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# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey



## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Wednesday, September 28, 2022

• (1705)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 34 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person and remotely using the Zoom application.

In order to ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to take a few moments for the benefit of the witnesses and members to make a few comments.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating virtually, please use the “raise hand” function. Before speaking, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you're done speaking, please put your mike on mute.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for the meeting. For those participating by video conference, you have the choice of floor, English, or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I would again advise committee members and witnesses to speak slowly for the benefit of the interpretation services. I would also like to remind participants that screenshots are not permitted. Should any difficulties arise during the meeting, please advise me, and we will suspend while we correct it.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 3, the committee will commence its study on the supporting Black Canadian communities initiative.

The connectivity tests have been completed for all the witnesses, and we are ready to go.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussion. Witnesses, I would remind you that you have five minutes each for your opening remarks, followed by questions from the committee members.

From the Canadian Congress on Inclusive Diversity and Workplace Equity, we have Nosakhare Alex Ihama, executive director. From the Nia Centre for the Arts, we have Alica Hall, executive director.

We will start with Mr. Ihama for five minutes.

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama (Executive Director, Canadian Congress on Inclusive Diversity & Workplace Equity):** Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of this very critical conversation.

I appreciate the opportunity, and want to give a shout out to Michael Coteau—I think he's there somewhere—for the work he is doing in the Black community to help with Black businesses and develop the community.

When we talk about supporting the Black community, especially Black businesses, we see that the government and other corporations are doing a lot with allocating funds to help people to either start or keep their business going, and things like that, through organizations like the Black Business and Professional Association. I used to be on their board.

An area that is overlooked many times is the impact of racism on Black businesses. I will talk about three points in my five minutes.

I had a friend, George, who invited me to Canada almost eight years ago. He has passed away now. He was so successful with his businesses. He had a lot of Zellers pharmacies. We used to have Zellers. His complaint was that some white people would come in and say, “I want to see the pharmacist.” The moment he appeared they would insult him and leave. Some would say, “You're a pharmacist? Did they have a pharmacy in Africa?” He would always come to me, and I would always encourage him. It wasn't one and it wasn't two, but he had three pharmacies where that was consistently happening. He had them in white-dominated areas, which literally was killing his businesses.

My first job here was at a call centre. As I often say, I loved it so much. People would call, and I would say, “Bank of Montreal Mastercard, Alex speaking.”

[Translation]

I would say, “Hello, how can I help you?”, and they would say, “What the devil is that? What accent do you have?”

[English]

If that were my business I would be losing 80% of my calls because of my accent. Yes, it's one thing to say, “Here's \$1 million, or here's \$2 million,” but there is an aspect of education that is continually overlooked.

We are doing a lot. We speak. We train, but until this becomes part of the educational curriculum whereby we are seeing less and less racism, we can keep pouring money into the business, but if nobody's coming, the business is going to close down. We can keep pouring money into the business, but if there are no plans to educate people in the community through their professional curriculum...

We've all heard about limiting—or restricting, rather—Black education to February. It is good we have February as Black History Month. Where it is bad is that it's limited to Black History Month. That continuously impacts. I know this because I have a business. I know many Black people with businesses.

I also talked about credit. Some of you may not know this, but the banks have systems to decline credit or give credit to people because of their postal code. I have tested it. I'm a victim of that. If I use a postal code in Vaughan or York, I'll get a line of credit of \$25,000. If I use a postal code in Jane and Finch or in Kipling, I'll only get \$500. I tried it. It's not what they told me. I have friends who go through that.

The point is that when we talk about systemic racism, we don't see it. Most people don't see it, but those who feel it, they experience it and it continues to hamper their businesses.

What are some of the things I feel perhaps the government needs to look more into rather than saying, "Here's \$20 million, or here's \$1 billion"? What are we doing? What can be done more to increase the awareness of anti-Black racism? It's through the educational curriculum, through the systems.

Most of these systems used by the banks and insurance companies were built by people with a colonial mindset. The people using them may no longer be racist, but the systems were built years ago and they still are. There are so many systemic barriers beyond what we see and read in the paper. It's what we're feeling.

