



Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub

Building Solidarity and Collaboration to Support African, Caribbean and Black Women Entrepreneurs During COVID-19

Virtual Roundtable Summary Report

English-Language
Roundtable

NOVEMBER 18, 2020

French-Language
Roundtable

NOVEMBER 26, 2020

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The Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) is a national network and accessible digital platform for sharing research, resources, and leading strategies. With ten regional hubs and a network of more than 250 organizations, WEKH is designed to address the needs of diverse women entrepreneurs across regions and across sectors. In response to COVID-19, WEKH adopted an agitator role connecting women entrepreneurs and support organizations across the country and led network calls and training sessions. WEKH's advanced technology platform, powered by Magnet, will enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs and the organizations who serve them by linking them to resources and best practices from across the country.

With the support of the Government of Canada, WEKH will spread its expertise from coast to coast, enabling service providers, academics, government, and industry to enhance their support for women entrepreneurs. Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, in collaboration with Ryerson's Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship and the Ted Rogers School of Management, is leading a team of researchers, business support organizations, and key stakeholders to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to grow women's entrepreneurship in Canada.



Black Business and Professional Association
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Founded in 1983, the BBPA is a non-profit, charitable organization that addresses equity and opportunity for the Black community in business, employment, education, and economic development. The BBPA represents Black entrepreneurs across a broad spectrum. The BBPA has developed specialized culturally appropriate support programs to meet its constituents' needs. The BBPA Harry Jerome Awards are the most prestigious fundraising and scholarship effort in the Canadian Black community. They recognize and honour achievement nationally within the Black Canadian community. The BBPA provides scholarships to Black youth to further access to higher education and drive the overall success of the entire business community. Financial literacy is a particularly important part of this effort, that is why the BBPA heavily invests within this programming sector. The Business Advisory, Implementation, and Development Series (BAIDS) is a new, customized program intended to train and expand the capabilities of Black entrepreneurs. The end goal of BAIDS is to prepare Black businesses for ongoing success both during and post-COVID, and the BBPA has taken a lead in creating and presenting the program.



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Casa Foundation for International Development is a Canadian not-for-profit founded in 2011 to advance women, youths, and emerging leaders through economic, entrepreneurship, and business development initiatives. Casa Foundation offers support to vertical sectors in the area of health, infrastructure, and education. Casa foundation's social impact programs and initiatives are executed through the trifold approach of Partnership, Sponsorship, and Mentorship.



SEDULOUSWOMENLEADERS.NET

Founded in 2018, de Sedulous Women Leaders (dSWL) is a national network (social enterprise for profit) whose mission is to get as many immigrant Black women to rise to the T.O.P. of their professional career, as well as their entrepreneurial and political journey, by facilitating the delivery of mastermind classes, private coaching, mentorship, free quarterly events, and an annual conference. With six City Chapters (Grande Prairie, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, and Surrey in United Kingdom) and a network of over 500 women members, de Sedulous Women Leaders' goal is to elevate the next generation of women leaders to support emerging innovators, creators, changemakers, and disruptors. The free quarterly events connect women leaders together to foster networking, collaboration, and partnerships.

Sponsors

The sponsors of this project include the Government of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.



