



**Towards an Action Plan Based on the Report of the  
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council  
Advisory Committee to Address Anti-Black Racism  
in Research and Research Training**

**February 2023**



## Summary

Addressing systemic anti-Black racism remains an ongoing priority for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). SSHRC welcomes this report by an advisory committee of Black scholars, and commits to developing an action plan to address its findings and recommendations. For SSHRC to be able to implement changes in the 2024 program cycle, the action plan will be published in fall 2023. Over the coming months, SSHRC will develop this action plan through an inclusive process that centres Black scholars and researchers, and also engages key institutional stakeholders.

## Context

SSHRC is the federal research agency that promotes and supports excellence in Canadian research and research training in the social sciences and humanities. Understanding that excellence depends upon an inclusive research ecosystem, SSHRC is committed to the aims of the [Tri-Agency Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#) as prerequisites to research excellence. Within this broad approach, differentiated strategies are necessary to meet the needs of the social sciences and humanities community, and because multiple forms of discrimination cause different lived realities of inequality and exclusion.

SSHRC's commitment to dismantling barriers faced by Black scholars reflects a growing recognition in Canadian society that long-standing anti-Black racism is a root cause of quantifiable, systemic underrepresentation, inequality, and exclusion. In 2018, the Government of Canada recognized the International Decade for People of African Descent (IDPAD), committing to work for a better future for Black Canadians. The IDPAD objectives are protection of rights for people of African descent; respect for the contributions of people of African descent; and the development of national action plans to address anti-Black racism. Inspired by many social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, people in Canada and around the world have raised unprecedented calls for the elimination of systemic anti-Black racism.

In this context, SSHRC's Vice-President, Research, invited Black Canadian researchers and students to join an Advisory Committee to Address Anti-Black Racism in Research and Research Training. The members came from different parts of the country, representing both official languages; large and small institutions; and a diversity of professional fields and backgrounds. During meetings in 2021 and 2022, the members of the Advisory Committee examined race-disaggregated intersectional data on participation in SSHRC's granting programs; analyzed the wider research ecosystem; and provided a number of recommendations.

SSHRC welcomes the report of the Advisory Committee; thanks the members for sharing their time, expertise, knowledge and experience; and wishes to recognize their great dedication and diligence in undertaking this important work. The findings and recommendations contained in the report will lay the foundation for a SSHRC action plan to address anti-Black racism in the Canadian social sciences and humanities research enterprise.

The report clearly demonstrates that Black Canadians remain statistically underrepresented in the Canadian research enterprise. Black researchers and students face unique barriers, deeply rooted in long-standing, systemic anti-Black racism and intersecting forms of prejudice and discrimination. The report highlights many areas where these barriers exist: underrepresentation in hiring and promotion of academic staff; excessive burdens placed on Black academics; inadequate mentoring for Black graduate students; unconscious bias in the merit review process; and many other cultural and structural manifestations of anti-Black discrimination.

Such overlapping forms of exclusion limit the full and meaningful participation of Black Canadians in research at all levels. This is both an inequity to those directly affected, and a diminution of the research enterprise as a whole. The persistence of systemic anti-Black racism impairs Canada's capacity for research excellence and innovation, weakening Canadian society to the extent that it is deprived of greater contributions from Black researchers, whose full potential can only be realized in a more equitable and inclusive research ecosystem.

### **Actions to date**

SSHRC has undertaken work, both internally as an organization and with regard to its research and research training programs, that moves towards these goals:

- In 2021, SSHRC leadership commissioned a culture, employment and systems review to explore issues of racism and discrimination specifically affecting employees who identify as Black.
- Recommendations were made on how the agency can: strengthen its culture to be fully inclusive by creating a psychologically safe and trusting environment for Black employees; and determine whether there are systemic barriers and discrimination in the agency's policies, people management, programs and procedures.
- Anti-racism training was provided for all Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat staff (who are all SSHRC employees) and its governance committee members (e.g., presidents and vice-presidents of the three agencies), including some Human Resources members.

- In 2021, the Vice-President, Research, created the Advisory Committee to Address Anti-Black Racism in Research and Research Training and sat as an ex-officio member in its 2021-22 meetings.
- In November 2022, SSHRC and its tri-agency partners, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and Canadian Institutes of Health Research, announced [new funding opportunities to support Black scholars](#).
- The three federal research funding agencies have begun implementing changes to ensure disaggregated data are available for more funding opportunities, allowing for improved monitoring and insights across all programs.