The last point I will quickly add with my remaining 90 seconds, I think, is the Canadian Congress has been talking about and training on diversity since 1998. We have educated at the Bank of Montreal and other big banks, and have done training. We train 10,000 people every year through our organization. But since the death of George Floyd, some analyses have been done, and 80% of the work for diversity was given to white-led organizations. I didn't say that. There are researchers who proved that.

Even with the banks—I know CIBC is one, but there are many of them—the government needs to look at some policy or some way to ensure that even the training of Black... A minister of Ontario, a friend of my work, said that the person who trained them on anti-Black was an Indian woman. Of course, I'm sure she's smart, but she's not Black. It is fundamentally flawed to hire somebody without the lived experience to speak on the experience of other people. Those things are happening and you'd never know about it. We do.

- (1710)

If any seconds are left, I yield them back to the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ihama

We will now move to Madam Hall for her five-minute opening statement.

Madam Hall.

**Ms. Alica Hall (Executive Director, Nia Centre for the Arts):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and the committee, for making time for this important discussion.

My name is Alica. I'm the executive director at Nia Centre for the Arts. We're a Black-led and Black-serving charitable organization based in Toronto. We support young people through career development, mentorship and employment in the arts. We also support emerging artists to perform and showcase their work so that they can build viable careers and tell the stories of our community right across the country.

After over a decade of supporting the creative capacity of our community, we're taking on this transformational project to renovate our 14,000-square-foot facility into Canada's first professional Black arts centre. I give you this backdrop because we have received a couple of grants through the supporting Black Canadian communities initiative in the past two years. This has really been helpful to support us in building our organizational capacity to prepare for this transformation from being a smaller grassroots group into running an arts institution. We have received support to do things like build out our digital infrastructure, and to do Wi-Fi planning to ensure that we have a safe and secure building and can process payments online. We've received support for HR planning to ensure that we have the right staffing model at the right times in order to run the facility, and of course fundraising. Before the pandemic, we had just one monthly donor. Now we have over 150. We've been able to work with the consultant to build out our stewardship plans and recognition to support those who are contributing to the organization.

Why is this kind of support needed? Just last year, the Foundation for Black Communities, in partnership with Carleton University, did a research study. They found that only 7¢ of every charitable dollar in Canada goes to a Black-led and Black-governed organization. So we know that there's a significant gap. The philanthropic sector is huge. Canadians are sitting on a wealth of money, billions of dollars, and yet that money is not trickling down to our community. Government resources are really key to help us do things like build our organizational capacity and deliver services, because we're not getting the same kind of support from corporations or the philanthropic sector's major donors. I just went through a \$10-million capital campaign, and I can assure you of that.

The other consideration is that at the municipal level and the provincial level, we know that the existing funding programs are quite focused on service delivery and staffing that directly supports service delivery. So core roles, core staffing roles.... I've had an operations manager just for the past year. She's been leading a lot of these strategic initiatives that help us to deliver our services more effectively and efficiently and prepare, as I mentioned, for the transformation that we're going through. But not many grassroots Black-led organizations have an operations manager. The challenge we face is that the existing funding landscape doesn't support the kind of keep-the-lights-on resources that are needed to ensure that there's a charitable landscape that's supporting the Black community across the country and that has the resources to do so.

As the federal government is looking to address anti-Black racism, address the proliferation of hate in our communities, and integrate immigrant communities across the country, there needs to be a strong network of charitable organizations supporting this work, particularly for the Black community. You have so far planted a number of seeds through the SBCCI program. We need to ensure that those seeds are able to grow and flourish, and that these organizations are able to continue doing this important work.

I have two suggestions on building the program as you look to implement the final couple of years of funding. One is to steer away from this project-based funding. A lot of smaller organizations don't have core funding support through their existing funding structures, so project support for six months to do this kind of work becomes really difficult. A number of staff are wearing multiple hats. They're doing service delivery. They're addressing all these issues that have come up through the pandemic. We're seeing increased focus and requests, as my colleague mentioned, for Black-led organizations. They don't have the staffing support to actually do this work.

