



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

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Commemorating Black History Month in February and beyond

February marks [Black History Month](#), a time for Canadians to honour the achievements and contributions of Black individuals and communities. This commemorative guide is designed to help organizations move beyond traditional celebrations and static memorialization, embracing a dynamic, action-driven approach to commemoration. Where commemoration from our perspective reflects on the past while acknowledging its ongoing influence and the evolving presence of Black voices, experiences, and identities in our society today and memorialization often focuses on preserving the past as fixed and unchanging.

At its core, commemoration is an active process—a way to honour Black histories, voices, and contributions in ways that inspire reflection, dialogue, and meaningful change. This guide invites organizations to view Black history as a continuous thread, woven into the very fabric of Canadian society and organizational identity. It challenges workplaces to see Black history not as a static or separate chapter of the past but as an integral, living force shaping industries, communities, and culture in the present and future.

Commemoration through this lens addresses the dual responsibility of acknowledging historical legacies of resilience and resistance while actively confronting the ongoing impacts of systemic inequalities. It recognizes that the contributions of Black individuals—past and present—are central to building a more equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible society. By honouring this history, organizations can amplify Black voices and create spaces where Black identities are celebrated and deeply valued as part of their foundational culture.

This guide provides practical tools, insights, and resources to support organizations in engaging meaningfully with Black History Month. It begins by exploring the diversity of Black identities in Canada, emphasizing the importance of centering Black stories to reflect the breadth of lived and living experiences. From there, it connects organizations to actionable steps and community resources, encouraging collective learning, self-reflection, and meaningful engagement. These sections aim to help organizations move away from performative gestures and instead adopt practices that result in authentic and sustainable outcomes.

The benefits of this approach extend beyond the workplace. Actively commemorating Black history creates opportunities for internal collaboration, fostering a stronger sense of belonging among employees. It also builds trust and engagement with external communities and clients, reinforcing an organization's commitment to equity and representation. By integrating Black presence and innovation into their culture and operations, organizations can model inclusive values while driving positive change that extends far beyond February.

Starting informed conversations: Planning exercise for teams, leaders, ERG's

To support your Black History Month planning, we have developed a two-segment exercise to guide you through conversations anchored in [Reflective exploration](#) and [Actionable commitments](#). Each segment is designed to initiate meaningful conversations and inspire engagement with Black history as a dynamic, living, and evolving part of your workplace culture, not just during Black History Month but year-round.

The two segments are meant to build on each other, however, for organizations early on their journey it may be valuable to connect with a local organization like those suggested on page 8 as a place to begin at the time setting in motion the Reflective Exploration activity to start preparing for next year.

Part 1. Reflective exploration

Objective: To critically examine and discuss the role of Black history, contributions, and presence in your organizational culture and practices.

Instructions:

1. Divide your team into small groups or conduct individual reflections, depending on group size and structure.
2. Provide each group or individual with the following questions:
 - What does Black history mean in our organizational context today?
 - How are Black contributions, experiences, and voices visible and valued in our daily practices?
 - How do historical legacies intersect with our organization's present-day culture, operations, and goals?

Activity:

- Allow 20–30 minutes for open dialogue, brainstorming, and note-taking.
- Encourage participants to focus on honest, evidence-based reflections rather than idealized or performative responses.

Outcome:

At the end of this segment, each group or individual will identify three key themes that capture their reflections on how Black history is currently acknowledged and valued in the organization. These themes will serve as a foundation for Part 2 on page 7.

Before moving to Part 2 of this activity, it is important to recognize the diversity of Black identities and the broader context of Black experiences, which will deepen our understanding as we move toward actionable commitments.

Exploring the diversity of Black identities in Canada

Who?

Depending on where you are in Canada, Black communities have had a different impact on culture, art, language and even geography.

So, while we're on the subject of commemoration, it is important to know who we are talking about and what stories we want to highlight. The Black community in Canada is not a monolith. It includes people with diverse backgrounds and identities, shaped by different historical paths and migratory experiences.

