



UNCONFERENCE

DISCUSSION

OUTCOMES

NOVEMBER 24, 2021

A debrief of participant reactions to the case studies and elicited action items

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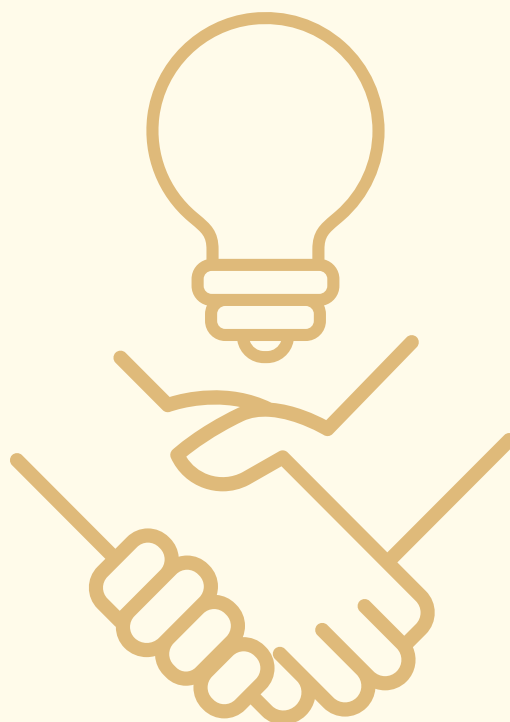


**THE IMMIGRANT
EDUCATION SOCIETY**

INTRODUCTION

The Empowering Communities ‘Unconference’ is the culmination of a focused study on the current experiences of racism amongst settlement agency clients and their communities in Calgary. Being the third and final stage of this inquiry, the event drew on initial survey and interview data to engage attendees with actual experiences of racism by their newcomer and racialized fellow community members. The Unconference had a wide array of participants from different sectors, which included representatives from immigrant serving organizations, academia, and from municipal and provincial governments. The attendees list was carefully curated with consideration of what ideas, perspectives, and community roles they bring to the table. In total, we had approximately 40 participants discuss their views regarding racist experiences in the community and anti-racism action. These discussions sought to consider new directions in which attending policy makers, service providers, experts, and community members could address emerging issues with race and racism close to home.

This report contains summaries and nominal analysis of key points and action items articulated by Unconference attendees around the five identified themes that have emerged from the survey and interview data. These themes are: (1) intergroup hostility and stereotyping, (2) language and racism, (3) workplace discrimination, (4) racial biases in education, and (5) sexual harassment and public safety. These five themes were found to be the most common categories of experiences expressed by interview participants. A more complete analysis of all the data gathered by the research team for the Empowering Communities Unconference will be provided in the forthcoming full research report.



THEME 1: INTERGROUP HOSTILITY AND STEREOTYPING

The first theme introduced participants to experiences of intergroup hostility and stereotyping where the understanding of “Canadian culture” shapes how discriminatory acts occur between newcomers and local residents, and established and recent immigrants. Challenges to tackling this theme include bureaucracy, the “bystander effect”, engagement strategies to include law enforcement personnel (i.e. police and military), and lack of action by policy makers. Below is the example used to spark conversation on the topic:

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“About a couple months ago, I was almost [a victim of harassment in public] but my wife, my wife was there with me and then she asked me, just to leave it [...] This is in a shopping mall, and then the person was in line. And then [...] she asked me to go to see another cashier, and the guy told me, that this is Canada, and that you have to learn the rule. I told him that I was called by the cashier, so I'm going there. And he looks like very—you know, he wanted to fight with me. And he looks very tense. And my wife was behind me. And then she apologized on my behalf. And I have to move aside. But what I thought is that the guy was not good mentally, he looked depressed or something. And then he was saying ‘you cannot go, you have to learn the culture’. And then he should have told me nicely, but the way I see he looks like he's going to hit me.”

