

## Addressing Anti-Black Racism

<b>Date:</b>	June 22, 2020
<b>To:</b>	Toronto Public Library Board
<b>From:</b>	City Librarian

### **SUMMARY**

---

The purpose of this report is for the Toronto Public Library Board to consider approval of recommendations from the City Librarian for taking action to address anti-Black racism in the city and within the workplace.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

**The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:**

1. endorses the City's [Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism](#) and vision;
2. affirms the priority of addressing anti-Black racism for both the community at large and staff at TPL as part of the work being undertaken for the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan;
3. requests the City Librarian advance anti-Black racism initiatives in the city and within TPL by working with community partners, the City of Toronto, the Toronto Public Library Foundation, staff, TPL's Equity and Diversity committee (EDGE) and Toronto Public Library Workers Union, Local 4948 CUPE; and
4. requests that the City Librarian incorporate another staff diversity survey into the staff engagement survey planned for 2020-2021, reporting to the Library Board on the results.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

---

All actions arising from the recommendations in this report will be accommodated within TPL's approved 2020 operating budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

TPL's Strategic Plan (2020-2024) – *Vital to Toronto–Building Success, Resilience and Well-Being for our City* – provides the strategic directions for the next five years. The strategic plan incorporates an equity lens, which focuses on understanding and addressing barriers to library services for equity-seeking groups and vulnerable populations so they are able to achieve equitable outcomes. In addition, the equity lens supports staff by continuing to work to remove barriers to an inclusive and equitable workplace.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Identifying and addressing anti-Black racism in the city and within TPL is a key strategy to eliminate barriers and create a community and workplace that is more fair and inclusive to all.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

The world has been galvanized by recent anti-Black racism events in the United States. Racial discrimination and injustice is pervasive and manifests itself throughout society, including here in Toronto and within TPL.

Public library service is founded on the social justice principles of equity, inclusion, tolerance, respect and dignity. Equity, diversity and inclusion are specifically identified as core values in the Library Board's [Vision, Mission and Values Statement](#). As such, TPL has a longstanding commitment to ending systemic racism and inequities in society. An example of this longstanding commitment is the Rita Cox Black and Caribbean Heritage Collection, which was established in 1973 by then Parkdale branch head, Rita Cox, to promote and profile Black and Caribbean historical and cultural experience, with a special emphasis on Canadian content. The collection is recognized as one of the most significant Black and Caribbean heritage collections in Canada. There are now four of these collections across TPL.

TPL's mission to provide free and equitable access to services is based on advancing equitable outcomes for all. Addressing anti-Black racism is an integral part of the City of Toronto's and TPL's strategies and work to advance equity, diversity and inclusion. This work also includes TPL's 2017 Board-approved strategies for Indigenous Initiatives and the development of an LGBTQ2S+ Service Plan in collaboration with TPL's Pride

Alliance staff group, the latter of which will be brought to the Library Board following community consultations.

As a member of the [Canadian Urban Libraries Council](#) (CULC), [the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries](#) (FOPL) and the [Urban Libraries Council](#) (ULC), TPL has joined North American public library systems to show a strong commitment to ending structural racism: CULC's [Statement on Race and Social Equity](#), FOPL's [Statement of Solidarity with the Black Community Against Systemic Racism](#), and ULC's [Statement on Race and Social Equity](#). Libraries use these statements as a baseline for building progressive policies, activities and collaborative relationships to advance equity.

To support and enhance policies in place to support workplace equity and diversity, TPL established in 2012 two staff resource groups to promote and discuss issues of equity and diversity in the workplace: Equity and Diversity Group of Employees (EDGE) and Pride Alliance. Mandatory diversity training was implemented in 2013 and the results of TPL's first diversity survey were reported to staff in March 2015. A new survey will measure progress using the results of the first survey as a baseline.