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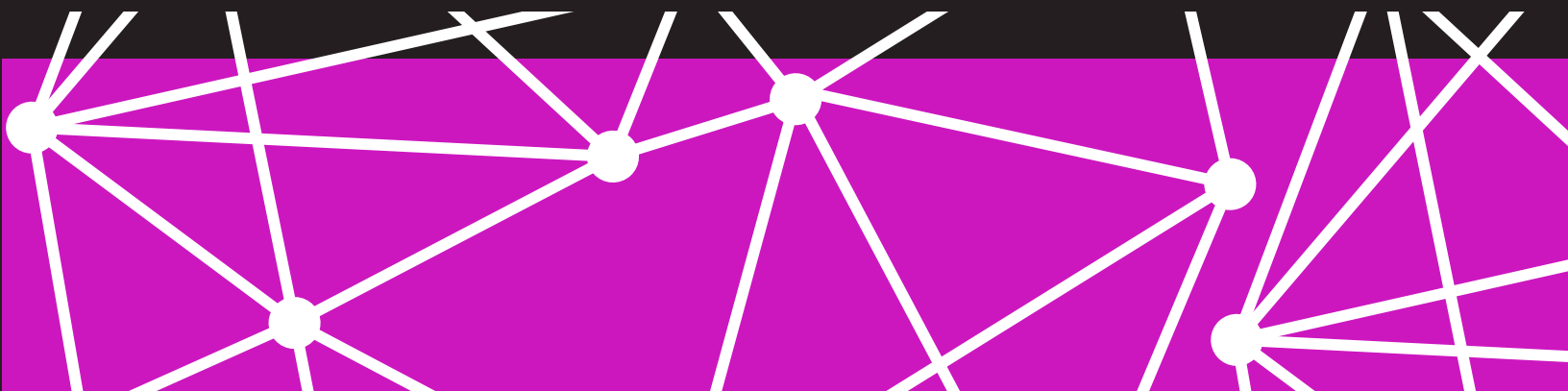
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified disparities in our socio-economic and political systems that have impacted women entrepreneurs around the world. Black women entrepreneurs are facing an even greater burden—largely due to systemic inequality, discrimination, and lack of access to needed supports. The effects of the pandemic on Black women entrepreneurs are compounded by the impacts of school and daycare closures, the burden of unpaid work in the home, and unequal access to basic infrastructure support. Additionally, Black women entrepreneurs are more likely to have businesses in the service industry, own smaller businesses, and be self-financed, making them among the most susceptible to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal government has implemented various programs to mitigate the challenges created by the pandemic, yet recent research by the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) indicates that many Black businesses are not positioned to take advantage of these. While these programs address some of the issues faced by entrepreneurs, the Black community has highlighted the need for additional support, as well as an increased need for a gender lens on investments, and an understanding of the distinct needs of different ethnic groups within the Black business community.

BBPA, Casa Foundation, de Sedulous Women Leaders, and the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) hosted two virtual roundtables to discuss the state of Black women entrepreneurship in Canada—one in English and one in French. With increased attention and focus on the Black entrepreneurship community, the roundtable presented an opportunity to discuss gaps in services and build collaboration among stakeholders to maximize services and opportunities for Black women entrepreneurs during this time.

This report sheds light on the state of Black women entrepreneurship, summarizes the discussions held during the virtual roundtables, and shares the recommendations derived during the roundtable discussions.



Context

Black Canadians make up about 3.5% of the total Canadian population, according to the 2016 Census, and form a heterogeneous group with different identities.¹

Research has shown that the Black Canadian population has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Black Canadians face higher rates of unemployment and are overrepresented in the industries most affected by the pandemic, like food and accommodation services.^{2,3} Black Canadians are disproportionately overrepresented in precarious employment, and yet these are the jobs that are at greatest risk in the work of the future economy.⁴

The 2017 Black Experience Project found that one-third of respondents identified challenges in the workplace, including explicit racism, discrimination, and microaggressions. The statistics are discouraging: 80% report experiencing day-to-day microaggressions;⁵ 42% report being mistaken for someone else who serves others, like a bellboy or janitor; 59% said that others expected their work to be inferior; and 68% report unfair treatment when seeking employment. Given these dynamics, 23% of respondents downplayed being Black in employment situations.⁶ It is no wonder that of the 1,600 corporate Board members across Canada that were analyzed by the Diversity Leads report, only 13 were identified as Black.⁷ Black Experience Project respondents reported pursuing self-employment and entrepreneurship due to the negative experiences in the workplace and exclusion from employment.⁸

While these statistics paint a bleak picture, it is likely that Black women face additional difficulties at home. Black women often face compounded difficulties of care work, as they are more likely to be single heads of households. The effects on Black women

entrepreneurs are compounded by the crushing impact of school and daycare closures, as well as the burden of unpaid work in the home during the pandemic.⁹

Snapshot of Black entrepreneurs

According to Statistics Canada, 3.5% of Black Canadians are self-employed, and 29.5% of self-employed Black Canadians are women.¹⁰ In Toronto, 48% of Black entrepreneurs are solopreneurs, while 32% have two to five employees.¹¹ Because of the differences in experience of Black women entrepreneurs, inclusive definitions of entrepreneurship matter. Depending on who is considered an entrepreneur, a large group of Black Canadians could be excluded from entrepreneurial support programs. In Toronto, 55% of Black-owned businesses operate in the health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, finance and insurance, professional services, and retail trade sectors.¹²

