



**FORMAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BLACK COMMUNITY ON SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AT  
THE CITY OF SASKATOON**

Consultation Conducted by **THE PEOPLE BRIDGE ADVOCACY INC**

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With gratitude,  
Senos Timon  
Executive Director,  
The People Bridge Advocacy



## Executive Summary

The purpose of the report was to analyse the Systemic Barriers affecting the Black Community engagement in the City of Saskatoon. Specific objectives were to identify key problems and offer recommendations to the City of Saskatoon in the areas of Human Resources – Recruitment Retention; Advisory Committees, Boards, and Commissions; and Community Engagement. There were barriers identified by the Black Community in the current structures of the City’s systems, inclusion, and management. There was also a lack of communication channels identified between the Black Community and the City. The report recommends a major restructuring of Black recruitment methods, employment and training for low level and high level Black personnel, clarification of job descriptions, more engagement and development of communication channels with the Black Community, and educating leaders and public servants about anti-racism, cultural competence, and how to work in multicultural settings.

## Introduction

*"With the new approach comes new strength and new thoughts and hope, trusting the Black community to lead the transformative engagement process and using the Black community's relationships and talents within the Black community to build bridges and strengthen relationships with the City of Saskatoon; we believe this process gives the Black community some hope for the much-anticipated true transformation in the City of Saskatoon."*

The goal of this project was to study, analyse, identify, and provide recommendations that could help the City of Saskatoon address the issue of systemic barriers affecting members of Saskatoon's Black community's inclusion within the City of Saskatoon's workforce, committees, and boards. Another goal was to explore ways of enhancing engagement with the Black community. Three areas were covered in the report:

1. Human Resources – Recruitment and Retention
2. Advisory Committees, Boards, and Commission
3. Community Engagement



Data was collected through focus groups and individual interviews with working professionals, community/organization leaders, entrepreneurs, and recent university graduates. All participants were from Saskatoon. The total number of people who participated in the consultation/research was twenty-one (21); eleven (11) of whom participated in the focus group and ten (10) participating in individual interviews.

The demographics of the participants were drawn from the Anglophone and Francophone Black communities and organizations in the City of Saskatoon. These include participants identified as African Canadian/African American, Black Caribbean/South American, and African. Out of the twenty-one (21) participants, seven (7) were identified as female, and the age of all participants ranged from 18 to 74 years old.

The report includes the Executive Summary, Introduction, Conclusions, Recommendations, the Discussion, References sections, and Appendices. The discussion section analyzes the three areas listed in this introduction from which the conclusion and recommendations were developed. Appendix A describes the formal engagement process with the Black Community on systemic barriers at the City of Saskatoon, and Appendix B provides Data Limitations.

## **Conclusions**

- Systemic barriers affect the progress of members of the Black Community at the City of Saskatoon. It affects them in the area of recruitment and retention; Black people are also barely represented in managerial positions, advisory committees, boards, and commissions; engagement between the City of Saskatoon and the Black Community is limited.
- Many Black people who are highly educated and more qualified continue to encounter systemic barriers. Many of those who are hired at the City feel unwelcomed as they continue to face systemic racism, making retention difficult. One way to recruit and retain Black professionals is to develop strategic training diversity programs that aim to help Blacks know those in management positions or help the recruiter to become more aware of the probably unconscious bias they may have about Black people.
- For members of the Black Community to be represented in advisory committees, boards, and commissions, it is important for the City to understand that something must change in



the hiring process, retention and work environment. The advisory committees, boards, and commissions are where important decisions are made that affect the lives of everyone in the community of Saskatoon, including the lives of the visible minorities.

- The City should take steps toward closer engagement with the Black Community, working more closely with the community than at present. Establishing lines of communication with the Black Community will prove to them that they are being valued and recognized. If the City engages with the Black Community meaningfully, they will discover that there are many African community associations within the City of Saskatoon they could work with to address the issues. Some of the Black Community Associations that the City could work with include the Ghanain Community; Nigerian Community; Saskatoon Caribbean Canadian Cultural Association; and the South Sudanese Community.
- The City Police need to commit to engagement with the Black Community more to build trust and reduce the issue of racial profiling.

## **Recommendations**

Below are some recommendations of what the City of Saskatoon should do to begin to solve the problem of systemic barriers that affect members of the Black Community so that in the future there is no such problem anymore. Several of our recommendations are specific to hiring/recruitment, Council committees, or community engagement. However, it is also important to recognize how these three areas intersect, and to be holistic in the development of strategies and also in reporting back to the Black Community. It is time for the City of Saskatoon to:

1. Start developing a strategy for action to fight systemic barriers affecting the Black Community in Saskatoon. According to the respondents, the existing systems with their own policies, practices, and norms continue to create an atmosphere for systemic barriers.
2. Develop an action or strategic plan and a mechanism for evaluation, if or when this project is considered, processed, turned into practice and implemented.
3. Establish equity programs and develop special programs for Black employment in all three areas: Hiring/retention, commissions/boards/committees, and community engagement. Steps should be taken to go beyond tokenism.



