

# Using the Connected Community Approach to disrupt White Supremacist Culture



There are as many ways to build community as there are communities. In current Western culture, community building activities can run counter to the paradigm of white supremacy\* that often underpins organizational, institutional and government interventions. Jay Pitter, Tema Okun, Chimamanda Adiche Ngozi, Ibram X. Kendi, John Powell and Ritu Bhasin are just some of the anti-racism practitioners who support the paradigm for a more equitable future envisioned by black grassroots activism generations before them.

By drawing on their wisdom, the following offers insights as to how the Connected Community Approach (CCA) can be leveraged to help create that new paradigm so that, when organizations, institutions and municipalities design funding, policy and projects with and for marginalized communities, they do so in ways that increase equity and in particular racial equity, strengthen agency and honour multiple ways of knowing and doing. The table below is not meant to be an exhaustive list, it is built upon over time, based on experiences and is not intended to capture all of the ways CCA and the 10 Keys can be enacted to address racial equity.

This document is offered for the use of community development practitioners across sectors who are seeking to enact racial equity, and dismantle the structures and systems that allow white supremacy to thrive. This document has potential to be used at multiple scales to effect change locally and/or systemically.

*\*White supremacy is the idea that “White people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of White people are superior to [Black people, Indigenous people, and other racialized people] and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions.”*

*(Source: [www.dismantlingracism.org](http://www.dismantlingracism.org))*

*Though you might associate this term with extremist racist groups, white supremacist ideas were the building blocks of Canadian institutions and still underpin dominant cultural beliefs as well as policies that uphold racial inequities today.*

<b>CCA Key</b>	<b>Ways in which this key can be used to dismantle white supremacist culture</b>
<b>Prioritizing power sharing and equity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include an approach to centering equity in each process or strategy you are leading or co-creating in a community in order to be clearly focused on how equity is understood in the purpose of the work and identify where equity intersects with different phases and areas of the work. This approach could include creating an equity statement for each project and allocating time/creating space for reflection in each project, to pause and check-in about equity in the work.</li><li>• Research and amplify the history and untold place-based stories in neighbourhoods you are working</li><li>• Research and learn about how systemic racism has impacted the neighbourhoods and groups of people you are working in</li><li>• Acknowledge the complex histories and socio-political dynamics in communities and how they inform the local experience</li><li>• Identify and address power imbalances at the beginning of any community building process; reflect on the identities and privileges you hold and are inherently bringing into a process, make adjusting your own behaviour to correct power imbalances your focus throughout</li><li>• Don't assume you know what is best for a community outside of a relationship with that community</li><li>• Make challenging white supremacist culture and the behaviours associated with it part of healthy, productive community building</li><li>• Build collective understanding of the impacts of white supremacy and mechanisms to disrupt it.</li></ul>

<b>CCA Key</b>	<b>Ways in which this key can be used to dismantle white supremacist culture</b>
<b>Connected communities from the inside out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create an organizational or group culture in which safer space exists and is consistently held for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) to share their experiences and perspectives</li><li>• Make intentional, mindful listening normalized practice</li><li>• Reflect on the impact of sharing experiences and the potential need of culturally relevant trauma informed supports</li><li>• Unpack assumptions and implicit biases is prioritized as a key piece of our work together</li><li>• Encourage, support and celebrate the interruption of white supremacist language and/or actions, talk about your own assumptions and organizational culture and how they might impact your community building work; create intentional strategies to interrupt harmful biases and assumptions</li><li>• Acknowledge the impact of white supremacist systems on organizational structure and the related limitations to enact change; create intentional strategies to reflect these limitations back to systems players</li></ul>