The survey established that 43 percent of the workforce are members of a visible minority. Actions taken resulting from the survey and to continue to address diversity and equity in the workplace included a revised Board [Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination policy](#) in 2016. The policy goals are *to recognize the dignity and worth of every person (whether resident, service recipient or employee) and to create a climate of understanding and mutual respect*. The policy clearly states *TPL will not tolerate, ignore, or condone discrimination or harassment and is committed to promoting respectful conduct, tolerance and inclusion. All employees are responsible for respecting the dignity and rights of their co-workers and the public they serve*. The Library's Human Rights and Harassment procedures that support the policy provide a range of dispute resolution options for staff, customers and Board Members who believe that they have experienced discrimination and/or harassment. In addition, new training focused on anti-oppression and respect in the workplace was initiated. In 2017, mandatory Indigenous cultural competency training was launched; LGBTQ2S+ positive space training for staff that started in 2014 was announced in 2019 as mandatory to start in 2020.

There is still work to be done, however. In a recent meeting with the EDGE committee, members bravely shared their lived experiences with particular examples of racism experienced in the TPL workplace and with the public over the years. This racism takes many forms as it does in the larger community. Sometimes the racism is blatant while other times it is far more subtle, in the form of micro-aggressions from the public, in the workplace and amongst colleagues.

The Library Board's 2020-2024 Strategic Plan identifies the need to advance equity issues by using an equity lens throughout the work of the plan. This means building a shared understanding of the work that needs to be done to advance equity in the city, but also the work that needs to be done to advance equity and inclusion within TPL.

## COMMENTS

It is important to recognize that there is racism in Toronto that causes injustice, poverty and suffering. Anti-Black racism is rooted in the history and experience of enslavement and colonization in Canada and other countries, and the intergenerational impacts must be confronted and addressed here at home.

It is recommended that the Library Board endorses the City's [Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism](#) and its vision. The action plan is a five-year plan that is the result of a collaborative effort between the City of Toronto and Black Torontonians to confront anti-Black racism with corrective action. TPL staff participate in the plan. As an example, TPL is identified as one of several partners delivering employment-related programs. The plan has leveraged the knowledge and experiences of Black residents and organizations in making municipal services, spaces and policies fully inclusive and accessible to Black Torontonians, with the following vision:

*Toronto is a city where Black residents have access to the life chances and opportunities enjoyed by other Torontonians. We will become a city in which no Torontonian is denied access to resources or participation due to anti-Black racism, and where the knowledge, skills and talents of residents of African descent are fully engaged in leading our vibrant and thriving city.*

It is further recommended that the Library Board affirms the priority of addressing anti-Black racism for the community at large and staff at TPL, as part of the work being undertaken for the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. As a start, the City Librarian recently announced that mandatory anti-Black racism staff training, including for the Library Board, will be launched in 2020.

Building a more equitable and just society can only be done through sustained, intentional, informed, systemic and transformative library-community partnerships and internal staff collaborative work. It is recommended that the Board requests the City Librarian to advance anti-Black racism initiatives in the city and within TPL by working with community partners, the City of Toronto, the Toronto Public Library Foundation, staff, TPL's resource committee EDGE and CUPE Local 4948, and requests another staff diversity survey be conducted in conjunction with the staff engagement survey planned for 2020-2021, reporting to the Library Board on the results with the expectation that the survey insights will drive change where needed. Included in this

work will be a policy review focused on customer service and human resources areas with a lens to address barriers for racialized and other equity seeking groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

Anti-Black racism is systemic and pervasive. TPL has a longstanding commitment to ending systemic racism and inequities in society and the workplace. To address anti-Black racism in the city and within TPL, there are a number of priority actions that need to be developed and undertaken as part of the Library's 2020-2024 Strategic Plan.

## **CONTACT**

Vickery Bowles; City Librarian; Tel: 416-393-7032; Email: [ybowles@tpl.ca](mailto:ybowles@tpl.ca)

## **SIGNATURE**

---

Vickery Bowles  
City Librarian