4. Help recruiters to become more aware of the unconscious bias they have about Black people. Adopt cultural safety, anti-racism and bias trainings in work places, including in the Saskatoon Police Service, with emphasis on subconscious racism; to ensure that Black people and their rights are protected in the work environments.
5. Educate leaders and public servants about how to work in multicultural settings. Educate people to accept that people have cultural differences and backgrounds; they must come to accept that people are not the same; they do not look the same; no race is better or superior than others; people have different ways of thinking and doing things; and, that people must learn how to appreciate diverse divergent views. Recognize that many Blacks who are hired in Saskatoon feel unwelcomed as they continue to face systemic racism, making retention difficult.
6. Hire or promote Black employees already working within; not bringing a person from outside the organization when there is already a qualified and experienced Black employee.
7. Develop and implement procedures to debias the application processes, for example removing names and addresses of applicants.
8. Hire more Black people into entry level positions and career path them into management positions.
9. Establish a program for hiring Black interns at various levels. Provide training opportunities and offer them permanent jobs and promotions. For example, designated equity positions in Human Resources, Boards, Committees, or Engagement.
10. Build and increase networking opportunities with the Black Community. This should be done by working with schools, settlement agencies and Black community organizations.
11. Incorporate opportunities for Black youth and students to connect to the City through volunteering and mentorship opportunities into City plans and processes.
12. Recruit and retain Black professionals; develop a strategic diversity training program that includes a strategy to connect Black Community members to managers and leaders at the City.
13. Engage with the Black Community; organize workshops and information sessions about the roles of the advisory committees, boards, and commissions, and the importance of Black participation. Teaching them that the advisory committees, boards, and commissions are where important decisions are made that affect the lives of everyone in the community of Saskatoon, including the lives of the visible minorities.





14. Follow-up with Black people who have worked at the City and encourage them to join City boards and committees.
15. Set goals for Black representation on City committees and boards based on current demographic data. Some committees that have a particular impact on Black Community members should have designated spots for members of the Black Community, for example, the Board of Police Commissioners.
16. City staff need to have a basic understanding of the Black Community to properly engage with them. This includes understanding the diversity of the community, issues that are important to the community, and cultural competencies for working with diverse groups.
17. City leaders should work directly with Black Community leaders to understand and address the issues that affect diverse Black Communities.
18. Establish a line of communication with the Black Community and take steps toward working more closely with the Black Community to close the engagement gap. For example, engagements through the Black Community Associations, organizations, and leaders in the City of Saskatoon.
19. Use different communications methods with the Black Community other than the conventional methods of emails. Various ways of communication work effectively with the Black Community, through means of established Black organizations (including churches and mosques) and community associations and working with Black leaders to reach community members.
20. Engage with the Black Community to educate them about the engagement procedures and processes so that they can participate and lend their voices that would help the City of Saskatoon reshape policies that are more inclusive and reflective of our diverse community.
21. Work with community leaders to educate Black community members about engagement processes and mentor them in participating in civic processes.
22. Find ways to hear from and give Black people opportunities to work and contribute positively to the economy.
23. Engage with Black entrepreneurs in the City of Saskatoon and work in partnership with them and address their concerns. For example, one black small business owner who was interviewed for this report talked about the challenges Black entrepreneurs face when running businesses in the city. They can be reached either through the People Bridge Advocacy or Black Community leaders.



24. The City of Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners should meet often with Black Communities and their input be considered in decision-making in the areas of policing visible minorities.

### **City of Saskatoon Accountability**

- It is important that the recommendations be considered and addressed within a specific period; say, within a year. So many reports are often submitted to Council with no actions taken to address the issues raised
- The Black Community needs to see updates in terms of the progress of the project: what actions are being taken; about the strategic plan including what the City is planning for the next six months; what the community will see within a year.
- The community would like to be briefed on both short- and long-term goals. The updates will help the Black Community know whether or not what is presented in this report is actually being achieved. The City can update the Black Community through Black Community Associations, organizations, and leaders.
- The briefing of the Black Community can be organized through the People Bridge Advocacy, given that the organization has contacts of all those who were interviewed for this report and the Black Communities they belong to.

### **Discussion**

Systemic racism has existed in Canada for centuries, with numerous efforts having been made to identify and address concerns in Canada. Although there has been significant progress in some areas, barriers persist. Media discussions about systemic barriers and racism in Canada have provided an avenue for raising awareness of the issues. Especially since the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, Canadians have begun to learn about the historic injustices and systemic racism experienced by Indigenous peoples. Racialized peoples, specifically Black Canadians have been identified as a group that has continued to report a high incidence of racism (Jean-Pierre & James, 2020; Jasford, 2016).



The Black Lives Matter movement has helped to showcase the experiences of Black Canadians across the country, resulting in increasingly louder calls to address the systemic racism affecting the lives of Black Canadians (Diverlus Hudson, & Ware, 2020). Black Communities have expressed concerns that their voices are not being heard. Some reported that they have grown numb to it. They believed that even if they spoke up, there would be no action because no one was paying attention to them (Jean-Pierre & James, 2020; Jasford, 2016).

The killing of George Floyd in 2020 sparked global outrage relating to viral incidents of police brutality and anti-Black racism and exposure of systemic barriers in many institutions. As a result, the City of Saskatoon's Mayor Charlie Clark reached out to a few members/leaders of the black community in Saskatoon (Dr. Judy White, Professor Emerita, Mr. Ali Abukar, CEO, Open Door Society; Ms. Alberta Muembo, Student/Activist; and Mr. Senos Timon, Community Builder and Founder of The People Bridge Advocacy Inc.) to discuss how to address these issues. After many meetings, the Council approved three (3) motions put forward by Councillor M. Loewen. The motions are to identify and address elements of systemic barriers in the City of Saskatoon in the areas of:

1. Human Resources – Recruitment and Retention
2. Advisory Committees, Boards, and Commission
3. Community Engagement

The City of Saskatoon and four Black Community members/leaders involved in this initial process agreed that the scope of the consultation/engagement should include more voices from the Black Community. It was then agreed that a report on systemic barriers be prepared for the City of Saskatoon.

This report is based on the data collected from the interviews conducted with Black working professionals, community/organization leaders, entrepreneurs, and recent university graduates residing or working in the City of Saskatoon. The report presents information based on the three identified areas: Human Resources; Advisory Committees; and Community Engagement.