Based on the scenario above, participants discussed specific action plans to tackle intergroup hostility and stereotyping. These action items include:

1. **More inclusivity and awareness initiatives**

- a. Bring an intersectional lens to tackling racism as other identities (e.g., religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) overlap that exacerbate intergroup hostility and stereotyping.
- b. Continue conversations on anti-racism practices like the Unconference to include voices who are generally absent due to other commitments.
- c. Work with organizations who have little experience, but have expressed high interest in assisting newcomers and immigrants settle into new environments (i.e., the police and the military).

2. **Access to tools**

- a. Develop newcomer service guides for mainstream organizations which lists all settlement service organizations and services for newcomers and immigrants.
- b. Provide more funding to support programs that will empower racialized communities to do more anti-racist work rather than funnelling finances back to other cultural or diversity training workshops that benefit non-racialized communities.

3. **Educating people on their rights as it relates to experiences of racism**

- a. Work closely with government and industry players to develop policies that educate people on their rights in the workplace and in the broader community.
- b. Establish strategies to mitigate intergroup hostility and stereotyping between recent and established immigrants as it relates to cultural norms.

4. **Resources for bystanders and their roles in public spaces**

- a. Develop public awareness campaigns, (similar to those used in public transit) to teach the public what to do in cases of hostility and stereotyping in public.
- b. Distribute bystander information posters in businesses and grocery stores.



1. **Gather more knowledge for policy makers**

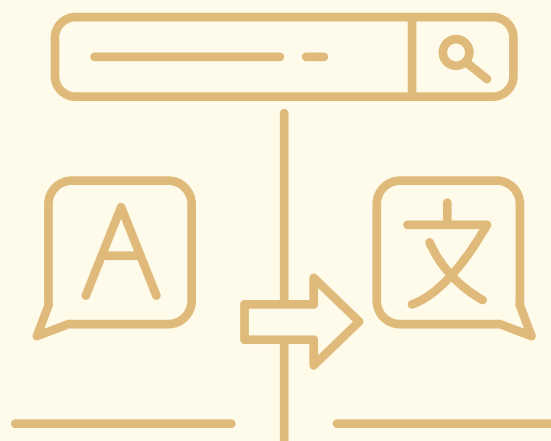
- a. Ensure multilingual participants can effectively participate in discussions such as these about racism - provide translators/ interpreters to effectively communicate their views.
- b. Utilize grassroots organizations' connection with local communities to reach individuals whose views are normally difficult to obtain.
- c. Provide mechanisms where immigrants and racialized community members are able to influence policy makers' decisions about them and their communities.
- d. Include discussions about other marginalized groups, such as gender diverse and religious groups.

2. **Provide resources and a resource list to practitioners and mainstream services**

- a. Equip frontline workers and service providers with the repertoire to empathetically deal with communication breakdowns.
- b. Raise awareness to mainstream service providers about situations that could happen to newcomers and in interacting with newcomers as well.
- c. Develop anti-racism efforts which move people away from the perception that immigrants need "accent reduction", and problematize the notion in popular discourse that particular cultures are the 'norm'.

3. **Collaborate among organizations**

- a. Pool resources between organizations.
- b. Leverage the reach of multiple organizations to assess needs and execute broad-based actions.
- c. Take the opportunity to work with groups in society that are not commonly seen to be partners in anti-racism training, such as the military and the police force.



THEME 3: WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

Workplace discrimination can exist in the Canadian labour market, and trigger precarity and vulnerability among newcomers, immigrants, and racialized communities. Our dialogic analysis at the Unconference stresses that racialized immigrants confront numerous barriers when participating in the labour force. For those who have entered the labour force, they are excluded from accessing professional employment at high-wage firms. Once they have secured themselves in the workforce, they encounter a significant wage gap compared to their counterparts. Below are the examples presented for the focus group discussion:

“...they got other people to the job. They don’t prefer people from my country of origin. So they gave the job to other people, even though they are not that qualified, they don’t have all the skills and qualifications for the job.”