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<p><b>Embrace the messiness</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge there are multiple and sometimes competing agendas in community; find ways to live with that tension, explore win/win scenarios and centre equity in decision making</li> <li>• Understand that conflict is part of any process, support people to practice dealing with conflict in positive ways that foster learning and mutual accountability</li> <li>• Intentionally make room for everyone to participate without dictating terms of engagement</li> <li>• Support people to engage in community building in the way that feels right for them; honour both light and deep involvement; honour community building that engages with individuals, groups and political processes</li> <li>• Recognize grief, trauma, intergenerational trauma, the erasure of culture and identity and how this manifests in systemic ways and shows up in individuals historically on the receiving end of racism in complex ways; invest time and resources in creating and acting upon opportunities for collective healing processes.</li> <li>• Source and share specific resources for BIPOC participants who are impacted by grief, trauma, intergenerational trauma and/or the erasure of culture, ie. Black Mental Wellness Resources: <a href="https://www.flipsnack.com/LiftedbyPurpose/lbp-bmh-resources-7uig9pcbdc.html">https://www.flipsnack.com/LiftedbyPurpose/lbp-bmh-resources-7uig9pcbdc.html</a>; Indigenous Mental Wellness Resources: tbd</li> </ul>
<p><b>Let values lead</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-create plans that are explicit about actions to promote equity and address anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism</li> <li>• Design goals using seven generation thinking: build on what has gone before and lay foundation for what will come after an individual project</li> <li>• Make inclusive decisions: avoid making decisions under extreme pressure</li> <li>• Don't require people who raise hard issues to do so in an "acceptable" way: Focus on building trusting relationships; understand "why" people want to engage with you in community building, explore "how" you can work together, what values and principles will guide your work; only then decide on "what" you want to do together</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Build on everyone's Strengths</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and honour cultural and traditional practices that are valued by each community</li> <li>• Recognize and design for the intersectional identities all people carry</li> <li>• Embrace multiple expressions of community power and assets; reject single, simplistic stories of any individual or group</li> <li>• Develop a culture of appreciation honouring everyone's contributions to the work</li> <li>• Acknowledge stories of strength and resilience and find, support and encourage counter stories, narratives and lived experiences that are often silenced or erased.</li> <li>• Recognize that strength and resilience are used to describe acts of survival which come with significant challenges to individual and community health and well-being.</li> <li>• Refrain from defining people or groups by their "need"; use people first language and focus on their strengths</li> <li>• Understand the fundamental difference between being a professional offering a service and a community developer supporting community driven process</li> <li>• Design projects that support agency and autonomy and intentionally support people usually marginalized to contribute their unique talents and insights to the design and implementation of mutually beneficial projects</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learn together</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that discomfort is at the root of all learning</li> <li>• Intentionally design positive learning environments for BIPOC who have a history of lived experiences with hostile learning environments</li> <li>• Articulate that cultures and experiences other than your own have something to teach you; take responsibility for your own learning</li> <li>• Co-create a racial equity learning agenda for your organization/group/project; prioritize sources from authors/speakers who are (BIPOC)</li> <li>• Notice when people are approaching community building in ways different from your own and how those different ways might improve your own practice</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Work at multiple scales</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the Connected Community Approach as a way to disrupt white supremacist practices of community engagement/consultation by formalized structures (institutions, governments, others)</li> <li>• Make the focus of intervention the systems that perpetuate white supremacist culture; gain commitment of organizations, institutions and governments to shift their own paradigm of working with community</li> <li>• Discuss a political analysis of racism as it relates to specific projects, how it might affect the project and the individuals involved and the best way to disrupt it</li> </ul>
<p><b>Make community building visual</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find ways to elevate voices, stories and art of diverse, BIPOC communities</li> <li>• Whenever possible, intentionally step back in order that BIPOC people are at the forefront of representing themselves and their experiences</li> <li>• Support BIPOC communities to define how they are represented and how their experiences are articulated</li> <li>• When using illustrative graphics, photos or stories, make sure that they authentically represent cultures and experiences outside of the mainstream</li> <li>• Deliberately seek out and amplify collective wisdom from across the global diaspora, and present it using a variety of methods,(graphics, visual art, performance, media, etc) to maximize opportunities for people who have been the targets of racism to find themselves and their perspectives reflected in the content.</li> </ul>

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<b>Facilitating collaborative process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build inclusive teams prioritizing BIPOC; fostering a culture that supports different perspectives and expertise</li> <li>• Foster a culture of perspective empathy; take the time for people to understand each other's context</li> <li>• Co-create community building projects where everyone involved has a sense of agency and stewardship</li> <li>• Make asking questions, holding space, listening, storytelling core facilitation practice</li> <li>• Focus collaborations around authentic engagement processes rather than one "table"</li> <li>• Ask who is not involved and why, and create intentional efforts to reach out to (BIPOC) organizations and groups</li> <li>• When engaging grassroots groups in organization driven processes, honour their contributions with compensation for their time and their expertise</li> </ul>
<b>Build creative infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review policies and practices that may be creating invisible barriers for team members from equity seeking groups</li> <li>• Identify the infrastructure in the charitable sector that acts to marginalize individuals or groups</li> <li>• Work collaboratively to design alternative policies, practices and models that centre equity</li> <li>• Use perspective empathy tools to design infrastructure that supports people rather than just organizational efficiencies</li> </ul>

**References:**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – The Danger of a Single Story, Ted Talk 2009 Ibram X. Kendi – How to be an Anti-Racist, Penguin Random House, 2019 Jay Pitter – A Call to Courage, Canadian Urban Institute, 2020

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