## **1. Human Resources – Recruitment and Retention**

*“The current structures were created decades ago to accommodate mainly one racial group. Although the dynamics have changed, year after year things remain the same. Not much has changed. I believe the structure of the hiring process would have changed many, many years ago. How many reforms or revisions to the hiring processes would have been done already, if actions had been taken?”*

### **1.1. Issues**

Human Resources is one of the major areas where Black Canadians continue to encounter systemic barriers. The recruitment of qualified Blacks has been limited and retention has also been a problem among those who have been employed.

Participants noted that after completing university or after immigrating to Canada with the hope of acquiring a professional job, many Black Canadians find it difficult to access professional jobs. They struggle at the entry level after obtaining their degrees. Others fear that their efforts to enroll in the universities were worthless as they find themselves with no other option but doing manual jobs for survival. Given that many Black people are recent immigrants; networking abilities are limited, which in turn limits their ability to make connections that will facilitate access to the job market. Participants suggested that their exotic names, color of skin or foreign accents are also working against them as they are often turned down when they apply for internships where they could be mentored, gain required experience, and be ready for entry level jobs. They concluded that as long as they are not able to acquire these, they will continue to encounter barriers to facilitate their ability to meet job requirements within their fields. The following are the systemic barriers for recruitment and retention identified by participants.

#### **1.1.1. Recruitment Barriers**

##### **1.1.1.1. Recruitment Barrier 1- Recruiter Bias**

Participants provided examples of barriers to recruitment and hiring. They reported that often, a Black person would apply for a job and be called for an interview. They felt that once they got into the interview room, regardless of their ability to express themselves or the academic and



professional credentials they held, the Black person will not get the job. Whatever biases the recruiter has are based on prejudice. “They just do not like you because you look different. That is just what it is. It does not matter the qualifications. They will continue moving the goalposts until they find a reason to reject you.”

Participants reported situations in which Black employees at the City of Saskatoon were often overlooked for promotions. Even if a Black employee is capable and meets all the requirements, the department often hires a non-Black person from outside for the higher position. Even if the Black employee is as qualified or more than the newly employed, the organization still assumes that the Black employee does not have the ability or capability to handle the responsibility. “They assume that the Black employee could underperform if given the position. This makes the Black employees conclude that they are often overlooked because of the color of their skin. The Black employee can be kept in the same position watching their non-Black counterparts being given new positions.”

#### **1.1.1.2. Recruitment Barrier 2- Lack of Transparency**

The participants also mentioned that many institutions or positions have been historically difficult for Black people to enter. Minorities have no idea how those systems work, and it becomes even more and more difficult for them to enter those spaces because of the lack of transparent or clear hiring processes. For example, one can meet all the job requirements, is called for an interview, is told that they need a person with their qualification in that position but to be told later that they had already hired the right person for the position.

#### **1.1.1.3. Recruitment Barrier 3- Canadian Credentials and Work Experience**

Job prospects are even worse for highly qualified Black immigrants who have just moved to Canada. On top of being Black, they have to deal with the issue of foreign credentials and lack of Canadian work experience. Although some of these Black immigrants come with strong credentials and wide experiences in the field, most of the time, their foreign credentials and experiences are not valued during the job interview. Additionally, most institutions do not offer the opportunities to hire and train these Black immigrants. Many find it difficult to go back to school and repeat the study of the same things they already know. Some try to go back to school while



others give up and do manual jobs to survive. Some Black immigrants made the decision to move to Canada after reading that Canada needed highly educated people with wide experiences like them. But it is a different experience after arriving in Canada. Some are left with regrets after discovering that things are not like what they were told on the Canadian Government website. They have to pay the bills, but they cannot find jobs within their professions because of lack of Canadian experience. The only places where they are not asked about Canadian experience are dishwasher and janitor jobs. Even if they desire to return to where they came from, it becomes impossible because they sold everything or took loans to move to Canada, the loans they must work to repay.

### **1.1.2. Retention Barriers**

#### **1.1.2.1. Retention Barrier 1 – Limited Opportunities for Promotion**

The current process of hiring is often not clear, confusing and not well-understood to some Black applicants and employees, making them feel discriminated against. They feel welcomed during the job interview to be told later that the position had been filled. One participant indicated that at one of their friend's workplaces, the management can praise Black employees and advise them to apply for a vacant position only to be told that somebody from a different organization had been offered the job. Because of this, most Black employees feel disappointed and would prefer to leave their jobs in search of different jobs. Participants shared their perception that the Black employee is often denied the position because the manager had heard somebody telling them that Black people are not efficient or cannot be efficient when they are promoted to a managerial position.

#### **1.1.2.2. Retention Barrier 2 – Leadership**

Most of the time, systemic racism or institutional racism does not start directly from the managers. It starts from the top ranked officials, normally, because they make criteria for hiring very narrow. Participants reported that if a Black person is hired, some of their non-Black colleagues often start showing them unwelcomed behaviors, making the Black employee feel excluded, not fitting in and wanting to quit the job. Even during meetings, the Black employee's contributions are often



discounted or totally ignored. This makes the Black employees feel unwanted. They feel they were hired simply as a token to show to the public that their organization is diverse.

#### **1.1.2.3. Retention Barrier 3 - Tokenism**

The participants also mentioned the issue of tokenism. Every organization is under pressure to have their departments look like Canada. They are urged to hire members of visible minority. To tick that box, the organization can hire one visible minority as a token. The opinions of the visible minority are often ignored. They are given only superficial responsibilities. They are often overlooked when it comes to promotion. Oftentimes, they have to work twice the effort to be recognized. They can experience passive aggression, which is often hidden and very covert, or institutionalized forms of discrimination. Because of such unfavorable environments, the Black person becomes uncomfortable and often starts looking for a better job.