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Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black entrepreneurs

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a large impact on Black women entrepreneurs. BBPA conducted a survey to identify the impacts.¹³ The results are displayed below, in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic
on Black Entrepreneurs

	Canadian Federation of Independent Business	Black Business & Professional Association
Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will not help	37%	80%
Do not think they will qualify for a Canada Emergency Business Account	20%	80%
Are fully open	20%	10%
Do not have cash flow to pay April bills	30%	80%
Worried about permanent closure	39%	85%
Unsure they will be able to reopen	32%	60%
Can survive less than a month	25%	85%
Believe government should make emergency money available to businesses	86%	98%
Lack capacity to take on debt	56%	96%

Note: The sample of women was not sufficient to assess the statistical differences between men and women.

There are a few things to note about the table above: 80% of BBPA respondents stated that the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will not help; and another 85% are worried about permanent business closure. Only 37% of respondents from the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses responded that the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will not help, and 39% are worried about permanent business closure. The survey results demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionate negative effects on Black businesses.

The report, *Women Business Owners and the Impact of COVID-19*, by the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub in partnership with BMO presents another picture of the impacts of the pandemic on women across various demographic groups, using survey responses from 1,200 women.¹⁴ Some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were common to all women. The list of common themes is displayed below, in Table 2 (themes are listed in no particular order).

TABLE 2

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic –
Common to All Women

Theme 1: Mental and Physical Health: Impact of Unpaid Work
Theme 2: Revenue Loss and Bankruptcy
Theme 3: Need to Make Strategic Decisions
Theme 4: Workplace Safety
Theme 5: Online Presence: Need for Digital Transformation
Theme 6: Employee Issues
Theme 7: Collaboration – With Partners, Customers
Theme 8: Government Support Insufficient
Theme 9: Uncertainty and Stress
Theme 10: Innovative Approaches

Additional research with 65 participants revealed the pandemic impacts that were specific to Black women entrepreneurs, which are elaborated below.

TABLE 3

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic – Themes
Specific to Black Women Entrepreneurs

Theme 11: Businesses Created to Meet Needs of African/Black People
Theme 12: Businesses Were Often Inspired to Celebrate Culture
Theme 13: Addressing Inequality and Supporting the Community
Theme 14: Experiences of Anti-Black Racism
Theme 15: Trauma Informed



Barriers

As the research above suggests, Black women entrepreneurs face unique intersectional barriers. This is partly due to prevalent stereotypes of entrepreneurship that exclude women and racialized people. Conducting a Google Image search of entrepreneurs will primarily lead to images of white men; this is the dominant image of an entrepreneur for most people.

Black women entrepreneurs face additional barriers. Cultural stereotypes and anti-Black racism lead to discrimination against Black women entrepreneurs. There is systemic discrimination embedded in the ecosystem's institutions, including those associated with education, finance, business support, incubators and accelerators, and government funding. Meanwhile, there is a lack of support in the ecosystem in the form of encouragement, mentorship, sponsorship, and access to networks and information. There is a need for culturally informed pedagogy and supports designed to meet the specific needs of Black women entrepreneurs.

To tackle these intersectional barriers, it is necessary to build an inclusive innovation ecosystem and approach the problem through a systems lens. It is necessary to drive change at the macro level (societal level), the meso level (organizational level), and the micro level (individual level). At the societal level, we can work to challenge the dominant stereotypes in the media; at the organizational level, we can work to change the organizational culture of incubators and financial institutions, which are discriminatory toward Black women entrepreneurs; and finally, at the individual level, we can work to provide resources and skills training.