These communities have developed and evolved over the centuries, shaped by waves of migration, social movements and political change.

Here's a closer look at the [diversity within Black communities in Canada](#) which we invite you to research in greater depth by navigating the links provided.

[Roots in the African Diaspora](#)

- [African Canadians](#)
- [Caribbean Canadians](#)

Where?

Regional variations and historical experiences

- [Nova Scotia and the United Loyalists](#)
- [Ontario and the Underground Railroad](#)
- [Quebec and the Haitian Diaspora](#)
- [The Prairies and the Oklahoma Migration](#)
- [British Columbia, Housing Discrimination, and Hogan's Alley](#)

Black story and lived experiences in Canada

Storytelling serves as a powerful tool for truth-telling and connection and offers an intimate lens into the lived experiences of Black Canadians, while also challenging systemic inequities. Similarly seen with the [TTC's celebration of Black History Month](#), these articles illustrate Black communities to preserve their history, amplifies their voices, and inspire actions, and narratives demand commemoration – not as static remembrances of the past, but as dynamic and intentional acknowledgments of ongoing struggles and victories. Looking forward, these short but important examples of Black stories compel us to envision a future where equity, empowerment, and inclusion are not ideals but lived experiences and realities. Allowing us to reflect on the past, present, and future, these narratives invite us to question themes they intimately explore – identity, resilience, community, equity, empowerment, and resistance – and how to celebrate diversity and story together.

[Why Dionne Brand is the Alchemist of Language](#) (April 23, 2023)

The article celebrates Dionne Brand as a literary icon and highlights her impactful work as a poet, novelist, and activist. It discusses her exploration of themes of Black Identity, systemic oppression, and violence. Brand's legacy as a Toronto Poet Laureate, as well as her influence in Canadian culture is noted for its commitment to art and activism. Notable works: *A Map to the Door of No Return*.

[5 Black Women Talk About Their Lives in Canada - Past, Present, and Future](#) (January 31, 2020)

This article features insights from five Black Canadian women about their experiences in Canada, highlighting systemic issues and the intersection of personal and societal challenges. It explores topics such as healthcare disparities, racism, and cultural identity, shedding light on how historical and ongoing inequities impact black communities. The article examines the experiences of Black women in Canada through reflections on the **past, present, and future**:

- **Past:** the authors reflect on the historical challenges Black Canadians have faced, including systemic racism and marginalization in areas like healthcare, education, and representation. They acknowledge the legacy of discrimination that continues to shape societal structures and personal experiences
- **Present:** The authors reflect the ongoing struggles with inequities and barriers, such as how healthcare disparities emphasize how systemic racism is still prevalent, but at the same time, they also celebrate the resilience and achievements of Black women in various fields, such as healthcare, beauty and fashion, arts, and community advocacy, that creates and includes inclusive spaces.
- **Future:** The authors further reflect on the focus on the future and emphasize the need for change, representation, and empowerment for upcoming generations.

[In Conversation: Desmond Cole and Téa Mtonji](#) (May 14, 2020)

This interview highlights anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and what it means to be free in Canada. Desmond Cole discusses carding, the role of the mainstream media and how it frames anti-Blackness as a surprise, and importantly, Cole talks about how Canada is equally guilty of exporting white supremacy as well, and because of how the Canadian national identity is seen, it is usually taken less seriously than what happens in the United States.

[Christina Sharpe's form-defying memoir *Ordinary Notes* explores the Black experience](#) (November 08, 2024)

Christina Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes* emphasizes the importance of centering Black stories by exploring the complexities of Black life, history, and memory through a blend of personal and cultural reflections. She examines systemic racism, resilience, and the beauty within Black life, creating space for deeper understanding of the Black experience in Canada and beyond. The article shares an excerpt from her memoir.