#### **1.1.2.4. Retention Barrier 4 - Racist Work Environments**

According to the participants, even in low level jobs, the working environment is not often favorable for the Black professional. They may work where they are seen as overqualified, where a branch manager may only have grade 12 level of education. Overseeing, supervising and managing a person with a BA, master's, or a PhD who had worked in professional positions overseas is often uncomfortable both for the manager and the employee. It creates other issues because the intellectual capacities are not at the same level. It creates communication issues and cohesion issues within the workplace. On the mental side, it is a problem for the overqualified Black person.

Another issue that the participants noted was anti-Black racism. No matter how much the government has tried to recruit Blacks, it is hard to retain Blacks because of systemic, anti-Black racism. The racism is no longer overt. It is covert racism that is difficult to prove. The environment created by covert racism makes it difficult for Black employees to stay. A participant described a situation where a supervisor can make the work environment extremely difficult for the employ. No matter how hard the black employee is working, it is not always enough. The black employee is rarely praised. During a staff meeting, the black employee's contribution or point of view is often ignored. The supervisor looks for a reason to blame or fire the black employee. Thus, qualified



black people sometimes might not want to work in an environment they think is toxic, especially if they have other options.

## **1.2. The Way Forward**

The participants expressed that many Black people who are highly educated and more qualified continue to encounter systemic barriers. Many of those who are hired feel unwelcomed as they continue to face systemic racism, making retention difficult. One way to recruit and retain Black professionals is to develop strategic training diversity programs, where the programs aim to help Blacks know the managers, leaders, and recruitment systems at the City better, or help the recruiter to become more aware of the probably unconscious bias they may have about Black people. More diversity training will help t recruiters know how to ensure an inclusive workplace, prevent systemic barriers, gain awareness of unconscious bias at the workplace, and allow the City to make fair decisions. It does not matter how many Black people the government recruits, the government will have a hard time retaining them if the work environment is not favorable. Thus, continuous anti-racism or unconscious bias training can be helpful.

### **1.2.1. Anti-racism and Cultural Awareness Education**

To avoid the problem of systemic racism at work, all employees should be invited to attend racial and cultural awareness programs. This is important because when it comes to racism in an organization many non-visible minority employees are often in a state of denial. There are certain attitudes and behaviors toward members of visible minority groups, Black people, and marginalized groups that often make them uncomfortable in the workplace. Thus, being aware of such attitudes is important. Such attitudes can impede the Black employees' performance and create the stereotypes that Black people are lazy, cannot be efficient, and cannot get along with coworkers, and so, cannot be good managers. One participant noted that the experiences of Black people, especially when it comes to promotion at work, are very bad. That when it comes to promotion, Black employees are often overlooked. Racial and cultural awareness training programs for recruiters could play a major role in reducing these attitudes and biases.

Cultural safety has been found to be very effective in preventing discrimination and promoting access to mainstream jobs for people from other minority ethnic groups and other marginalized





populations. Promoting real conversations about racism and inclusive activities would help reduce workplace racism. Understanding racial biases will help the City hire and retain Black professionals in high level positions as they feel comfortable in the work environment. Revamping existing equity diversity and inclusion (EDI) programs within the City will improve the recruitment process.

### **1.2.2. Relationship Building: Networking Through Volunteering and Mentorship Opportunities**

Given that many young people in Black Communities do not have enough knowledge about the job opportunities at the City of Saskatoon or have limited or no connection to people in higher positions, there should be more volunteer programs created for Black youths to help them get to know about the career opportunities within the City. There should be opportunities for black students and youth to connect to the City through volunteer work with City Staff. People in higher management positions who had undergone anti-racism or unconscious bias trainings should be included in City plans and processes across the organization. This will help young people to build relationships and learn about job opportunities at the City. Furthermore, such programs can help address the problem of the lack of work experience. Many Black graduates do not have work experience in their given fields in Canada because of the barriers. Through volunteering and mentorship programs, they can gain the experiences they need for professional jobs. Mentorship programs within the City can be one important pathway that will facilitate access for people who ordinarily would not be able to access institutions like the City.

The City can reach out to the university, colleges, Black groups and communities to locate potentially qualified Blacks. That is where mentorship can play a greater role in transitioning Black students from whatever level of education into a job. For instance, if the City decides that it is going to create Black mentorship programs, it will create job opportunities for Black people. During mentorship, Blacks can learn how the City works, and learn about opportunities; and, if they are mentored by inspirational mentors, they could be inspired to become like them. This could be an important first step because they would know who to talk to and what opportunities exist.

Mentorship programs are extremely important for young Black professionals, even in the police service. Blacks being mentored by the police would generate interest in joining the police force.



Black Communities need people in the police. This does not mean or guarantee that the historical concerns of police discriminatory attitudes towards members of visible minority would be solved. However, more Blacks being in the Saskatoon City Police would strengthen community trust that they will be treated fairly by the law enforcement. Members of the Black Community would develop different perspectives about the police. Seeing more minority officials there would give them the sense of pride and belonging.

### **1.2.3. Addressing Racism in Application Process**

Black job applicants often complain about their applications being rejected because of exotic sounding names. To resolve this, the City may ask the individuals making the considerations to not include names of the applicants. Instead, they could just include their education, their experience, and other requirements. When the City receives the applicant's resume or CV, they remove the name and address and replace it with a number. They will consider candidates for job interviews without knowing about their race, gender or skin color. This will reduce the issue of overt racism in the application and consideration process. It will reduce bias in the hiring process because the job recruiters will initially not guess the racial backgrounds of the applicants.

### **1.2.4. Entry Level Positions and Opportunities for Advancement**

One participant noted that, although there maybe qualified or overqualified unemployed Blacks in Saskatoon, efforts need to be made to hire more Black people for entry-level jobs who may later on qualify for specific managerial positions. For the Black to qualify for a managerial position, it should start from early on; from internship, to entry level, and so on, to the top. If the City plans to actively go on to hire minorities to the managerial positions, they may not find them at the specific capacity that they want. That is why it is necessary to hire somebody in for an entry-level first, if they do not have all the pre-qualifications for the higher position. If they work in the organization for 10 to 15 years, for example, they can qualify for certain managerial position that requires years of work experience. The City needs to provide proper internship, proper mentorship, and clarify the clear categories for how to improve from point A to point B and C. This will enable the City to employ qualified people with basic experience required for the job. This will give Black employees the opportunity to work in a specialized area where they do not have the needed skill set at that given moment.