The second thing I would mention is that there needs to be more support for core staffing and operational resources. That's because of the gaps at the other two levels of government, as well as what I mentioned around the need for that for particularly Black-led organizations.

As you look at redesigning and restructuring the SBCCI program for the coming fiscal years, I think it's really important that you think about long-term support for Black-led organizations and more unrestricted funding.

Thank you so much.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Hall.

Before we begin our six-minute round of questioning, I will remind you that I'll advise you when you have 10 seconds left. This is to ensure fairness. We want to get to as many committee members as possible.

Madam Kusie, you may begin. You have six minutes.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Madam Hall, you did an excellent job articulating the benefits of the program for your organization, as well as the shortfalls. Thank you very much for that.

With that, I will go to Mr. Ihama.

I was wondering, Mr. Ihama, if anyone you know has applied for the supporting Black Canadian communities initiative fund. If so, perhaps you could talk about it. Have you yourself applied, or do you know anyone in your community who has applied for this fund?

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** No, we have not applied, but we know people who.... I don't think they've applied, but they have discussed it and were thinking about applying. However, I can't confirm whether they did or not.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** You stated, in your opening comments, many of the barriers your community faces, but I'd like you to expand on that, please.

What would you say is the most significant holdback or barrier to Black-led organizations applying for federal funding, in general, if you had to name one particular thing?

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** I find that it's the enabling environment, and I know many organizations, like the BBPA and others, are working on this.

There is an area called Eglinton. Some of you may know it. I know a lot of business owners in that particular area, and I drive there every now and then, especially when I go to the Jamaican consulate there. The environment itself is not enabling the businesses to thrive. I mentioned my friend who had three pharmacies. He has passed on now. I see our friends who have put so much effort into this. Yes, there may be funding to support it, but if the communities themselves are not committed to patronizing your business, it's not going to go anywhere, no matter how much funding you have.

If you want an action item, topic or theme, it's the enabling environment. It's one thing to have the funding, the confidence and all the supports. Again, if somebody is not knocking on your door, then the business is going to struggle and eventually close. We know businesses like that. We're doing a lot on our end, but we want to see the government.... Yes, the funding is there. The money itself doesn't enable the environment. You could give me a million dollars, but if the people in my area of Mississauga don't patronize me because they don't have the awareness that I'm not dangerous or whatever they are struggling with, then the business will shut down and similar businesses will shut down.

I used to live in Malton—shut down. I used to live in other areas—shut down. Like I said, I apply for credit, with the same credit worthiness.... I have a friend at TD Bank who said, "Use an address in Royal York. Watch." I did, and I got it. It's the same credit. I just used a different address. We tested it. It was a test.

The enabling environment, the systems, the policies—these things were built way back and nobody has ever talked about the actual systems. By "systems", I'm talking about the technology used. I worked in a bank. I worked for the Royal Bank, CIBC and BMO, so I know them. I know those systems are still in there.

It's an enabling environment.

I don't know if that answered your question.

• (1720)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Expanding upon this enabling environment you're referring to, what more do you think the federal government should be doing to support entrepreneurship in Black Canadian communities?

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** Number one is education. Restricting Black education to February is an injustice, as Martin Luther King would say, injustice anywhere. Number one is education. The fact that for far too long we're still keeping it to February, I think, frankly, we should be ashamed of. It's the same for indigenous people. That's number one.

Number two is that we need to look at the systems and the policy both in the judiciary and in finance. Nobody's holding the bank.... I know the banks. I know them well. I know some of the leaders who are there. Why would a system that applies credit give you credit because you have a different postal address? It's the same credit, the same. We've tested it, and we can test it again and again. That's number two.

Number one is education. We need to take that beyond workshops and conferences and put it into classrooms. We need to put that into classrooms. People have the option to take it to their homes or not, but at least put it into the classroom.

