an inherently oppressive practice.



7 Encourage continuous feedback & adaptation

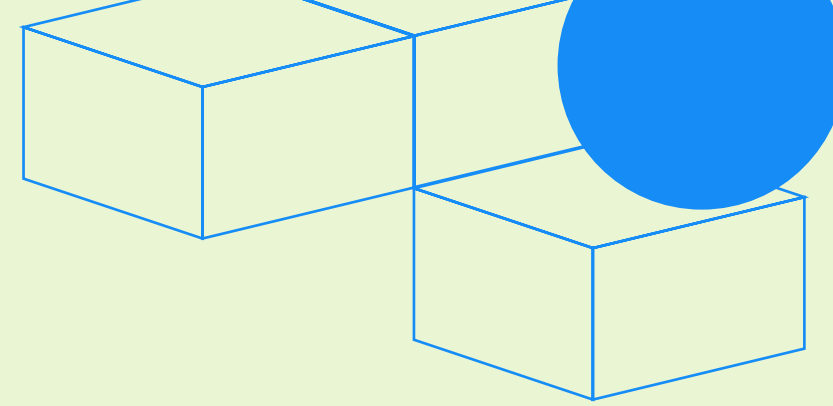
Regularly seek feedback from participants to ensure that the support groups are effectively being supported. This feedback should be used to make any necessary adjustments to supports, resource allocation, structure, or organizational involvement. Additionally, highlighting the positive changes that have come from the group's reinforces the organization's commitment to continuous improvement and support.



Often when we think about creating safety we think about inclusive physical & virtual spaces

While these are essential, it is equally important to broaden our understanding of safety to encompass cultural, psychological and emotional dimensions. Safety isn't just about the physical environment, it's also about fostering a workplace culture where everyone feels secure, respected, and valued.

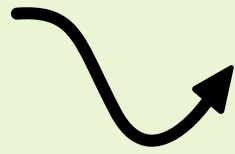
Prioritizing
safety



Conversations about safety can be deeply personal and challenging, particularly when they involve discussions of race and power dynamics. Engaging in these topics can itself be a source of discomfort and even fear, especially for those who have historically been marginalized, oppressed, or silenced. Psychological safety requires us to acknowledge and address these dynamics, recognizing the profound impact that power imbalances and racial inequities can have on racialized individuals' sense of security.

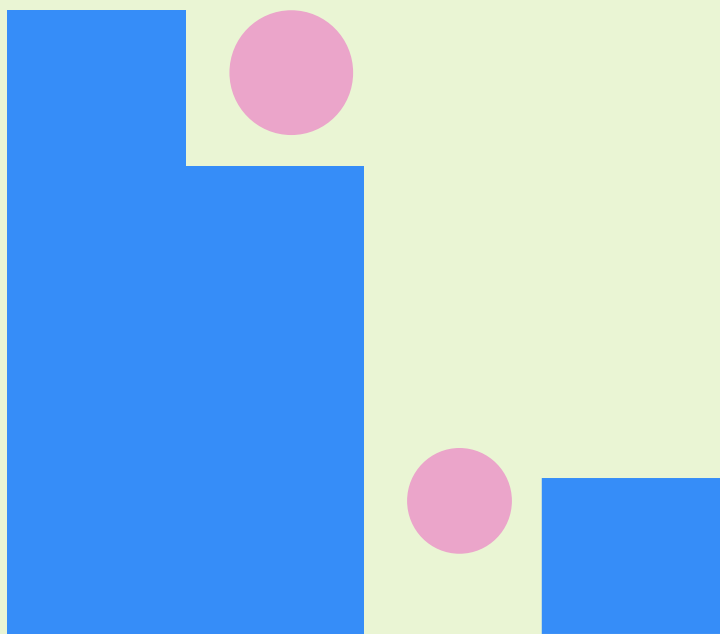
Physical spaces should be accessible to individuals with visible and invisible disabilities and designed to accommodate diverse needs. They should also consider the possible need for closed community spaces, conflict resolution, and support needs. Virtual spaces should be user-friendly and offer features like captioning and translation services. They should also be supported by protocols to remove unsafe participants, space for folks who may be triggered, and supporting those who may not have easy access to them. Additionally, promoting inclusive language and communication practices in all interactions helps create a respectful and supportive environment.

○ Coupled with these
 ○ concepts is the
 ○ understanding that
 ○ psychological safety
 ○ must be prioritized in
 ○ the ways we curate
 ○ and welcome people
 ○ into our workspaces.



Ensuring that we have the tools, understandings and systems necessary to prioritize psychological safety is imperative. A staff member expressing their experience of a lack of safety, whether with a colleague, manager, within the broader organization or a partner, should be treated as an urgent priority. Organizations must develop mechanisms to address these needs promptly and effectively. For example, if a staff member expresses discomfort or fear of working with their manager, there should be established processes in place to address this concern without delay. While understandings and integrations of anti-racist principles and practices are not yet advanced everywhere, it is important for leaders to consider the concept of consent and believe their staff when issues of safety arise.