English-Language Roundtable

The English-language roundtable took place on November 18, 2020 and was co-hosted by BBPA, Casa Foundation, de Sedulous Women Leaders, and WEKH. The session was moderated by Stephanie Dei, National Coordinator of the WE EMPOWER programme of UN Women, European Union and International Labour Organization. In total, 40 representatives from organizations supporting Black women entrepreneurs across Canada participated:

- > AfroBiz
- > Bevor Consulting & Training Services
- > Black Business Association of BC
- > Black Female Funders
- > Black Opportunity Fund
- > Canadian Aboriginal & Minority Supplier Council
- > Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce
- > Canadian Women's Foundation
- > Carter Strategy Group
- > CQ Business Coach
- > Diversity Institute, Ryerson University
- > Developing Young Leaders of Tomorrow, Today
- > Elevate International
- > Global Compass Consulting Services Inc
- > International Black Economic Forum
- > Jean Augustine Centre for Young Women's Empowerment
- > Lifelong Leadership Institute
- > Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services of Ontario
- > Pitch Better
- > Skills for Change
- > STRIDE Human Resources and Organization Development Consulting
- > York University
- > YWCA Canada

The roundtable began with a presentation highlighting the state of Black women entrepreneurship, followed by a discussion between participants and facilitators to identify current gaps in the entrepreneurship ecosystem and make recommendations to fill in these gaps.

Summary and recommendations from the English-language roundtable

The following discussion questions were used to guide the conversation:

1. What are the main gaps in service offerings?
2. How can WEKH's network work together to fill some of those gaps?
3. How can we ensure there is a gender lens applied to the money coming into the Black community?

A summary of the roundtable discussion follows.

Building community

- > Partnerships and collaboration are important to advance Black women entrepreneurs. Events like the roundtable can help create strong partnerships, build meaningful collaboration, and foster strong networks. There is an imminent need to strengthen the community for Black women entrepreneurs.
- > It is important to share resources and best practices among Black women entrepreneurs and participate in opportunities to build one another up. This collaboration breaks down existing and internalized glass ceilings.
- > It is similarly important to strengthen solidarity among organizations by ensuring intentional collaboration following a "no organization left behind, regardless of size" mentality, to ensure resources are adequately distributed among Black women entrepreneurs.

- > Coupled with stories of success, Black women entrepreneurs can share mishaps, areas for improvement, stories of struggles and triumph, and how to cope with feelings of loneliness during the entrepreneurial journey in an effort to support one another.
- > To avoid duplicating existing efforts, Black women entrepreneurs can support existing initiatives and uplift Black women entrepreneurs currently in business, as well as aspiring young Black women entrepreneurs.
- > Mentorship, sponsorship, and collaboration are critical for advancing Black women in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, therefore becoming more attractive to governments, partners, and other players in the ecosystem.
- > Black women entrepreneurs can support one another in providing information on how to access government opportunities and funding.
- > Black women entrepreneurs can strengthen the community by buying from or using the services of other Black women entrepreneurs when possible.

Breaking stereotypes and sharing success stories

- > Discrimination chips away at the confidence of Black women entrepreneurs. Building confidence to engage in entrepreneurship and to present their products and services is essential to success for Black women entrepreneurs.
- > Funding for women entrepreneurs is often allocated to those in the tech and innovation sectors; however, Black women may not follow these “traditional” notions of entrepreneurship and may be focused on artisanal entrepreneurship. It is therefore necessary to challenge the notion of what constitutes entrepreneurship and innovation.

- > Black women entrepreneurship is not monolithic or focused on one sector or area, and the diverse experiences of Black women need to be recognized and supported.
- > Promote the sharing of more million-dollar stories and practices, sharing the successes achieved by the Black community to break down internalized glass ceilings and build generational hope and opportunity.
- > There is a need to create space for Black women-owned businesses to fail, adjust, and try again, using these as opportunities for learning and growth.

Funding and business growth

- > Promote education and skill-building resources and opportunities, including providing a thorough understanding of national and international business regulations, to ensure that Black women entrepreneurs are able to capitalize on funding and business growth opportunities, including available pandemic-related financial supports.
- > One-time grants are one-off solutions, yet we must also ensure that entrepreneurs are aware that loans come with implications. The development of a sustainable fund that is managed by Black communities for Black communities across the country would be a long-term solution to the current lack of capital and funding.
- > Provide support for Black women entrepreneurs to develop their business models and plans for implementation and growth.
- > Ensure Black women entrepreneurs and small businesses have resources to manage funds and develop effective governance structures.