On number two, organizations like banks and insurance companies should be held accountable in some way, shape or form to ensure that the systemic barriers they have.... It's one thing for CIBC to say that they just donated \$10 million to the Black community, yet, if a Black Canadian applies for a credit card, he gets nothing, and if he goes to his cousin's house to apply using his address, he gets it. That's still going on, so there are deeper issues there.

Then, of course, we look at the policies of protecting Black businesses. We all know that one with regard to the law and justice.

I could go on, but education is number one. We are here today because of miseducation. Let's be very clear. There are still books on Amazon that say Blacks are from apes. There are books that say indigenous people are savages. There are university professors who still hold those views.

We are here because 11 generations were miseducated. We don't expect one generation to be educated or catch up, but what we do expect is, as they plan to educate the next 11 generations, at some point in time—hopefully it's not 11 but maybe two or three generations—we can truly live in peace, as Martin Luther King said, in a world where little Black boys and little white girls have no issues playing together and their parents have no issues either.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ihama. That concludes the time.

Now we go to Mr. Coteau for six minutes.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by saying thank you to our witnesses for being here today. You know, we're here as a committee to look at this initiative, to find out what's working, where we can make improvements and to tap into your expertise, and I just want to say thank you to both of you for the work you're doing to advance many issues that relate back to the Black community and the general public as a whole.

I'd like to talk about Nia, the organization that Ms. Hall represents. I want to take a minute to share some information with this committee. That organization started almost 15 years ago, I believe. The Youth Challenge Fund in Ontario was set up by Dalton McGuinty and Pinball Clemons in 2006 with an allocated amount of money and involved 33 Black-led organizations. Of those organizations, I believe only three exist today. Nia Centre for the Arts is one of those organizations in Toronto. It's one of the few Black spaces for the arts, if not the only one, in the entire province, if not the country.

One of the things that came out of the Youth Challenge Fund was the fact that, if organizations don't have the ability to build capacity, if organizations don't have resources to build better governance and to put in place better board structures, the basic backbones that are required for organizations to do well, they often fail.

I just want to acknowledge the work that the Nia Centre has done to survive over the last 15 or 16 years by going in all different directions, provincial and municipal, and by working with partners and anyone they could find to survive, and they're here now providing us with advice to build public policy. To me, that is capacity building, and that's one of the intentions of this initiative. You know, one of them is to contribute, to build capacity, to contribute to better public policy building, so I just want to say thank you for the work that you're doing and the work you continue to do.

Ms. Hall, I have a question to ask you.

From your perspective, why is it important to have Black-led organizations participate in the decision-making on how funding flows to organizations that service and provide support to Black communities?

• (1725)

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Thank you so much, Mr. Coteau, for the kind words and the question.

Having Black-led organizations.... I think we more recently landed on the language of B3 organizations—Black-led, Black-governed and Black serving—as an important way to categorize the organizations that I consider to be our peers in this network.

My other colleague here, Alex, also mentioned an important point: there have been previous rounds of funding that have been allocated or designated for anti-racism initiatives or initiatives that are focused on supporting Black communities, but those funds haven't actually gone to Black-led organizations.

I have gotten many a call over the years from other organizations saying, “Hey, there's a grant due tomorrow. Do you want to partner on it?” Really what they mean is that they can write an application where they receive funds, but we're listed as a partner, so they then leverage our work and our name in order to put forward an application that goes forward for adjudication amongst, if it's federal employees, who aren't as familiar with our communities and who aren't as familiar with the organizations that are actually doing the work on the ground, that have the connections to communities, that understand the issues that our communities are facing and that are doing this work.... What happens is that those well-meaning employees or committee members look at the grants and look at organizations that they're familiar with, which oftentimes can be national organizations, organizations that have been around for a very long time but don't actually serve our community or have connections to our community.

That's why it's really important that there are Black Canadians in the committee processes or the adjudication processes to review these grants, because they're more likely to be (a) familiar with the organizations who are doing this work, and (b) able to scrutinize the ways in which organizations are proposing that they design programs, that they conduct outreach, that they assess their impacts in ways that are reflective of our community's capacity and needs.