[Black Lives Matter and the Struggle for Racial Justice in Canada](#) (September 26, 2023)

The article discusses the Black Lives Matter movement in Canada, focusing on its fight against systemic racism and the ongoing struggle for racial justice. It highlights the story of anti-Black racism in Canada, the resilience of Black communities, and the activism aimed at dismantling oppressive systems. It further underscores the importance of addressing inequalities in areas such as policing, education, and healthcare while also recognizing the contributions of Black Canadians in advocating for equity and human rights.

As you read one or all of the articles, consider how each one reflects Black stories and experiences in Canada, and how they collectively reveal the systemic challenges faced, as well as the resilience, creativity, and advocacy of Black Canadians. Reflect on the following two questions as a way of exploring the struggle of racial justice, particularly with anti-black racism, systemic racism, white supremacy, and ongoing historical inequities that continuously impact the Black community in Canada.

- What role does storytelling play in celebrating diversity and promoting inclusivity in Canada?
- How do/can the narratives shared by Black Canadians challenge historical and colonial accounts of Canada's past?

The articles underscore how centering Black stories, through voices such as Dionne Brand, Desmond Cole, Téa Mtonji, Christina Sharpe, Black Lives Matter, and others, provides a vital lens for understanding the triumphs and struggles of Black communities. Commemoration is not merely a reflection on the past, but an active engagement with the present and future – acknowledging Black histories and contributions as dynamic forces shaping Canadian society.

Part 2: Actionable commitments

Objective: To identify concrete steps your organization can take to honour Black history as an ongoing, evolving process and to integrate Black presence and innovation into organizational identity.

Instructions:

1. Reconvene participants and share the themes identified in Part 1.
2. Use the following prompts to guide discussion and action planning:
 - What specific steps can we take to better honour Black presence and innovation in our organizational culture?
 - How can we make Black history and identity an integral, living part of our year-round practices, beyond February?
 - What resources, support, and learning opportunities are needed to ensure these steps are impactful and sustainable?

Activity:

- Assign one representative from each group to present their top three actionable commitments based on their discussions.
- Facilitate a collective brainstorming session to prioritize these actions and identify immediate next steps.

Outcome:

Participants will develop a short-term action plan (three to five initiatives) that aligns with the organization's goals for commemorating Black History Month and fostering an ongoing culture of equity and belonging.

Key insights and impact

This exercise is a starting point for embedding Black history into organizational culture as a living and evolving narrative. By reflecting on current practices and committing to meaningful actions, organizations can [move beyond performative gestures](#) to foster authentic engagement, build stronger connections, and create spaces where Black identity and innovation are celebrated year-round.

Approaching Black History Month through this lens reinforces the organization's commitment to DEIA, ensuring that Black voices and contributions are not only remembered but also valued, amplified, and integrated into the present and future of the organization.

Connecting organizations to actionable steps and community resources

As you look to planning and organizing your BHM event or actions in February and beyond, here are a few ideas to spark your imagination within and beyond your organizational practices.

Connecting with a Black cultural centre

One approach is to start by connecting with a Black cultural centre, historical society, or local organization supporting the Black communities in your area. Think personal, think local. Connecting with these organizations can provide links to local speakers who can speak to Black history in your area as well as current issues facing the Black communities around your organization. Many of these organizations also host BHM events or calendars that can link you and your colleagues to events beyond your organization. This can lead to further actions if you or your colleagues are able to support, sponsor, volunteer at and attend the BHM offerings in your area as well.

Below is a list of a few examples by province and city that might inspire your own searches. Keeping in mind that more details will likely be populated as we get closer to February.