“My colleague, who is a Caucasian Canadian, who has very similar backgrounds and skills with me, received much higher pay [...] You would never argue about your salary with your manager because it has been really difficult to find a job already in Canada. I know some colleagues who are also racialized immigrants who did that bargaining and didn’t work well. We just accept what comes to us.”

Adopting a critical reflection approach, the attendees in Theme 3 illustrated five areas of action items:

1. **Multipoint solution is essential**

- a. Professional development training for employees would be needed to promote workplace equity and inclusion in the hiring process.
- b. Transparency around hiring practices can be helpful for racialized immigrants to reinforce their skills when seeking employment. For example, provide constructive feedback on why they did not get to the interview stage or why they are not get the work opportunities.
- c. Awareness is vital as many employers would not be aware of their practice in the hiring process.

2. **Developing awareness in youth is needed**

- a. Youth is our future; building critical thinking skills to the younger generation and planting seeds to their daily knowing, thinking and doing can provide a promising future in a longitudinal perspective.
- b. Parenting skills could be vital in fostering critical reflection to the younger generation and inform them that sameness and difference co-exist in various social settings.

3. **Develop measurable outputs and outcomes for anti-racism practices and policies within the workplace**

- a. Designing an assessment system to measure the effectiveness of anti-racism practice in the hiring process from an institutional viewpoint.
- b. It needs to demonstrate how institutions have been practicing EDI adopting a localized approach. This would generate influential impacts on society for all.

4. **Individuals and pertinent communities need to talk and take action without fear**

- a. Funders would need to collect voices from the grassroots and revisit the notion of service quantity and service quality. A statistic-based measurement would not be feasible when dealing with individual stories and lived experiences. It would be beneficial if funders could revisit current outcomes measurement approaches and consider new approaches that more comprehensively assess community outcomes.
- b. The idea of “do your thing, keep your head down, don’t rock the boat” has been widely learned by the racialized communities, especially those who are female immigrants. Racialized community members need to question this bias and how the organizational setting and culture perpetuate this bias.

5. **Acknowledge that racism exists structurally and systemically**

- a. We need to reflect on the social locations of the self to better understand others.
- b. Discrimination is a social construct and it needs to be deconstructed. Institutions need to come up with more positive societal building to form an inclusive community for all.
- c. Implementation is key to holding the self to be accountable in the societal context. This requires individuals to establish a sense of responsibility in fostering social transformation.

1. Make sure environmental scans are incorporated and that everyone is involved

- a. Work to identify gaps in vulnerable populations.
- b. Cultural sensitivity: Making sure that teachers have enough training to ensure that new culturally diverse students feel welcome and supported.
 - i. Teachers need to be aware of racism, stereotypes, and students' stories to help their inclusion.

2. Encourage disruptive, transformative learning

- a. Using the youth to disrupt the status quo and be a force of change.
- b. Education should empower the youth to be disruptive.

3. Re-examine the policies in place to address the following aspects

- a. Why these policies did not work
- b. What would work
- c. What are the repercussions

4. Campaign on inclusive curriculum

- a. Integrate racialized immigrants' intersectional identities and their life trajectories into related education practice.
- b. Immigrant service organizations (ISOs) should be the link between community, services and policy makers.

5. Be able to monitor progress-performance indicators for the government

- a. Monitoring whether or not the figures are doing what they promised to do/ what they are expected to do.



THEME 5: SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The fifth theme introduced participants to an example of racially-motivated sexual harassment, which brought forth discussions on the intersectionality of immigrants. This is especially true of immigrant women, as they experience triple jeopardy (an immigrant woman of colour), which increases their likelihood of racial harassment. The case study also emphasized and explored the notions of social actors, accountability, vulnerability, and the importance of dismantling ingrained racial biases. The quote that was given to participants to discuss is presented below:

“They told me, next time if you see the same person coming here, and if he disturbed me or said something, just let us know. So exactly after three days, what happened? The same guy came back again [...] he started asking me like, did you miss me? Did you ever think about this? [coming home with him] and was saying women want orgasms and I'm giving that to my wife. This was the worst thing I've ever heard in my life, like a person standing over there in the [box store], talking this type of shit to me. [...]