Often, organizations' unwillingness to name and address the inherent racism in organizational structures and systems of power can challenge the safety of staff. This missing step under layers of power imbalance can leave racialized staff at all levels feeling unsafe, gaslit, unseen, unimportant, and disenfranchised. These imbalances can prevent staff from voicing their concerns or seeking help, fearing repercussions or dismissal of their issues. It is crucial that all staff throughout an organization feel empowered to advocate for their safety and well-being, knowing that their concerns and experiences will be prioritized.



Steps organizations can take to prioritize **safety**

Design inclusive

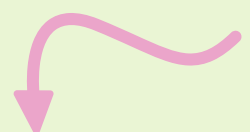
spaces

Create spaces both physical and virtual that accommodate diverse needs, including quiet spaces, prayer rooms, gender-neutral bathrooms, accessible technology, cultural protocols, and non-hierarchical spaces. Ensure that these spaces are adaptable and responsive to evolving needs of all employees.

Implement accessibility

features

Regularly engage staff in training that challenges unconscious and conscious biases, enhances cultural competency, and underscores the significance of psychological and physical safety.



Steps organizations can take to prioritize safety



Train on inclusive

communication principles

Offer regular trainings that focus on the impact of language, tone, and diverse communication styles in creating safer, more respectful, and effective environments. These trainings should also include discussions on microaggressions, non-verbal and cross-cultural communication.

Develop policies

psychological safety

Develop and enforce zero-tolerance policies that explicitly prioritize psychological safety. Employees should feel safe to express their needs, concerns, and expectations without fear of retaliation. There should be clear communication on these policies, and they should be consistently upheld.

Build trust for

anonymous reporting

To ensure the effectiveness of anonymous reporting mechanisms, it is essential to build a culture of trust. Employees should be able to believe that they will be prioritized, and their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed without prejudice, regardless of whether they choose to identify themselves.

Engage Staff

in bias training

Regularly engage staff in training that challenges unconscious and conscious biases, enhances cultural competency, and underscores the significance of psychological and physical safety.

Regular listening

sessions

Regularly engage staff in training that challenges unconscious and conscious biases, enhances cultural competency, and underscores the significance of psychological and physical safety.

Regular Listening Sessions: Regularly hold listening sessions facilitated by a trained and neutral facilitator, an elder, community member, or a facilitator of your racialized staffs choosing in a closed space for racialized staff. These sessions provide a safer space for employees to share their experiences and offer feedback on the organizations' practices and their experiences.

Address power

imbalances

Actively work to identify and address power imbalances within the organization. This might include revisiting organizational structures, promoting transparency in decision-making, and ensuring that all employees have access to the same opportunities for accommodations, advancement, and support.

Provide accessible

resources

Ensure access for all staff to resources that can support their mental and emotional well-being, such as flexible time off, mental health supports, culturally relevant counseling services, spending time in community, modification of work expectations, and workplace supports. These resources should be easily and equitably accessible and well-communicated to all employees throughout the organization.

Leadership

accountability

Hold leadership and management accountable for prioritizing and demonstrating a commitment to a culture of safety, accountability, and respect within their teams. Leaders should model the behaviours expected of all staff and be proactive in addressing issues of safety and well-being.

Ongoing assessment & feedback

**These
feedback
mechanisms
can include**

Gathering regular feedback from racialized staff is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Organizations should conduct surveys and provide other feedback mechanisms to understand employees' experiences and identify areas for improvement. This feedback should be intentionally collected, anonymous to ensure space for honesty and confidentiality, and the data collected should inform organizational shifts. Lack of use of feedback erodes staff's trust, and willingness to engage in the organizations processes.

Regular surveys & feedback mechanism

It is important for organizations to prioritize creating atmospheres that genuinely and intentionally encourage honest feedback. Although anonymity is used as a tool for creating safety, it is not a cure-all and often not as useful as we think. Factors like lack of trust, recognizable writing styles, personal experiences, and demographic data can compromise anonymity. Moreover, a history that demonstrates that feedback is not being integrated, may deter employees from expending capacity in offering more. It's important that an organization ensure that the data they gather is truly representative of its staff's diverse voices and experiences.

Anonymous feedback forms & surveys

These should be reviewed by a committee to make sure that diverse perspectives are considered, and biases are minimized.

Open forums

These should be facilitated by a neutral staff member or an external mediator. It may be helpful to separate staff and leadership to create safer spaces.

Optional & regular check-ins

These can be 1:1 meetings between a staff member and a person of their choosing creating a safer space for personalized and context sensitive feedback

Regular review of feedback mechanisms

To ensure that the mechanisms put in place remain effective and relevant, organizations should regularly assess their feedback tools and processes adjusting as needed.