French-Language Roundtable

The French-language roundtable took place on November 26, 2020 and brought together 24 participants, including representatives from the Diversity Institute, WEKH, support organizations, and Black women entrepreneurs. The French session was chaired by Sabine Soumare, Marketing and Communications Director for the Diversity Institute. The roundtable discussion began with opening remarks by Tania Saba, PhD, chair of the Quebec and Francophone Communities of Canada section of WEKH and professor at the Université de Montréal, where she holds the BMO chair in Diversity and Governance. Dr. Saba provided data on women entrepreneurship in Quebec and Canada. Women entrepreneurs in Quebec face a different entrepreneurial climate and set of challenges,¹⁵ so the French-language roundtable asked a different set of questions than the English-language roundtable. The conversation then evolved into an exchange of views between participants and facilitators to identify existing gaps in the women entrepreneurship ecosystem and offer recommendations and possible solutions.

Summary and recommendations from the French-language roundtable

The following discussion questions were used to guide the conversation:

1. What are the main gaps in service offerings?
2. How can WEKH's network work together to fill some of those gaps?
3. How can we ensure there is a gender lens applied to the money coming into the Black community?

To begin, the Moderator opened up the discussion with the following questions:

1. Why are there not any studies or data specifically related to Black women entrepreneurs in Canada?
2. In what ways are Black women entrepreneurs' experiences in Quebec different than in the rest of Canada?

A summary of the roundtable discussion follows.

Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs

Building on national research regarding Black women entrepreneurship, participants highlighted particularities faced by the Black Francophone community in Canada, which stressed the need to consider provinces with a notable Francophone presence in any analysis. Most of the discussion dealt with the following:

- > Fields in which women entrepreneurs primarily work are not considered "innovation" in its current traditional meaning. While innovation is a broad term, it is often—wrongly—linked exclusively to technology, where women are underrepresented.
- > Women entrepreneurship is considered a side activity, a result of persistent stereotypes around the role of women in society. This conception is further entrenched by the fact that women may start businesses when they cannot find employment or to bring in income as stay-at-home mothers with one or more children.
- > Funding for women entrepreneurship is only a fraction of that offered to men.
- > The impact of women entrepreneurship is not accurately assessed. To study women entrepreneurship, innovative assessment models must be developed, moving away from classic ones.

Recognition and political acceptance

- > The system has long overlooked the needs of Black women and other underrepresented groups and, as a result, it has not been designed for women—especially not for Black women and those from other underrepresented groups. The specific needs of the Black community and Black women entrepreneurs must be acknowledged and reflected throughout the system.
- > Entrepreneurs often work in silos with little interconnectivity; increased civic and political engagement by Black women entrepreneurs and supportive organizations is important to ensure the voices of Black women are heard and translated into meaningful policy changes.

Black women entrepreneurship studies

- > It is important to acknowledge that the Black community is not homogenous, but is made up of distinct identities, ethnicities, and cultures. Cultural factors that prevent Black women entrepreneurs from moving forward in entrepreneurship require deeper research and discussion.
- > To obtain relevant data on Black women entrepreneurs and racialized women, surveys must be more precise and include additional categories pertaining to origins and/or ethnic identity.
- > Solidarity among Black women entrepreneurs and Black communities is important in order to share responsibility for conducting targeted studies on Black communities. Solidarity can manifest itself in the creation of industry/trade-specific coordination groups.
- > Collaborating on research can help create a model for new entrepreneurs so they do not have to “reinvent the wheel.” This involves mapping processes, actors,

and networks. Organizations that assist immigrants must be included to increase the scope of impact.

- > Lack of resources remains a primary obstacle for conducting studies on the state of Black women entrepreneurship. It is necessary to ensure that funding is distributed equitably and that organizations focused on supporting Black women entrepreneurs are adequately funded.
- > Participants expressed a need for continued regular discussion to ensure concrete actions are taken.

Barriers, cultural specificities, and family traditions

- > Organizing cultural workshops is crucial for demystifying business development and growth for women who are new to Canada. These workshops can provide a comparative perspective between their country of origin and Canada. These training sessions could simplify the business landscape and regulations that exist in Canada and help them build the confidence necessary to start their own entrepreneurial project in Canada.
- > Funding-related expectations and restrictions are too broad and do not take into consideration the realities of Black women. Notably, in Quebec, some Black community members reported avoiding bank commercial loans to finance their businesses due to excessive reporting requirements.
- > There is a need for financial education and for combining all the work done by Black communities, storing the information and resources in one place for easier management and access.