It's really important that the community be part of this process. As Mr. Coteau mentioned, the Youth Challenge Fund was a really strong example of a Black-led funding body actually allocating resources, which really led to a funding approach that was collabora-

tive, that was focused on, at the time, young people, and that was focused on systemic change.

I actually was lucky to be one of the staff. I was a young intern at the Youth Challenge Fund some 15 years ago, so I feel really honoured to have started my career at that organization, to have seen how it best functions, and now to be realizing this important project for our country. But, yes—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Can I jump in for one second?

I just want to make the comment that people may ask on the committee, or even just Canadians in general: Why not just have Black-led organizations supply to the larger pool of funding sources or foundations?

I want to go back to the point that you made, because I think it's a really good point: that 7¢ for every \$100 that's contributed goes to Black-serving organizations in this country. It's only 7¢ on \$100. There's just not a really good balance there. Building the capacity and the ability for organizations to apply and to build themselves so that they can compete in that space is also important by carving out this type of initiative and other initiatives that are similar.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Hall, if you could incorporate in a future answer a reply to Mr. Coteau's comment, I would welcome you to do that. We're out of time.

[*Translation*]

We now continue with Ms. Chabot.

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the witnesses and thank them very much for being here.

As I am a francophone and unilingual, I will speak slowly so that the interpreters can translate my words.

My question is for both of you, Mr. Ihama and Ms. Hall. You may answer it in any order you wish.

The Supporting Black Communities in Canada Initiative, SBC-CI, is in its third year; it was in the 2019 budget. My first question is this. In your opinion, is this initiative sufficiently known to the community and is it maximized by organizations?

You talked about the awareness that should be raised on inclusion issues that fall under education, for example. Now, according to Employment and Social Development Canada, this initiative is supposed to advance the social inclusion of black and racialized communities.

I have two questions. First, is the program well enough known? Secondly, in your opinion, does the program meet the objective of advancing the social inclusion of black and racialized communities?

If your answer is yes, I would like you to tell us why. If not, I would like to know what improvements you would suggest.

[English]

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** What I understand.... Number one, is this program well known in the community? Number two, is it promoting equity or, rather, achieving the objective?

Number one, we have a very large base. I can say it's not as big as it could be. There is so much of this going on. People forward emails, as Alica just mentioned, saying, "Did you know about this? Can we partner together?" There's so much of it. Some of the perception that people have come up with is.... They just keep throwing money at us as if that's what we need right now.

We need some respect. We need some acknowledgement. We need some empowerment. We need some inclusion. We need some equity. There are so many things that we need beyond that.

I had the opportunity to interview Senator Mary Jane McCallum, the indigenous senator, yesterday for our indigenous event, which is happening tomorrow. I asked her, "Senator, what is wealth to you?" She paused and said, "Wealth, to me, is your voice. It's not money; it's your voice."

Do we have a voice? If we had a voice, there wouldn't be only 7¢ coming to our community. You could give us a million dollars. If we don't have a voice, it's not doing justice. Like I said, it's good. It's well-intentioned, so we appreciate it, but we still don't have a voice. We appreciate being here today, but in the grand scheme of things, we don't have a voice.

That's part one. I think my colleague will have something to add to that.

Part two of the question, I think, is already embedded in the response to part one. It's no, because, frankly, the government cannot do it alone. Let's be clear. The government needs to engage the corporations. The government needs to engage the community. The government needs to engage the schools. The government needs to engage the system. You can't do it alone. You could put \$100 billion in this, but it will not end systemic racism. That's a fact.

While it's being done, we appreciate it. That goes for the indigenous community too. We are very involved in that community as well. We need to amplify. If we look at the one beautiful picture I'm looking at in this House, the representation is imbalanced.

That's my take. Thank you so much for that question.

Please, my colleague, if you have something to add, you may go ahead.

• (1735)

[Translation]

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Yes, of course.

Thank you for your question, Ms. Chabot.

I'll speak more slowly.

