



LEVEL
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

Advocating for Safety in
Workplaces Through Public Policy
Change: An Examination Powered
by Indigenous Knowledge and
Social Justice Support

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CONTENTS

3	About the LEVEL Initiative
5	Biography
6	Executive Summary
8	Problem Definition and Background
9	Policy Options
13	Conclusion
14	Bibliography
16	About Vancouver Foundation

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

ABOUT THE LEVEL INITIATIVE

LEVEL is a youth-engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth population in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL CONSISTS OF
THREE PILLARS OF
WORK TO ADVANCE
RACIAL EQUITY:



ABOUT THE LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies and are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓d̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



MARCUS
REID

With Heiltsuk/Nisga'a First Nation roots, Marcus Reid was urban born and raised on unceded territory of the Katzie, Semiahmoo, and Kwantlen people in the city of Surrey, also living as an uninvited guest on unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam land through living displacement. Having experienced diaspora, Marcus believes that it does not permit reaping benefits from Coast Salish people and further believes whether Indigenous, person of colour, or white – all have the responsibility to value Indigenous way of life, and now are even more accountable to dismantling systems of Indigenous oppression to achieve liberation of other identity margins the right way. Marcus feels like it has been an arduous journey to come to this worldview from his own impacts from and self-perpetuations of colonization, but he grants this way of thinking from post-secondary education, Elders, his renewing of culture, and connecting with like-minded people determined to disrupt the system!

Much love and gratitude for the LEVEL YPP participants and leadership.

T'ooyaksiy riin! Thank you!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vision: Developing policy to create, maintain, and foster safer environments for Indigenous people, racialized newcomers, persons with disabilities, those impoverished, and LGBTQ2S+ (two-spirit), people for all-gendered communities. The purpose of staying true to this vision is to include everyone impacted by colonial suppressive systems, and further pay attention to those intersecting between various marginalized identity markers.

To ground this policy with an Indigenous knowledge and way of being, I'd like to define safety in terms of emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual safety. This also requires a deeper acknowledgement that safety cannot be so easily acquired under colonial systems like white supremacy, patriarchy, and more (Personal Communications, Nathalie Lorenzo). For those beneficiaries of hierarchy-imposed structures, it needs to be understood that unearned privilege is at the expense of oppressed people's livelihood. For example, the settler-stolen Indigenous land that we are situated on continues to effect and affect all aspects of Indigenous people's safety. This will remain an undue hardship for Indigenous peoples until there is reform in the hierarchies imposed on these lands. Acquiring reform is not for the purpose of repositioning Indigenous people at the top of a hierarchy, but completely dismantling these oppressive systems to centralize the true sovereign people's culture, values, and laws into the life of those residing on these lands. In contrast to Indigenous erasure, to centralize Indigenous people's way of life, values would emerge that are beneficial to contemporary society. Traditional values of many Indigenous peoples would foster safety for everyone, like respect for peoples of other nations, LGBTQ2S+ (two-spirit), empowering women and all genders, caring for Elders and those with disabilities. Grounding policy analysis with Indigenous knowledge demonstrates the importance of widening the scope of anti-oppression to all inflicted by a system that is not working for everyone.

Further, to build this policy with a comprehensive and intersectional lens, I'd like to acknowledge that European colonialism has also detrimentally impacted the aforementioned oppressed groups who have settled in Canada, or are situated in Canada by force of colonialism. Which is why this policy ask has a holistic range of groups to consider, centralize, and stand with in solidarity together.

With all these different communities, it's important to recognize the magnitude of hardship when individuals intersect between marginalized communities – for instance a Muslim woman of colour navigating different layers of oppression when immigrating to Canada. How does this individual come to terms with their safety?

These are questions and instances that the policy ask aims to explore solutions for.