To avoid overlooking Blacks already in the workplace, promotion should be based on seniority. The participants admitted that seniority could be a major issue in the City of Saskatoon, given that most Blacks in Saskatoon have not lived in the City for years. However, they stated that this could be adopted as a long-term project. For instance, Blacks who were hired for entry-level jobs can move through the ranks until they occupy higher positions.

## **2. Advisory Committees, Boards, and Commissions**

*“Most of the time, if you don't know anybody who has been a member of the board, committee, or commission, you will not know that there's something like that you can even be part of. And most especially, you may not know about the criteria to make you qualify and be able to apply to be on board or on the commission. Maybe it's only me, but I think that many of us as Black people are ignorant of the information that we need to know before being part of anything extraordinary like the Board, Committee, or Commission.”*

### **2.1. Issues**

According to the participants, one of the challenges that members of the Black Community face is lack of representation on advisory committees, boards and commissions in the City of Saskatoon. Because of the absence of Black or visible minorities in key advisory committees, including the Board of Police Commission, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory committees, issues affecting visible minorities continue to be inadequately addressed. Because of this, many members of the Black Community continue to feel unwelcome in the city that they love and consider home. They fear that it might be because they and their cultures are not considered part of Canada. Lack of representation in these bodies also means that the community does not know even if those bodies exist, what they are about, or how to get into them. The reality is similar to some of the comments around recruitment to the workforce in the City of Saskatoon. There is a problem with recruiting or appointing members of visible minorities into new and existing advisory committees, boards, and commissions.

It is not clear whether the commissions, boards and committees have self-awareness about the lack of Black representation, or whether or not they have got a diversity of views when making decisions that could have impacts on members of visible minority communities. The following are the barriers that result in a lack of representation on City Committees, Boards, and Commissions.



### **2.1.1. Lack of Representation Barrier 1 – Communications**

The major problem is lack of communication. Lack of communication means lack of knowledge or awareness about those groups. In most cases, the Black Community does not know what is going on in the City. One cannot become involved in a group they have never heard of, nor know anything about. Many people in the Black Community have never heard of or seen individuals who are serving in the City's advisory committees, boards, and commissions.

One participant stated that because Black people do not know what is going on, they are not aware of the information they need to know about the criteria or the requirements for applying to be on the advisory committee, board, or commission. Because of lack of communication from the City it makes it difficult for Black people to attempt to join any of the groups.

Participants noted that most times when those positions are created, the information is listed on the City's website. But not many people in the Black Community go to the City of Saskatoon website to read information. When they do, it is mostly about bills, either to pay their business license, property taxes or anything like that. It is rarely about searching for a board, committee or commission vacancy.

### **2.1.2. Lack of Representation Barrier 2 - Relationships and Community Understanding**

The majority of individuals from within the Black Communities do not have the relationships that would allow them to know what is required to sit on those boards, commissions, and committees. They do not know the advantages of holding positions like that, or what kind of work they do.

According to the participants, the few people who know about these groups have heard about them from other people. They only have vague knowledge about them. Only few people bump into a board, committee, or commission member at social events. Participants reported that at the event, the member can mention something briefly about their work, and that would be it. To majority of Black Community members, such groups do not exist in the City.

### **2.1.3. Lack of Representation Barrier 3 – Safe Space**



Furthermore, for many of those who know about the groups, the mere fact that they are going to be on camera or they are going to speak to the public make them not want to be part of it. One participant noted that there are many well-spoken highly educated Blacks in the Community, but the mere fact of being on camera often scare them off. They prefer speaking off camera. They fear being judged by the wider community.

#### **2.1.4. Lack of Representation Barrier 4 – Connection to City Selection/Appointment Practices**

Participants concluded that there are hardly Black representatives involved in the selection/appointments process. Lack of Black input or representatives in the process of selection/appointments to the boards or committees contributes to unconscious biases and systemic racism and barriers.

#### **2.2. The way forward**

The participants noted that for members of the Black Community to be represented in advisory committees, boards, and commissions, it is important for the City to understand that something must change. The advisory committees, boards, and commissions are where important decisions are made that affect the lives of everyone in the community of Saskatoon, including the lives of the visible minorities. If there is the opportunity to have Black people represented in all the advisory commissions, boards, and committees, it will surely help because people's lives are affected by the decision that are taken there, regardless of whether one is Black or not. The best way is to have the opportunity of having Black people represented in all the commissions, boards, and committees. It is important to have designated spots for people of color.

According to feedback from participants, if Blacks are not represented, it is hard to see how they can feel that their problems are being addressed in effective ways. Most of the current systems were established from the White/settlers' perspectives and continue to be dominated by members from the European background. The participants noted that problems cannot be solved with the same culture, mindset, and systems through which the existing problems originated. The challenges Black people face may not be understood and addressed effectively without input from Black members. More details about steps that the City should take are included below.



### **2.2.1. Communications**

There are a lot of Black professionals living in the City of Saskatoon. Some can qualify for the advisory commissions, boards, and committees. They do not apply for those positions for several reasons. One of the reasons there is limited or lack of representation in those groups has been lack of awareness among Black people. It would be like a good opportunity to conduct job fairs, or information sessions to explain to Black people what some of those roles and opportunities are. The commission, board, and committee members would come and talk about their experiences on commissions, boards and committees, what they are like, the work they do, and what they are able to contribute to society. It is important that people know each commission, board, and committee, and the roles and responsibilities, and why it is important for Black people to be represented in those groups. Black people will not be interested in applying to serving in the advisory commissions, boards, and committees unless they know the importance of them. Thus, there need to be conscious efforts to make Black people aware of the importance of being part of a board or committee, or being part of a decision making as a visible minority. They will be taught how to apply to various advisory commissions, boards and committees.