[English]

Is the program well known? I think there are some differences between the business side of things and the charitable side. The SBCCI for the charitable section was administered to Black-led organizations. I think there were three: one in Ontario, one out west and one in Nova Scotia. They had record applications for some of the streams, so I think there was some greater awareness in terms of some grassroots outreach to charitable organizations to solicit applications from them.

However, I know there is a difference between.... Charitable organizations have been receiving grants and applying for grants for many years. We're more familiar with that system, whereas Black businesses haven't received support for decades, so I could see Alex speaking a bit more to the trend of businesses not being in the know. I, for one, oftentimes see grant applications for businesses and forward them to my entrepreneur friends, but yes, they're just not looking out for grants in the same way. I think that is one of the challenges.

To your second question around whether this program is meeting the goal of social inclusion, I would say that the funding over the past few years has focused on capacity building. I'm receiving funds to develop a digital infrastructure plan or a fundraising plan. That work, over time, will enable me to better serve the community and to create a space where Black Canadians feel they're represented, feel a sense of belonging and see artwork that reflects their stories and their narratives. Young people can connect with mentors, but the fund is not supporting that direct work. It's supporting the organization.

I would say that, no, that goal hasn't been achieved. There is an opportunity for this committee to refine and revise the program so that it can provide direct support to Black-led organizations to do that work, to create safe spaces, to connect them to the social capital that is necessary for them to move ahead in their careers and to offer them employment opportunities through the network of charities that have been supported through the federal government and the SBCCI program.



I would say that goal hasn't been reached, but it is within reach.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hall.

Madam Zarrillo, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to get some more information from Ms. Hall on the topic of building capacity and on the opportunity for long-term planning.

Ms. Hall, you mentioned some of the changes that can be made and thinking about funding that is not project-based—unrestricted funding—but I want to dig deeper.

How are you able to do this long-term planning or capacity building now with these short-term grants that aren't necessarily funding operational needs?

**Ms. Alica Hall:** I've been really dependent on other folks coming forward to support us and fill these gaps.

For example, I mentioned that I do have an operations manager now, which has been critical in doing things like preparing to manage the facility, leading strategic initiatives and freeing up my time, allowing me to do advocacy and fundraising. The only reason I have an operations manager is that I made a proposal to the United Way in Toronto and articulated why I need an operations person for the next two years to get us into the building and ensure that the building is realized.

As one of the original supporters of the Youth Challenge Fund and the Nia Centre, they gave us the money for two years for an operations manager. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to do it, because the municipal, federal and provincial funding that I received—was received quite a bit of funding—has a restriction on how much money can go to operations: only 20%. I'm signing a grant agreement now for \$400,000 over two years, but only 20% of it can go towards the kind of staffing that allows me to do my job and allows an operations manager to ensure there's a facility for these young people to come into and for artists to be able to work in.

It means that we have to juggle all these programs and all these funders in order to get the resources we need for core staffing and organizational operations. I've spoken to officials at Canadian Heritage to say the same thing.

We're receiving support to do important work. For example, we're working on a research project now to look at experiences in anti-Black racism and online hate, but only 7% of that funding agreement is going towards operations. I'm leading the project. More than 7% of my time is being invested in the project, but the federal government has capped the funding that supports my efforts.

It's a structural problem that hinders organizations in doing the long-term work and focusing our time on service delivery and serving our community rather than chasing a number of project funds.

Thank you for that question.

• (1740)

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Mr. Ihama, you addressed it head-on, the systemic racism that's happening, and you spoke specifically about banks today. These are federally regulated workplaces.

My question is about the kind of work the government can do in federally regulated workplaces to ensure the education that you speak of. There's a lot of work that needs to be done.

Are there any examples you could share with this committee of any of the banks or any of the other federally regulated workplaces that are doing this work? Do you have any thoughts about more federal oversight to make sure there's education happening?

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** Absolutely.