Strategy to increase safety mandated through three main policy recommendations:

1. Examine and Update the Designated Groups in the Federal Employment Equity Act.

- The Federal Employment Equity Act designates women, Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities as groups who face inequity in employment. This policy ask observes who is excluded from this designation and what impacts there are for marginalized groups without anti-oppression support. These observations are for the purpose of recommending a larger scope of employment discrimination, as well as recognizing oppression within workplaces.

2. Amend the Federal Employment Equity Act to Deepen External Anti-oppression Training.

- This policy ask aims to lobby the Federal Minister of Labour to require outreach and training services in the Employment Equity Act. One recommendation is for an amendment to include and/or expand external anti-oppression training into employment equity policy. This would increase equity initiatives in federally regulated employers for the purpose of fostering safety within workplaces.

3. Stipulate Conditions to Federal Government Funding for Continual and Tangible Support for Designated Employee Equity Groups.

- Lastly, this policy ask utilizes the case study of attaching additional requirements to the Summer Jobs Canada program to prohibit discriminatory organizations from receiving funding. With successful methods of stipulating funding conditions, more options are recommended for what other anti-oppression initiatives can be implemented by furthering conditions to receive funding.
- First Nations and corporations should already align their values with anti-oppression initiatives and if they are not, their openness to change is integral in implementing new public policy.
- In the development of these anti-oppression initiatives, the purpose/core values of this youth program must continue to be central for the marginalized groups to be present in policy making decisions.

PROBLEM DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND

- There is serious need for immediate and long-term proactive work in combatting unhealthy and unsafe behaviour that perpetuates oppression.
- In Canada, colonization has created a complex hierarchy of control that facilitates an unequally distribution of access to resources according to privileges.
- These resources can be wealth, employment, education, healthcare, and more.
- Privilege or discrimination can be dependant on race; national or ethnic origin; colour; religion; age; sex; sexual-orientation; gender identity or expression; marital/family status; and disability (Paragraph 5, YW Boston 2017).
- Evident privileges in Canada include, but are not limited to, white or light-skinned, heterosexual, cis-gendered, fully abled persons, elite class, and those holding citizenship.
- In comparison to marginalized groups in Canada like Indigenous peoples, black folks and people of colour (BIPOC), queer and trans people (LGBTQ2S+), people with disabilities, geographical location (urban city vs. remote reserve), low-income, and Newcomers with uncertain and temporary immigration status, and more.
- There are structures in place to eliminate discrimination like the Canadian Human Rights Commission and Provincial Human Right Tribunals.
- However, these oppressed groups are not only inflicted by daily micro-aggressions but also by institutions that have systemic oppression embedded into these systems. For Example, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) created in 1977 had exempted the Indian Act as being discriminatory for more than 30 years (Wasacase, FNST Personal Communications 2019). Members of First Nations were unable to legally challenge the Indian Act as discriminatory through the Canadian Human Rights Commission (Open Parliament 2011). One implication of this exemption was preventing First Nations from utilizing the CHRC to challenge gender inequality in the Indian registry that uniquely discriminated against status First Nations women. Ultimately, this racist and sexist policy had prolonged the oppression of gender by forcing advocates to navigate other human-rights avenues to dismantle the systemic discrimination.
- The purpose of reflecting this Canadian history is to highlight the imbedded exclusion and control of power engrained in policy work.
- To eliminate inequity/inequality, it is integral for those benefitting from systemic oppression to acknowledge privilege, and actively centralize oppressed people in decisions for public policy.

POLICY OPTIONS

Amend the Federal Employment Equity Act to Include Mandatory, External Anti-oppression Training

All levels of government including municipal, provincial, federal, and First Nation governments have the potential to be lobbied in mandating anti-oppression initiatives in work and educational environments. The regulations of a work industry are dependent on the federal or provincial jurisdiction, so to create the largest impact multiple government and ministerial avenues must be sourced for policy change.