Multiple feedback channels

Staff should be given various avenues through which they can provide feedback, whether written, verbal, anonymous, or in-person, ensuring that diverse communication styles are accommodated.

Continuous listening

Feedback isn't limited to formal mechanisms. It's essential to cultivate an organizational culture where all types of feedback are recognized in everyday interactions and are taken seriously.

Training on communication styles

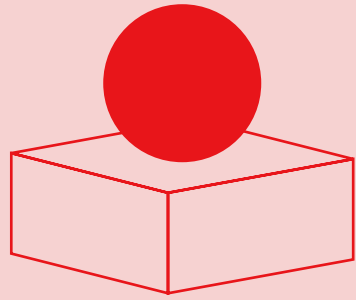
Provide staff and leaders training on different communication styles to streamline an understanding of how to give and receive feedback effectively across cultural and personal differences and expectations.

Transparency & commitment

Regularly communicating and demonstrating to staff the importance of their feedback and the organizations commitment to utilizing it is crucial. This transparency builds trust and encourages ongoing buy-in.

Collective understanding of representation

It's critical for organizations to create spaces and opportunities to come to a collective understanding of what it means for data to be representative of its staff with the staff. This needs to involve recognizing and addressing any gaps in feedback and ensuring diverse voices are heard and acted upon.



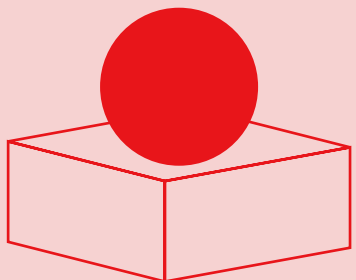
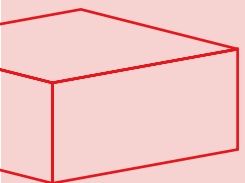
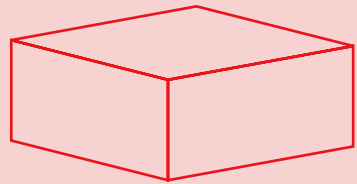
Evaluating

the effectiveness of initiatives

Organizations should establish robust methods for evaluating the success of their initiatives before, during, and after their implementation. This includes tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) such as employee retention rates, promotion rates, and employee wellbeing and satisfaction rates disaggregated by race. It is essential that the indicators that set the standards be established by racialized communities, ensuring that the measures of success are both relevant and meaningful. Transparency and openness throughout the process can enhance outcomes and often increase the buy-in that organizations will observe from all levels.

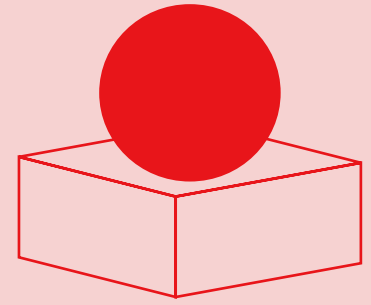
Regular reviews of these metrics at all stages of implementation are crucial. These reviews can enable organizations to gauge the real impact of their efforts, identifying both successes and areas for improvement. It is important that organizations share what they learn and acknowledge shortcomings as much as progress. This is crucial for maintaining trust and demonstrating commitment to continuous improvement. Organizations must not shy away from acknowledging where they are falling short. This honesty is key to fostering a culture of growth and accountability.

Critical to this process is ensuring that the success of these initiatives is viewed as integral to the organization's overall success. Too often equity initiatives are seen as peripheral to core organizational priorities, which can undermine their effectiveness and long-term sustainability. The thorough integration of these initiatives across all departments such as finance, programming, HR, communications, policy, education and more is essential. Contextually deep evaluations that span the entire organization not only support sustainability, but are also crucial in achieving honest success and transformation.



Steps

organizations can take to *evaluate* the **effectiveness of** initiatives



Note: The evaluation stage can be a very delicate process, as success and/or effectiveness is viewed and defined differently by all. It is important that the perspectives of affected communities are prioritized in defining success. Too often organizations will seek validation from metrics that don't fully capture the meaningful transformation needed to achieve lasting change.

Integrating indicators throughout the organization

Embed specific indicators across all departments and functions of the organization. This integration ensures that equity is a core consideration and can be evaluated in all areas of work, from budgeting and resource allocation to program design and delivery.

Consulting with racialized staff on KPIs

Ensure that KPIs are determined and/or approved in direct consultation with racialized staff, to guarantee that the metrics being used are relevant and reflective of the staff's needs and expectations.