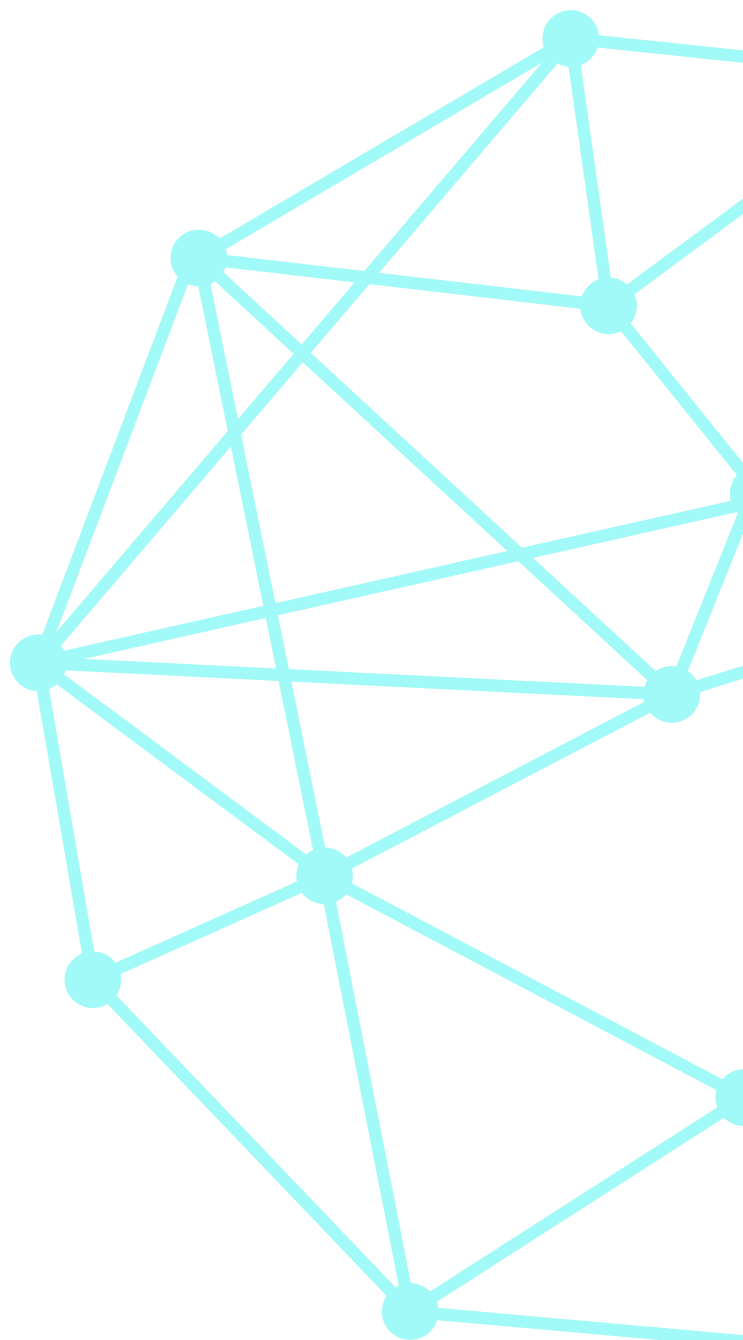
Funding and lack of resources

- > There are strong concerns about the overreliance on volunteers to build organizations in the Black business community due to a lack of financial resources. Although the voluntary support is beneficial (and often necessary) to launch these organizations, building long term financial support is critical to ensure they do not have to exclusively rely on volunteer resources.
- > Comprehensive research focused on Black women entrepreneurs is necessary for making the case for increased funding for Black-led organizations.
- > The COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for Black women entrepreneurs. Many were unable to access pandemic-related government supports. Targeted opportunities for the Black business community to obtain information on accessing public and private financial supports would be useful in closing resource gaps.
- > Applications for funding are often inaccessible, lengthy, and difficult to complete. This renders Black women entrepreneurs—especially those in the Francophone community—functionally ineligible. Funding requests should be developed in consultation with Black communities in order to better serve the entire population.