If individuals are aware that they are qualified and could meet the application and other criteria requirements, there is great likelihood they would submit their applications. Knowing that it is a big responsibility, the Black professionals and leaders who have been confident and talented enough to apply can be a huge asset to the City. How passionate and compassionate they are about their community can make a difference. There are many Black professionals and leaders in the City of Saskatoon who are good public speakers and have good leadership skills who could be good candidates for such positions.

### **2.2.2. Connections to City Hiring Practices**

If there are Black people who had already worked for the City, it would be good to have the qualified ones join the commissions, boards, and committees; because it is better to appoint someone who had already worked in the system. They can understand how the system works better than an outsider and can be in a better position to give wise advice and strategic information.



### **2.2.3. Committees of Particular Importance to the Black Community**

There are some advisory commissions, boards and commissions whose decisions have significant impacts on Black people. Those boards need to be inclusive with Black representatives. For instance, the Board of Police Commission, advisory board or committee, need to have designated spots for the Black Community. Having Black representatives on these entities is very important to reduce negative relationship that exists between law enforcement and some members of Black community and other visible minorities. There needs to be diversity in the police system or Saskatoon Police Commission. There are many incidents of Black community members having confrontations with the police. The advisory committee, board, or commission could help provide the police with sensitivity training, including, the training that could reduce racial profiling and miscommunication.

### **2.2.4. Accountability, Targets and Measures of Success**

The City needs to include the goal of appointing Blacks to the advisory commissions, boards, and committees within its strategic plan. Appointment should be based on the percentage of Black people in the City of Saskatoon. The City will make specific targets of how many Blacks should be appointed in each. Efforts should be made to avoid tokenism. One participant said, “tokenism is often used to hide systemic barrier and racism. They would say, “well, there is no systemic barrier or racism in our department. See, we do have Blacks in our department.” They make sure that one Black employee is always shown on camera.”

## **3. Community Engagement**

*“With the new approach comes new strength and new thoughts and hope, trusting the Black Community to lead the transformative engagement process and using the Black Community’s relationships and talents within the Black community to build bridges and strengthen relationships with the City of Saskatoon; we believe this process gives the Black Community some hope for the much-anticipated true transformation in the City of Saskatoon.”*



### **3.1. Issues**

The participants stated that the engagement of the Black Community in civic affairs or consultations in the City of Saskatoon is not near to where it needs to be. The following are the barriers that participants identified to community engagement at the City.

#### **3.1.1. Community Engagement Barrier 1 – Acknowledging the Diversity of the Black Community**

Most Blacks living in Saskatoon are recent immigrants from Africa, Caribbean and other parts of the world. This is a relatively new phenomenon since traditionally most immigrants came from England or Europe. Participants noted that many people living in Black Communities have different experiences from those earlier migrants. Some came to Canada as refugees from war zones. There is a variety of other reasons why people have come to Saskatchewan. These newcomer populations are very diverse and come from different walks of life. Thus, the Black Community is not homogenous. The Black Community is diversity within diversity. So, engaging Black people in the City of Saskatoon is more complex and would require complex approaches. For example, within the larger Black Community, there are regional Black Community Associations such as the Ghanain Community; Nigerian Community; Saskatoon Caribbean Canadian Cultural Association; and the South Sudanese Community. Different Black Associations may have different issues that concern them more than the other sub-Community. Close engagement with them would help the City understand the complex problems the larger Black Community faces.

#### **3.1.2. Community Engagement Barrier 2 – Understanding Community**

One important population is the Black student population. Those who came as students may be a little bit different in perceptions, experiences and dreams for future. They have their own academic, social and accommodation issues to deal with, and life can be very difficult for them. This group often feels like they have nobody (community support worker, social worker, and psychologist) to turn to for psychological needs or other needs such as affordable accommodation. With lack of support or direction, or when things become overwhelming for them, many decide to quit school. It is a common belief among Black students that they might not get a





job based on their qualifications upon their graduation. They believe that systemic barriers and racism would prevent them from reaching their highest potentials. Some do not see the value of accumulating too much student debt and end up doing unskilled labor. If the City could engage this group early and offer them internships, it could go a long way to give them hope in the city they call their own. When engaging with the Black Community, this is an example of where the City needs to understand the diversity of the Black Community and have connections to various diverse groups, including Black university students living in the Black Community

Beyond the student population, there are some in the community who moved to Canada with their families to settle and make it their home. There are Blacks who moved to Canada as migrants to work and better their lives. Some came highly educated with foreign credentials. Others came less educated. All came with the desire to resettle, work and contribute positively toward the economy of their new country. With goals and dreams not met, many have been experiencing psychological problems tensions/conflicts at home. In addition there are challenges of accommodation issues, children rebelling against them and dropping out of school and involving in delinquency, divorce, and other kinds of hardships. There are also many who are unemployed and lack connections or directions for employment. Above all, some feel marginalized in the City of Saskatoon and feel they do not belong here. In the City of Saskatoon, for example, there is no single street named after any Black person of African origin. Research has shown that city arts and street naming play an important role in making marginalized populations feel belonging and involved in the daily activities of a city. Close engagement with the Black Community will help those feeling marginalized restore hope and develop the sense of belonging. They want to feel that they matter and their various contributions to the City of Saskatoon's progress are valued.

### **3.1.3. Community Engagement Barrier 3 – Racism**

There are also some in the community who feel that the environment has never been friendly to them. Some had experienced open racism, and others had had several negative encounters with the police. Although Canada is said to be a country that practices multiculturalism, many in the community feel that they are unwelcomed in their new country and that their foreign experiences and cultural contributions are not needed by the greater society.