### **Moving forward**

To respond to the findings and recommendations in the Advisory Committee report, SSHRC will develop an action plan to advance transformative change over the short, medium and long term. The development of such a plan requires an appropriate process. SSHRC cannot undertake this work alone. As noted in the report, any analysis involving the barriers or needs of Black communities must be undertaken together with Black researchers and individuals with lived experiences of anti-Black racism.

SSHRC's action plan to address anti-Black racism in the Canadian social sciences and humanities research enterprise will be developed through an open, inclusive and transparent process that will engage key stakeholders, centring members of the social sciences and humanities research community (students, faculty, administrators and other staff) who identify as Black. The process will also engage other federal research funding agencies, relevant federal departments and agencies, and institutional networks, such as [SSHRC Leaders](#). The process will be based on evidence and good practices, collaborating with and learning from the experiences of groups such as the signatories of the Scarborough Charter on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion in Canadian higher education. In addition, environmental scans, research reviews and lessons learned from other strategies to address exclusion may be useful in identifying promising avenues for action.

The vision guiding this process will be one of research excellence through an inclusive research ecosystem, in which Black students and researchers, in their full diversity, can flourish and achieve their potential, free from barriers of anti-Black racism and other intersecting forms of systemic discrimination.

The plan's scope will encompass elements over which SSHRC has direct impact, such as its organizational culture, practices, and internal policies, as well as research and research training programs directly administered by SSHRC. Given SSHRC's leadership role in the wider research enterprise, the strategic action plan will also explore the agency's capacity to indirectly influence and incentivize change in the broader research enterprise, in partnership with the other federal research funding agencies and in its relations with research institutions. The agenda for this plan will be developed iteratively, through engagement. It takes as its starting point the findings and recommendations of the Advisory Committee report, and will address a number of interconnected challenges, such as the following:

- **Correcting underrepresentation**, resting on longitudinal tracking of sustained representation in application and award rates, graduate student enrolment, faculty hiring, promotions, etc.; and setting measurable goals, with indicators and targets of continual improvement towards sustained, equitable representation. Further data on the racialization of precarious employment among instructors may also be instructive.
- **Removing barriers**, including identifying and removing both structural and cultural barriers to full and meaningful participation that are rooted in anti-Black racism, in such areas as:
  - **funding**—identifying measurable strategies to improve access to funding, further embedding equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) considerations in program design, and equitable funding for Black-led or designed research projects, including those involving Black community participation;
  - **merit review processes**—reviewing practices, guidelines and training with a view to eliminating bias in adjudication processes; and addressing underrepresentation of Black scholars on merit review committees;
  - **burden reduction**—addressing the reality that, due to underrepresentation, Black faculty commonly take on greater workloads than their peers, serving on EDI and other committees, with impacts on teaching, research, and mentoring time; and
  - **graduate students**—addressing barriers faced by Black students on the continuum from undergraduate to graduate levels. The report notes data gaps here, given that graduate student fellowship application and selection processes are not all within SSHRC's direct control.

- **Data strategy**—the above items depend upon reliable race-disaggregated data as the necessary evidence base to diagnose, prioritize and inform policy and programs, and to develop indicators for measuring sustained progress. The report of the Advisory Committee identified several data gaps and calls for effective data collection permitting intersectional analyses, while protecting the right to privacy. SSHRC will enter discussions with Statistics Canada concerning improvements to the Postsecondary Student Information System and University and College Academic Staff System surveys.
- **Culture change**, developing effective strategies to eliminate barriers rooted in unconscious bias, e.g., undervaluation of research by Black scholars, glass ceilings, etc. This includes anti-Black racism training, with the development of associated competencies. SSHRC’s organizational culture review on anti-Black racism, currently under development, will provide important insights informing goals and strategies in the action plan.
- **SSHRC leadership**—the report calls on SSHRC to explore policy and funding tools that could incentivize or indirectly impact institutional changes in the wider research ecosystem.
- **The public role of the social sciences and humanities**—the social sciences and humanities can bring new knowledge to advance inclusion and equity in Canadian society and contribute to intersectional anti-Black racism work. In Canadian institutions, student interest in Black Studies programs continues to grow.

SSHRC’s inclusive process to develop an action plan will work in an iterative fashion to refine an agenda that meets the needs of those living with the realities of anti-Black racism. The plan will be published in fall 2023 so initial program implementation can commence in the 2024 fiscal year.

While the IDPAD officially ends in 2024, SSHRC's action plan will be an instrument to continue to advance the Decade's three goals of Justice, Recognition and Development. Beyond 2024, SSHRC will strategically apply an intersectional anti-Black racism lens to its EDI commitments, celebrate excellence among Canada's Black scholars, and support the development of a new generation of Black researchers.

Signatures



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Ted Hewitt,  
President



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