The federal government has jurisdiction to regulate work industries that transcend provincial boundaries like First Nations, inter-provincial/international transportation, telecommunications, and banks. A branch in Employment and Social Development Canada is the labour program, and it regulates these work industries. One of the labour program's responsibilities is to administer and enforce the mandatory Legislated Employment Equity Program (LEEP 2019) under the Employment Equity Act (Bill C-44). Within this program, federally regulated companies are required to develop equity policy and submit an annual report of an action plan and progress on the employment equity of the company. This is government legislation that solidifies the direction and need of anti-oppression work in Canada. Working on this previous equity initiative should also help navigate the political system of change in the federal government. Possible further steps are participating in public consultation and attempts of submitting policy recommendations to the federal Minister of Labour.

A policy recommendation for the Federal Employment Equity Act (EE Act) is to consolidate the obligations of employer's anti-oppression training within the workplace. Implementing this training obligation can be by method of amending the EE Act (sourced at Justice Laws Accessed 2019), Part 1, Section 5, for the Employment Equity Plan to explicitly require employers to seek and host anti-oppression initiatives in the workplace. This training can extend to everybody affiliated with the company including employees, managers, and stakeholders. For tangible results, the most effective training would be in-person, facilitated workshops. It is realistic to recognize the nature of some workplaces, which may prevent it from being possible to do in-person training, such as a transportation company requiring staff to take rotational shifts of work. In these situations, accommodations like online training may be utilized. However, to remain true to the mandate, this training must be developed by the communities it is representing and communities afflicted by oppressive systems. The goal is to create actual change in safety for people at work and in their lives. To keep in mind, this Employment Equity Act effects the aforementioned federally regulated industries. To impact other industries, other avenues of equity policy will have to be examined and created.

To Modernize the Employment Equity Act, We Must be Aware of Which Groups are Designated in the Employment Equity Act, and Who is Excluded

Four groups in Canada have been designated as groups facing inequity with employment: Aboriginal people, Visible minorities, persons with disabilities, and women (Canada Labour 1986). However, there are other marginalized groups excluded from the designation in the Federal Employment Equity Act.

One factor that is not taken into consideration in the Federal Employment Equity Act are employees' sexual orientation and gender identity beyond a binary (male/female). There have been no amendments to which demographics are designated groups since the inception of the Employment Equity Act (Treasury Board of Canada 1996). Neglecting human rights for LGBTQ2+ people is rampant across the globe, which has resulted in less consideration and research regarding employment, so it may be difficult to see the financial impacts against queer, trans, and gender diverse people. However, there are organizations doing this emotional and mental labour for LGBTQ2+ research data, and they illustrate the detrimental impacts to LGBTQ2+ members' health and safety. Recently, the World Bank had conducted research about LGBTQ2+ employment and had issues navigating statistics due to the limited available data. The research indicates that the limited data is because human rights and equality for LGBTQ2+ people are more considered through a social, cultural, or ethical lens, instead of LGBTQ2+ economic development issues, (Badgett 2014). With more LGBTQ2+ representation and issues gaining attention, like the short film: Sexual Minorities and Development (2015), also published by the World Bank, that asserts the evidence of LGBTQ2+ people suffering lower education outcomes due to discrimination, bullying and violence; higher unemployment rates; a lack of access to adequate housing and health services; and financial services.

From lived experience, I have endured work places that were anti-LGBTQ2+ with strong toxic masculinity, homophobia, and transphobia all present. This work culture perpetuates very power-driven male, cis-gender, and hetero privilege that actually affects everyone, including LGBTQ2+ /non-LGBTQ2+ and people of any gender, including men. This personal experience had demonstrated the adverse impacts of workplaces with unhealthy relationships and behaviour. On the other hand, I have also experienced work environments that have not only tolerated LGBTQ2+ folks but celebrated diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. The results of fostering a safer environment for the LGBTQ2+ community in the latter work place created and maintained a healthy, productive, and welcoming work environment.