Policing is another major area that requires engagement with the Black Community. There is a lot to be learned by the police about the Black Community. The more the police engage with the Black Community, the more they will understand and treat them better. Like any other community, the Black community has issues involving crimes, especially when it comes to the youth. However, it is a common understanding in the Black Community that Black youth tend to be racially profiled by the police and are charged and jailed more than their non-Black counterparts.

Lack of meaningful engagement between the City of Saskatoon and the Black Community has continued to make it difficult for the community and community elders to find ways to address these and other issues not mentioned here because of being outside the scope of this project.

### **3.2. The Way Forward**

Engagement with the Black Community would help the City reshape policies that are more inclusive and reflective of our diverse community. To do this, will require a shift in how the City works with the Black Community. The City must understand that there are different communities within the larger Black Community. These Black Communities have different experiences in education, in the community, and socioeconomically. Understanding the Black community is required for addressing the barriers that Black people face in participating in City engagement opportunities. However, as the City improves its engagement with the Black Community, they will also be able to build better relationships and understandings of that diverse community. According to the participants, the City should engage with the Black Community more closely than at present. This should include working to bring together City leaders with leaders from the Black Community and creating opportunities for two way communications. The participants also identified direct connections between engagement and Human Resources and procurement practices. More details about steps that the City should take are included below.

#### **3.2.1. Understanding the Black Community**

To build better relationships with the Black Community, City staff, particularly leaders should be equipped with background knowledge about the community, particularly it's diversity and some of the issues that are important to community members. Equipping themselves with a basic



understanding of the issues that matter most to the Black Community will give them new perspectives and better ways to address issues affecting the Black Community.

The participants mentioned the importance of black participation and input in decision making. They mentioned this project report as an example. That the report is Black-led and might reveal to the City some issues and recommendations they had not known about the Black Community in Saskatoon. They noted that the decisions that affected a group should not be designed alone by those with little knowledge of the complex issues affecting Black Community in the City. At the moment many members of the Black Community are feeling marginalized as they are not included in many or any of these discussions around decision-making.

A participant noted that if the City needs more input from the Black Community, they need to connect with them in ways that are culturally adapted. Cultural competence is the measure that is needed to deal with issues that affect visible minorities in a multicultural society such as Canada, especially when working with those who feel that they are marginalized and discriminated against in society. In addition to education, through engaging with the Black Community, the City will be able to develop a more culturally appropriate approach towards working with ethnic or visible minority groups. For the City to be culturally adaptive, it needs deeper engagement with the Black Community. If the City is deeply engaged, they will understand that they cannot deal with everyone the same way and that a "one size fits all" does not work in a multicultural society.

A significant portion of the Black population in Saskatoon is part of the newcomer community. So, taking the opportunities to engage with them and some of the settlement agencies in the city, and sharing information about City of Saskatoon engagement opportunities will contribute significantly toward the reduction of systemic barriers.

### **3.2.2. Leaders Working Together**

Influential political figures from Saskatoon, including the City Mayor and his administration need to engage with Black Communities to understand diversity issues and how to factor them into their decision making and policy platforms. Leaders and staff must be properly educated and informed about the issues that matter most to the Black Community so that they are prepared to



work with Black Community leaders. These are not only opportunities to get insight from leaders of the Black community on current City processes, but to understand the concerns in the Black Community. Black Community leaders and City leaders working together can address most of the issues affecting the diverse Black Community.

### **3.2.3. Accessible Communications**

Establishing a clear line of communication with the Black Community will prove to them that they are being valued and recognized. Engagement with Black Communities should not be only by emails. If the City relies heavily on communication by emails they will not get a good response. Person-to-person engagements work well with African people. African people value personal and community interactions.

The City can use different platforms that could easily be accessible to the Black Community. Most members of Black Community belong to various organizations and Associations within the City of Saskatoon. For instance, if they start engaging with already established Black organizations (including churches and mosques) and community associations and leaders, to reach community members and raise awareness, automatically something will naturally start to happen and people will be more involved. Through the community associations and organizations, the City can get all the information on how they could engage with the Black Community.

The City needs to engage with the Black Community to educate them about City engagement procedures, process, and projects so that they can participate. This can be done in various ways, for example leaders in the Black Community and the City could work together to share information about engagement processes at events. Leaders from the Black Community could also mentor other community members, to help them to have their voice heard by the City.

### **3.2.4. Intersection of Engagement and Recruitment/Retention**

There are a lot of Black professionals living in the City of Saskatoon who could be a huge asset to the City. By reaching out to the communities, connecting with them, and letting them know that the government is interested in hearing from and hiring Black people. The City will be surprised to find overwhelming numbers of qualified people who are frustrated and unable to attain employment due to systemic barriers built into the city's processes.



If Saskatoon wants to retain these qualified Black people they need to engage with them and their community. Most of the Black people living in Saskatoon are recent immigrants who came to Canada to study or with expertise to improve their livelihoods. Not all of them are people who traveled thousands of kilometers from their homelands to Canada to seek refuge. Many came to Canada highly educated, with work experience and ready to work. Their major problem is they have not been given opportunities to exercise their God-given gifts and talents. They come to Canada to work, most continue to live much below their human potential. The City should find ways to hear from and give them opportunities to work and contribute positively to the economy.

### **3.2.5. Working with Black-Owned Businesses**

In the City of Saskatoon, there are many Black-owned businesses. The City needs to engage with them to discuss their strengths and challenges. Engagement with black entrepreneurs will help Black business owners and creators narrow the wealth-gap between them and the mainstream Canadians and take the Black Community a step closer to financial freedom.