Share data transparently

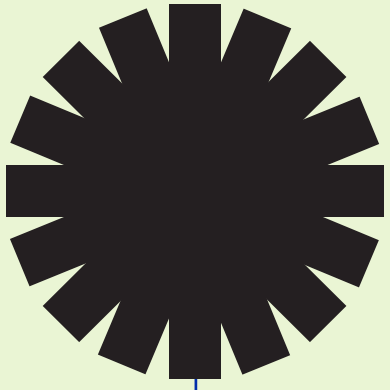
Share any and all data that is obtained from evaluations openly with all staff and stakeholders. Transparency fosters trust, collective ownership, encourages honest dialogue, and strengthens the organization's commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

Create a cross-departmental committee

Establishing a committee made up of staff from across the organization that is tasked with regularly analyzing collected data, gauging impact, and identifying areas for improvement can be incredibly helpful. This committee should prioritize racialized employees and be empowered to drive change based on findings. A "bottom-up" approach can be beneficial here.

Train leadership on equitable evaluation

Provide training for leadership and management on equitable and decolonial monitoring and evaluation practices. These trainings should focus on recognizing and dismantling biases that can skew data interpretation and decision-making processes.



Flexibility & responsiveness

Adjusting *strategies based on feedback*

Flexibility and responsiveness to feedback are essential for creating lasting and meaningful change. Organizations should be prepared to adjust their strategies and initiatives based on the feedback received from racialized employees. This may involve revising policies, enhancing training programs, or implementing new support mechanisms. Continuous improvement ensures that the organization remains committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment.

It is important to recognize that this is not an easy process and must be met with a lot of intention from the moment of asking for feedback. The type of feedback that you are looking for as an organization must be in relationship to the amount of change you can and are willing to make. When those two things are not aligned, it can result in unfulfilled expectations, confusion and frustration. Along the same vein, while working on a strategy for adjusting to the feedback, it's important to set staff expectations and to intentionally set and communicate organizational capacity. Having said this, we must be aware that the organization has a responsibility to push itself.

The challenging of systemic racism requires commitment and tenacity. It's why the proper accountability mechanisms need to be put in place. Abandoning the journey towards anti-racism intentionally or unintentionally communicates a lack of commitment or care towards the integration and safety of racialized employees in the workplace, so prioritizing and building towards sustainability is key.

“ There is something interesting about working within a power structure that you are asking to change while that power structure understands that that shift is a threat to itself ”



01

Establish clear and accessible processes for updating workplace policies and ways of work, in response to feedback from racialized employees. This should include regular reviews and revisions of policies and ways of work to ensure they are evolving to the needs and address the concerns expressed by racialized employees.

Develop robust feedback-responsive processes



02

Based on feedback that is received, organizations should introduce new ways of work, supports, spaces, trainings and resources that are designed to address emerging needs. This not only equips staff to participate meaningfully in the organization's growth and transformation but also reinforces the organization's commitment to continuous learning and development.

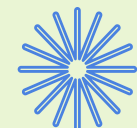
Introduce new trainings & resources regularly



03

Keep the organization at all levels informed about changes that are being made in response to their feedback. This transparency builds trust and demonstrates that the organization values and acts upon the input of their staff. Regular updates can also help to manage the expectations and ensure that staff are aware of ongoing efforts to address their concerns.

Communicate adjustments transparently



04

Leadership should share regular updates on their plans to address issues raised through feedback. This openness fosters a sense of collective ownership over the organization's growth and helps to maintain commitment, trust, and momentum.

Share future plans openly



05

Acknowledge and recognize staff contribute to feedback processes. Recognition can take many forms and should be discussed with the staff in question. Not all staff may feel comfortable being recognized and it can be delicate for staff who feel unable to participate especially in a situation where the organization is still working on creating safety within the organization in relation to engaging in feedback processes.

Recognize & reward contributions to feedback processes



06

It's so important to celebrate and highlight the positive impact that that integrating feedback and input from staff has had in the transformation process. This reinforces the impact of staff contributions and can serve as a powerful motivator for continued engagement. It also aids in the establishment of a positive feedback loop where staff feel more empowered to voice their opinions knowing that their input leads to tangible improvements that are appreciated and valued by the organization

Highlight positive changes from employee input

Steps organizations can take to **prioritize** safety

Additional Resources

Books, articles, and websites for further reading

The ARC Hubs resource library provides a curated list of recommended readings and resources for further education on creating safer spaces for racialized individuals and supports for personal learning objectives. It includes books, articles, and websites that offer valuable insights and guidance on diversity, equity, and inclusion: <https://centre-arc-hub.ca/docs/>

Contact information for organizational support

Note that supports should never be brought in to be louder than the experience and expertise of staff already within the organization. The key word here is support.

There are many types of support that organizations can seek out when they are prepared to do so. This includes consultants, facilitators, professional associations, advocacy groups, and counseling services that specialize in supporting racialized individuals in the workplace. The ARC Hub hosts an ever-growing roster of experts meant to centralize this type of supports which you can find here: <https://centre-arc-hub.ca/arc-hub-roster-of-experts/>

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