Information, access for Francophones, and networks

- > Francophone Black women entrepreneurs face an additional challenge as linguistic minorities in predominantly Anglophone provinces and territories. Building Francophone networks and resources targeted to Black women entrepreneurs will help to overcome some of the associated challenges.

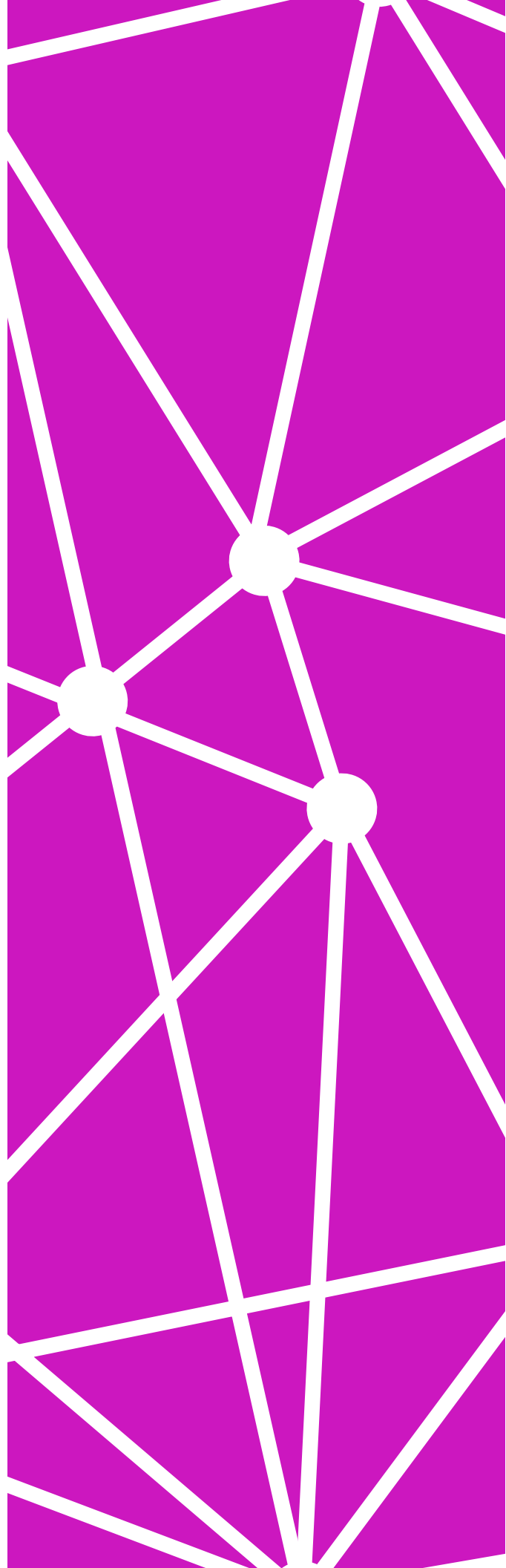
- > Lack of solidarity within the Black community is crippling sustainable economic opportunities. Participants expressed a need for the Black community to unite at various levels and lift one another up, for example through supporting and purchasing goods and services from the Black business community.
- > There is an increasing need to develop co-operatives for Black women entrepreneurs that focus on the services these women offer.



Moving Forward

In light of the challenges identified above, developing ways to support the Black business community is essential to ensuring the Canadian economy is inclusive, equitable, and fair. Opportunities for prosperity should transcend race and ethnicity. Through increased sharing of resources, ramping up research, deepening multi-stakeholder engagement, and discussions with the Black community, we can begin to build on conversations that develop tangible solutions to challenges identified. Working together in solidarity among stakeholder groups to increase Black women entrepreneurs' visibility is essential to promoting inclusion within the society. The roundtables were created to hear from and better support Black women entrepreneurs. Building on these discussions, the co-organizers developed the Rise Up Pitch Competition that recognizes African, Caribbean, and Black women entrepreneurs who have persevered with innovative business ideas despite the challenges faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These conversations, collaborations, and supports among and for the Black business community are a step toward creating an inclusive and prosperous ecosystem.

Developing ways to support the Black business community is essential to ensuring the Canadian economy is inclusive, equitable, and fair.



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