



Study of the **Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative**

Brief submitted by the Nia Centre for the Arts

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Background

[Nia Centre for the Arts](#) is a charitable organization that promotes, supports and showcases artistic traditions from the Black Canadian diaspora. Born out of the Youth Challenge Fund in 2008, the Centre has a rich history of developing the talent of Black creatives in Toronto. Through its youth mentorship, professional development opportunities and exhibitions, the Centre has become a home to creative minds in our community.

The organization is in the process of building Canada's first professional Black arts centre, located in Toronto's historic Little Jamaica. At 14,000 sq ft, the building will be equipped with a multi-purpose theater, a gallery space, a digital media lab, and a recording studio. Designed with multi-disciplinary artists in mind, this space will offer Black creatives the opportunity to explore, create and showcase their craft.

The Necessity of Funding for Black Organizations

Years of community-led research have shown that organizations serving Black Canadians are underfunded at every step of their journey. In 2020, the Foundation for Black Communities and Carleton University [found](#) that the philanthropic sector had effectively failed Black-Canadian communities. The [research showed](#) that for every 100 dollars donated to charitable organizations, only 7 cents goes toward Black-led organizations.

Recently, the sector has landed on the language of "B3 Organizations" to describe Black-led, Black-governed and Black-serving organizations. This important distinction highlights the work organizations like Nia Centre engage in by and for our community.

We are uniquely positioned to understand the challenges facing our communities as our staff and board members reflect the varied lived experiences of our communities. Moreover, we have a singular focus on designing programs and services that address these challenges, paired with our deep-rooted relationships with the community, which enable us to reach the desired populations.

In the years following the murder of George Floyd, the Canadian corporate and philanthropic sector has paid lip service to anti-racism and anti-discrimination initiatives. While some funding has been earmarked for long overdue initiatives in a range of sectors, this money has not been well distributed to B3 organizations. In the case that funding was distributed, they are distributed to larger, more established organizations that, although engaging in equity work, have no



relationship to our community. In our funding environment, smaller Black organizations are forced to compete with large, established, often national charities for the funding we need.

The federally funded Supporting Black Canadian Communities Capacity Building Initiative (SBCCI) represents an essential step towards intervention in the philanthropic sector. It is of absolute necessity that Black-led organizations receive unrestricted funding that allows for building long-lasting, sustainable and well-resourced organizations that can serve Black-Canadians across the country.

Benefits of the SBCCI Program

1) *Investment in a fund created specifically for Black-led organizations*

The program enabled emerging and established B3 organizations to access resources designed specifically to help them operate more effectively.

2) *Provides support for capacity building which is limited in the sector*

Most funding in the sector prioritizes program delivery, so the funds that enhance organizational capacity are limited. However, this funding did help many organizations to invest in key areas related to organizational development.

3) *Partners with Black-led organizations and increases the awareness of the program and access*

Initially, the Government of Canada implemented the program directly, but for the subsequent streams, delivery was implemented through regional intermediary organizations that are also B3 charities. This method was a better solution than the Government of Canada leading the program delivery because the charities on the ground have stronger ties to the community and could roll out information sessions and raise awareness better than the far removed from the federal government.

The Challenges and Limitations of the SBCCI Program

As a beneficiary of the SBCCI program, Nia Centre has made significant strides in developing our organizational capacity. We received funding to expand our processes and capacity in fundraising, digital infrastructure, and human resources. In addition, we were able to hire subject matter experts in these fields, often also Black leaders, hence adding to the investment in the Black-Canadian community.



Through feedback sessions attended alongside other grassroots and charitable organizations and our feedback collection, Nia Centre has identified the following challenges, which we believe, if addressed, could help the SBCCI achieve its goal strengthen the capacity of B3 organizations and the social inclusion of Black-Canadian charities

The first challenge is that the SBCCI's focus on capacity building is over-focused on projects and project building. B3 organizations across Canada are typically smaller and understaffed, making it difficult for organizations to carry out short-term projects without the appropriate staffing to deliver them. None of the money allocated by the SBCCI allowed staff to work on capacity-building projects.

The program's restrictions on operational funding have made it so that only 20% of the funding can go towards having the staff necessary to ensure a working facility for young people to enter. By creating a system in which organizations must pursue project-based funding, the program has perpetuated a structural problem that hinders and prevents B3 organizations from envisioning and establishing a long-term approach to service delivery to our communities.

The second challenge is that the program funding does not meet the national demands of Black Canadian organizations. For example, one of the intermediary organizations released an update on the delivery of the program [by Tropicana](#) indicating that 1100 applications were received for the SBCCI program yet only 178 organizations were awarded funding. This significant discrepancy points to the dire need for funding for Black organizations that the program is unable to meet, in part due to the limited funding for a national program.

Suggestions to Refine the Program

The SBCCI has planted several important seeds in the Canadian charitable landscape. However, for Black organizations to take full advantage of this opportunity, restructuring the program to meet the national needs of the Black communities will be necessary. To remedy the program's current flaws, Nia Centre would like to to proposed the following recommendations

- 1) **Implementing long-term support for Black organizations** into the program's structure will be essential. In order to adequately meet the needs of Black Canadians and the organizations that support them, steering away from project-based funding towards funding for core supports like long-term staffing is necessary.



- 2) **Creating a Black Community Foundation** will allow B3 organizations a greater access and decision-making power around funding. While the initial decision to bring in Black-led organizations as intermediaries to distribute funding to other B3 organizations is an important first step, it is not sustainable. Creating a dedicated foundation with the sole mandate to assess the needs, priorities and desires of B3 organizations at the national level is vital to long-term engagement with B3 organizations. This would ensure the program has sufficient staffing to conduct outreach, do information sessions for prospective organizations, visit the funded organizations and revise the program to respond to emerging needs. This organization will also serve as a resource for the government, funneling information and facilitating knowledge sharing.

- 3) **Reducing the Administrative burden**
Despite the small value of the grants (sometimes less than \$20,000) reporting is often required monthly. The program should be designed to be as responsive as possible, collecting data and insights as needed. The recipient organizations should be focused on service delivery as opposed to filling out reports.

Conclusion

The SBCCI program is a meaningful first step to creating a fair and equitable charitable sector. While the program's efforts to support capacity building are helpful, it fails to adequately address the needs of B3 organizations to grow and sustain themselves. The overfocus on project-based funding, and lack of long-term support infrastructure in the program means that smaller, Black-led charities cannot strengthen and develop their service delivery in the most needed way. Moreover, the program's inability to meet the needs of organizations across the country means funding does not trickle down to the groups who need it the most.

Considering reforms such as implementing long-term support for staffing and developing a dedicated Black Community Foundation will be important next steps as the program is restructured for the upcoming fiscal year.

We are happy to provide additional testimony and share our knowledge and expertise with the committee to support in reframing the SBCCI initiative.

Contact



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