- Alberta: [Black Settlers Of Alberta And Saskatchewan Historical Society](#)
 - Edmonton: [The National Black Coalition of Canada, Edmonton \(NBCC\)](#)
- British Columbia: [The British Columbia Black History Awareness Society \(BCBHAS\)](#)
 - Victoria: [Issamba Centre](#)
 - Vancouver: [Hogan's Alley Society \(HAS\)](#)
- Manitoba: [Black History Month Celebration Committee](#)
- New Brunswick: [New Brunswick Black History Society](#)
- Newfoundland and Labrador: [Nigerian Canadian Association of Newfoundland and Labrador \(NCANL\)](#)
 - St. John's: [Celebrating Black History Month In St. John's](#)
- Northwest Territories: [Artic Afro Cultural Association](#)
 - Yellowknife: [Black Advocacy Coalition Bringing Black History Month to Yellowknife](#)
- Nova Scotia: [Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia](#)
 - Shelburne: [Black Loyalist Heritage Centre](#)
 - Halifax: [Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute](#)
- Nunavut: [Association des francophones du Nunavut \(AFN\)](#)
 - [Nunavut Black History Society kicks off a month of celebrations with Bob Marley tribute](#)
- Ontario: [The African Descent Ontario](#)
 - Toronto: [Black History Month](#)
 - Newmarket: [Black History Month](#)
- Prince Edward Island: [Black History Month 2025](#)
- Quebec: [TableRonde du Mois de l'histoire des Noirs](#)
 - Montreal: [Centre culturel afro-canadien de Montréal](#)
- Saskatchewan: [African-Canadian Black History Month](#)
- Yukon: [Hidden Histories Society Yukon](#)

Connecting with your local organizations supporting Black communities

Another approach to starting your BHM event or actions is connecting with organizations supporting Black communities across Canada or locally that may resonate with your organizational mandate, vision, mission, or interests. Below are a few examples of organizations based on some common EP organization types identified through our EP survey.

- **Health care**

Connecting with national organizations like [Black Health Alliance](#) to work together on an initiative, to spotlight or amplify the [work of the Black Health Alliance](#) within and for Black communities across Canada, or to explore their research to inform your policies and practices year round.

Another national organization is the [Black Youth Helpline](#) which provides support for Black youth at the intersections of education, health, and community. There are opportunities to [volunteer](#) as an organization or individual, as well as offer monetary support through donations.

Seek local organizations like the Toronto based health organization [Women's Hands Community Health](#) (WHIWH) Centre which focuses on providing racialized women, trans and non-binary clients from several racialized communities with culturally safe, relevant, and responsive primary healthcare. WHIWH also has a [research group](#) doing work to improve the lives of racialized women that could provide further opportunities for connection, support and research to support your initiatives.

- **Finance**

For financial organizations, supporting initiatives like the [Pan-African Credit Union](#), connecting with organizations like the [Black Business and Professional Association](#), or collaborating with youth oriented organizations to support future growth of Black professionals in your sector like the [Careers Education Empowerment \(CEE\) Centre for Young Black Professionals](#) are also great ways to begin taking action.

- **Education**

In education spaces seeking out and incorporating resources developed by Black Canadians can enrich your content, such as Afua Cooper's project [A Black People's History of Canada](#), or take up some of the suggestions from Alyssa and Andre in the [Black History Month 101](#) episode of Teachers Like Us.

Wrapping up and moving forward

As organizations use this guide, they are encouraged to consider Black History Month not just as a singular event but as part of an enduring commitment to equity and belonging. A commemorative approach helps organizations view history as dynamic—something that evolves and informs their present and future actions. This lens enables organizations to honour the ongoing contributions of Black individuals while fostering spaces where Black voices, histories, and identities are actively shaping a better future.

Ultimately, this commemorative guide challenges organizations to position themselves as leaders in DEIA by adopting a modern, adaptive approach to Black History Month. It is an invitation to recognize Black history not only as a historical reality but also as a transformative force that continues to inspire innovation, resilience, and change.

Through this framework, Black History Month becomes more than a time of reflection; it evolves into a celebration of Black presence and a call to action—one that strengthens relationships, deepens understanding, and fosters a collective commitment to building inclusive communities and workplaces where everyone can thrive.