A recent victory of gender equality for trans people is the amendment to the Canadian Human Rights Act to add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination (Open Parliament 2017). This bill was sponsored by a Member of Parliament named Jody Raybould-Wilson in 2016, and became royally assented in June 2017. The most effective next steps to continue the momentum of achieving more LGBTQ2+ rights in legislative structures is including gender identity and sexual orientation into the employment equity act. To do this, there must be comprehensive research and consultation conducted by and for different LGBTQ2+ communities. For example, including LGBTQ2+ racialized Newcomers and Indigenous Two-Spirit folks. To have successful and tangible data, the research must navigate through different systems of oppression that are present in the LGBTQ2+ community, such as race, sex, and gender identity, to understand how those facing multiple marginalized identities will access employment equity policy. Including oppressed sexual orientations and gender identities into the Federal Employment Equity Act will positively impact the economy and, more importantly, it is a step towards the progress we need in combatting systemic oppression and micro-aggressions against one of many marginalized communities in Canada.

Stipulate Conditions to Government Funding Like Continual Support for Designated Groups

There have been significant achievements in employment equity that have been motivated by monetary rewards and incentives. A prominent example is the Federal Contractors Program (FCP), which requires that contractors bidding on business of one-million dollars or more with the government to have employment equity in place (FCP 2019). This shows the possibility for further equity initiatives derived from financial rewards that can impact other jurisdictions.

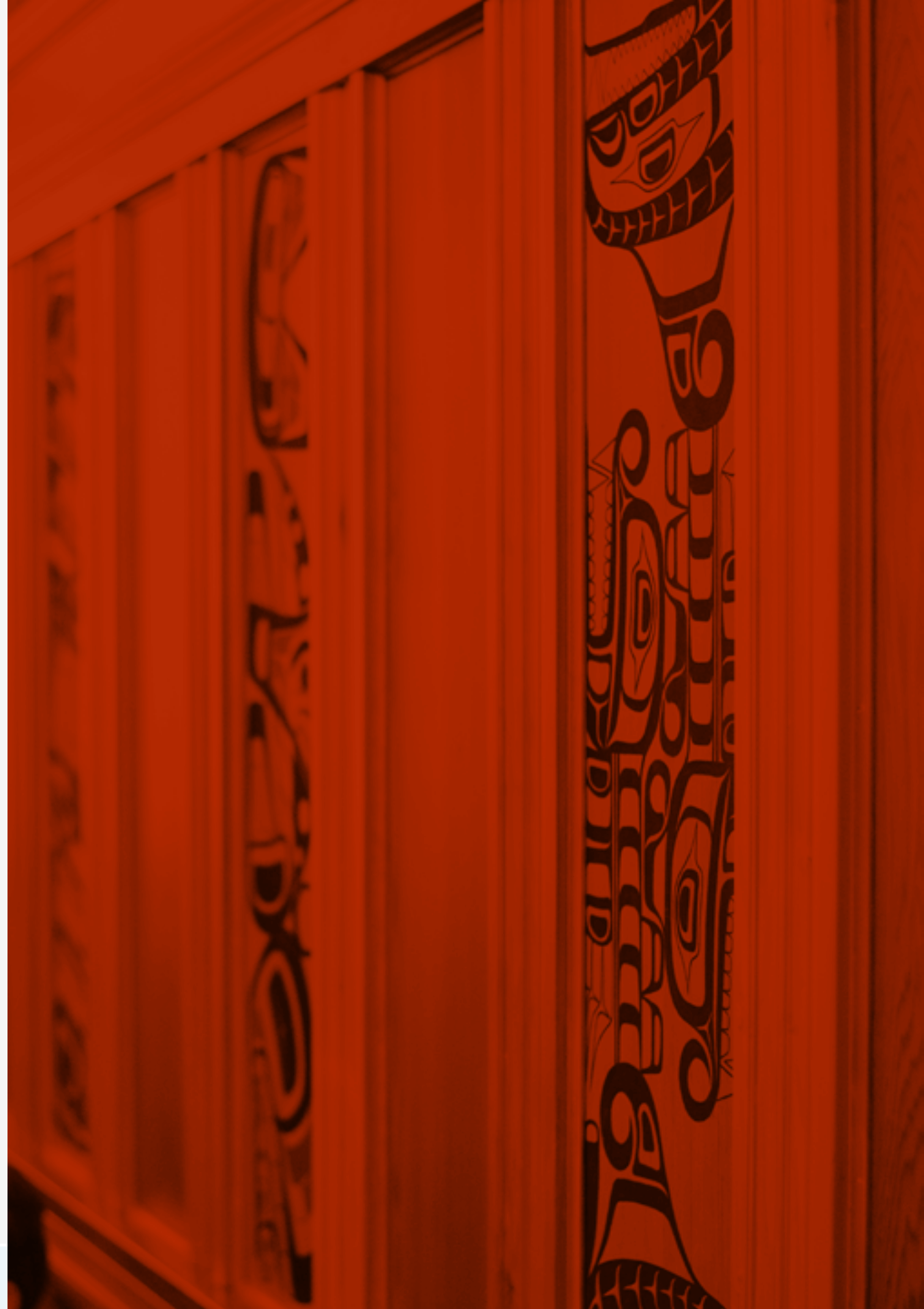
Another example to observe is a federal government program that provides funding to an organization for summer youth employment (Canada Summer Jobs Program). In 2017, the government created new rules for organizations that receive funding to attest that the organizations state their mandate, as well as the duties of the job, do respect human rights in Canada (Employment and Social Development Canada/ESDC). These human rights include reproductive rights, and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression (Global News 2017). While there was criticism about restrictions for this policy change, it had prevented oppressive organizations like anti-abortion, and other discriminatory organizations, from receiving funding. The same route of stipulating further conditions to funding could be applied to concrete anti-oppression initiatives like having sensitivity, inclusivity training and specified support for the designated groups in workplace receiving funding. The non-profit, public, and private sector with 50 employees or less are all eligible to apply for the Canada Summer Jobs Program. This criteria for funding attracts many organizations across Canada, therefore it would have a significant impact on simple funding conditions and not be subjugated to only one jurisdiction, but any organization pursuing the program. One of the recent updates to the programs objectives is to help youth with "unique barriers to employment" (ESDC 2019), so this policy change of proactive work on oppression in workplaces should align with the governments mandate of progressing human rights.