And at the same time, I started screaming and shouting. And I called to the [box store] staff, there was one female associate who came running towards me. She asked what happened, I told this is the same guy who was [...] harassing me. And he was saying that he was giving orgasms to his wife. And he's asking me to come with me in my home. [...] She didn't bother to call police. She didn't bother to say anything or to protect me, except to say: oh, sorry, sorry, I don't know what's going on over here. And the guy from there, he left. How dare she apologize to the guy over there who is harassing me rather than protecting a female?”

Based on the scenario presented above, participants discussed specific action plans to address sexual harassment and achieve an optimum level of public safety. These actions include:

1. **Have more difficult conversations**

- a. Engage with those directly affected to create spaces for conversations to take place where people feel confident to talk about sensitive issues.
- b. Examine why there is hesitancy to report sexual harassment cases, which has low report rates.

2. **Educate newcomers on their rights and how to deal with racism**

- a. Educating newcomers on how to recognize instances of sexual harassment and where to turn for support and information.
- b. Utilizing social media to circulate public service announcements
- c. The education component should include other social actors (e.g. bystanders, employees in any workplace, etc.).

3. **Working with larger public entities to lead organizational change across sectors**

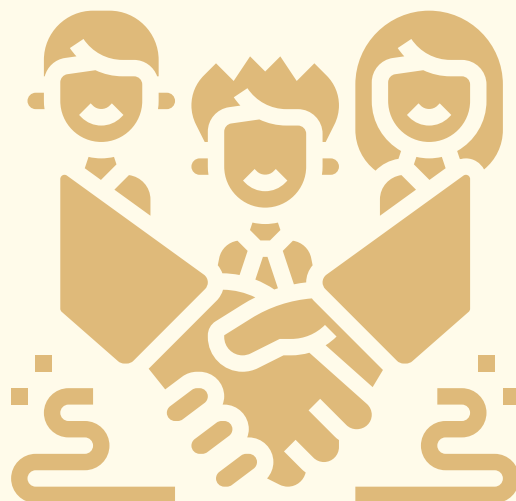
- a. Immigrant service organizations (ISOs) should reflect on their role in the discussion of racism and determine effective action plans towards anti-racism.

4. **Policy makers and other government officials need to be engaged in racialized communities to know what actions would best address their needs**

- a. When creating policies that involve racialized and vulnerable populations, have representatives from these groups be part of the policy making process as they know what would best serve their communities.

5. **Involve more levels of government and hold them accountable**

- a. Once anti-racism policies are in place, there should be periodic meetings with the policy makers, those who are in charge of putting the policy into action and representatives of the community that they serve to create transparency.



TAKEAWAYS

Despite being separated into five groups throughout the day, discussions with participants yielded similar key points and action items. As each individual possesses multilayered identities, their experiences may differ but connect to similar key issues - as highlighted in the outputs of the discussions. Across groups, it remains important for the community to work more to acknowledge that structural racism exists and needs to be addressed through change in perceptions and practices. More is needed to reach certain groups in order for their views and needs to be heard by policy makers. Grassroots organizations can play a key role in gaining these perspectives and data due to their position of trust and credibility among such populations. Groups active in anti-racism initiatives must work with organizations that normally do not participate in such efforts such as non-ethnic community groups and security services such as the police and military. A very common key point asserted that social stakeholders, such as newcomers and racialized populations, mainstream service staff and industry employees, need to have access to more tools and resources. This can help assist in addressing structural and public acts of racism. Change in the future can be cemented in the youth - emphasis on making them aware of issues of racism and the things they may unconsciously do that can reinforce oppression. More initiatives need to empower affected groups to take action without fear, allowing them to take control of spaces, and for mainstream individuals to make such spaces safe for everyone. These points will be further expounded in the complete research report to be distributed to participants and stakeholders in early 2022.