Given that many Black business owners in the City of Saskatoon are recent immigrants, like most living in the Black Community, they are still connected to their countries of origin culturally. They tend to produce services to members of their communities with goods imported from African or Caribbean regions. Such goods are often more expensive to procure. More of the services they provide are not well-recognized in the country, making it difficult for them to compete with their mainstream counterparts. Some want to diversify their businesses, but continue to find it difficult, partly because of their race. Engagement with this group will help the City find ways to address their concerns.

### **3.2.6. Police Engagement**

Although most communities are gaining traction, the Black Community continues to lag behind, in all the issues. The way the City deals with Black people's issues are different. The way the police deal with people of African descent is different. These challenges could be addressed mainly through community engagement. The police need to engage with the Black Community more to develop trust and understanding, especially between the police and Black youth. Because of lack of trust, Black youth fear the police and find it difficult to cooperate with them. The police



need to engage more with Black youths to know and understand them better. Engagement with Black youth also involve Black Community Associations and Organizations within the city, including Churches, Mosques, parents, and Community leaders. These groups help the Police find effective ways of dealing with Black youth crime and addressing the issues of racial profiling. They can also help reduce the tensions between the Black youth and the Police.

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## Appendix A

### FORMAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BLACK COMMUNITY ON SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AT THE CITY OF SASKATOON

#### Engagement Process

In December of 2021, The People Bridge Advocacy was contracted by the City of Saskatoon to conduct formal engagement with the Black Community on systemic barriers at the City of Saskatoon, under the supervision of the Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team.

The City of Saskatoon and The People Bridge Advocacy signed the agreement on Dec 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The community engagement process took into consideration the agreement requirement to work closely with the City of Saskatoon project team and the advice from the Black community subgroup/leaders. They have been involved in this project's initiation. This work came from the Black Community Consultative Committee, which includes (Dr. Judy White, Professor Emerita, Mr. Ali Abukar, CEO, Open Door Society; Ms. Alberta Muenbo, Student/Activist; and Mr. Senos Timon, Community Builder and Founder of The People Bridge Advocacy Inc.), brought together by the City of Saskatoon Mayor Charlie Clark in the summer of 2020 following the Black Lives Matter protests ignited by the killing of George Floyd in the United States. The Black Lives Matter protesters in Saskatoon demanded that the City address the issue of systemic racism in all forms. The three motions were presented to the Council on Sept 28, 2020.

The group had several meetings with Mayor Charlie Clark, Chief of Police Troy Cooper, April Sora, and other City officials to discuss issues of racism and inequity impacting the lives of Blacks in Saskatoon. It was during those engagements that this report project was considered, and agreement signed between the parties to commence the project.

The City of Saskatoon retained The People Bridge Advocacy to assist the City with the community engagement process in an independent role, including developing and implementing an engagement, consultation, and communication plan for the project.



The engagement and communications process included a project, social media post, leveraging stakeholder inputs, information sheet, stakeholder/participant's emails, and phone feedback.

People were engaged throughout the process between Jan 15th and Jun 5th, 2022. The list below provides an overview of the engagement activities and participation.

- Initial project discussion between the City of Saskatoon and The People Bridge Advocacy
- The signing of the agreement between the City of Saskatoon and The People Bridge Advocacy
- The People Bridge Advocacy recruitment of the project team
- Develop a work plan with timelines and processes, and procedures
- Develop questions for workshops and individual interviews
- Review workshops and interview questions by the Black Community subgroup/leaders (Dr. Judy White and Mr. Ali Abubkar and the City of Saskatoon project team, and the report author Dr. Teddy Bandima)
- Develop process for research ethics/informed consent
- Create, develop and assemble engagement materials
- Identify and develop potential participant contact list for recruitment
- Send invitations to potential participants
- Schedule and book appointments for individual interviews and focus group sessions
- Conduct individual interviews and focus group sessions
- Data transcription and anonymization and thematic Coding
- Analyze and synthesize data, interpret results and prepare a draft report
- Draft report review by the Black Community subgroup/leaders to review how data was interpreted ( Dr. Judy White and Mr. Ali Abukar)
- Finalize draft report and submission to the City of Saskatoon
- Presentation to the City of Saskatoon sub-team Mandy Fehr and April Sora
- Presentation to the City of Saskatoon project team (Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)
- Revision of report and submission to the City of Saskatoon
- Conduct a debrief with The People Bridge Advocacy project team
- Conduct project evaluation meeting with the City of Saskatoon project team





- Sharing the final report back with participants as well the City's responses

The Community Engagement focus group and interviews took place between March 1st and 31, 2022. They were conducted virtually via Zoom videoconferencing. There were two focus groups, six and five participants per group, and the session was 2hrs each. Also, ten individuals participated separately in the one-on-one interviews, and each discussion ranged between an hour and a half to two hours. Sixteen questions were developed for the workshops and one-on-one consultations, five for each theme and one general question.

The Community Engagement focus group sessions, and one-on-one interviews started with a Land Acknowledgement and project background information.

We consulted widely with Black Community stakeholders and made efforts to be inclusive. We believe we have done our due diligence and carried out this vital work to the best of our knowledge and expertise and adequately prepared this report reflecting the concerns and voices/views of participants.



## **Appendix B**

### **Data Limitations**

This report project had some limitations:

1. The report project was limited to the exploration of systemic barriers from Black perspectives in Saskatoon; given that all participants involved in the project were in one particular city, generalizing outside of Saskatoon is unknown.
2. The participants did not represent a variety of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups beyond members of the Black Community in Saskatoon.
3. The report was limited to the participants' perceptions of systemic barriers and racism.
4. The lack of deep reflections on the topic of systemic barriers and racism by some participants had a weakening impact on the data.
5. The author's ability, as a writer, was limited with respect to his ability to definitely interpret the perceptions of the participants regarding factors contributing to systemic barriers and how the issues presented in the report could be addressed.