CONCLUSION

- These policy options are to actively promote human rights and to eliminate unhealthy behaviour in order to foster safer work environments.
- To summarize, the public policy analyses in this paper are focused on change in policy surrounding employment equity at the federal level of government.
- Options proposed include: Amending the Federal Employment Equity Act to stipulate external anti-oppression training in mandatory equity policy that federally regulated employers have within their companies. As well as examining and updating the designated groups in the Federal Employment Equity Act to include LGBTQ2+ communities based on the discrimination of sexual orientation and gender identity. Lastly, stipulating equity conditions to the Canada Summer Jobs program in efforts to achieve continual/tangible support for designated groups that can acquire similar equity programs from the employment equity act by applying not only at the federal level, but also provincial jurisdictions.
- These anti-oppression policy recommendations target one federal government department, Employment and Social Development Canada, as ministers in this department are responsible for federal employment equity and the Canada Summer Jobs program both observed in this paper. However, it will take more than these recommendations between an individual and one government department to manifest safety for everyone.
- Upon completing research of marginalized communities in Canada, it is undeniable that there are dynamics of oppression that continue to be perpetuated in the workplace. To combat this oppression, it is necessary to recognize the roots of oppression stemming from colonial white supremacy, nationalism, patriarchy, and the detrimental impacts these systems have against those marginalized in Canada. Embracing a deeper understanding of oppression encourages different and intersecting communities to make change in the structure and fabric of our society – which is exactly what we need to dismantle each other’s social issues by standing together in solidarity.

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ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.



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