Only six weeks ago, I was tutored by a young woman who came from India. You are trained for six weeks, and you are put in a call centre, because it's the lowest paying job in the bank. That was my first job, and I loved it. This woman had a face call. It happened to be a white Canadian who, the moment he heard her accent, picked on her and insulted her heritage. "Your husband must be a terrorist." I listened to this. She said, "I'm sorry, sir. I'm sorry, sir. My husband is not a—". The caller said, "You're a Taliban." She replied, "No, I'm not."

The banks will tell you that the customer is always right. They've been telling us that since 1998. I did not know if our mentor had issues then, but I used to see my peers crying in the washroom. It's still going on. Shame on that industry, completely. Employees are not protected. I can bring them here for you to listen to them. They come to us to complain.

I heard that Indian woman, and I was very concerned. That happened in 1998, and it's still happening. That was the Royal Bank.

My suggestion is to "debank" them, the same way you take somebody with no credit out of your bank. If their clients mentally abuse and racialize their employees, protect them. Employees are not protected by the banks. They're not protected by the big banks. I know them. I'm sure it's the same in other areas, but those are federally regulated places. What do they have to do to protect them?

Number two is the system they use. I know the system. I worked for one of the biggest systems, at CIBC. They moved 900 jobs to India. They want to make a lot of money. Those systems, I know them. I can name those systems. The bank knows I know. I talked to that bank.

I can test that system. I applied for a credit card. I used my old address in Malton, and I applied for a credit card. Then, I used my new address in Shelburne. Different credit is accessible based on the area code. That is fundamentally wrong, completely wrong, but nobody is talking about it.

Number three, protect your employees and ensure there's equity in the assignment or giving of credit. For a simple thing like lending, they need to do that.

I know I have limited time, but those are two big ones.

To have parents crying in the washroom in 1998 and still crying today because they accepted a job at \$17.... People have degrees back home. The banks are saying that the customer is always right. They need to start removing those clients from their books, because those clients are mentally abusing and insulting their employees.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ihama.

Your time is concluded, Ms. Zarrillo.

We'll go to the second round with Ms. Gladu for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their frank testimony. This is exactly what we need to hear, which is the reality of the situation, and what the federal government can do about it.

I want to follow up on the question from my colleague, Michael Coteau. Why doesn't it work to have Black-led organizations apply for the general funding?

I'd like to hear what both of you think. I'll start with Mr. Ihama.

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** Please go ahead.

**Ms. Alica Hall:** I'm sorry. The question just flew out of my head.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Why doesn't it work to have Black-led organizations apply to the general funding pool?

**Ms. Alica Hall:** We have to recall, first and foremost, that Black-led organizations are a smaller contingent of charitable organizations, mostly because we've been underfunded and under-resourced over the years. When programs open up, particularly at the federal level, given that there are thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of charities across the country, oftentimes larger charities that have more resources, a dedicated fundraising department, a dedicated development department, years of successful applications potentially as well with the federal government, end up getting funded. They're familiar. They're already in the system. Oftentimes, review committees are familiar with their work and what they do, and say, "Yes, they can deliver on this."

We've definitely had scenarios where we've applied to programs that are focused on supporting racialized youth to access recreation programs, to access employment, to create a sense of safety and belonging. We apply. We put together an application. We often work with other folks who have been successful, and yet we're declined. When we follow up and ask for feedback, we hear, "It's a very competitive process. We receive thousands of applications. You're up against everybody." So for organizations that are newer, that are more grassroots, that are doing important and innovative work, but haven't been around as long or not as familiar....

I was in a meeting just last week with a bank representative, who said, "I fund arts organizations across the country and I've never heard of you. How come I don't know you?" They were excited to

support our work, but were surprised they didn't know of us. Why? We don't support the general community per se. We're very targeted in supporting Black youth, in supporting Black artists, and have spent most of our time cultivating those relationships and offering those supports.

The general mainstream, whether it's corporations or the government, is not as familiar with us. That's a detriment for us in being competitive and being assessed equitably, not competitively. We need equity in these scenarios. By carving out a separate fund for Black-led organizations, you're able to assess apples to apples. How can I go up against the National Ballet? Everyone knows the National Ballet. Everyone's excited to bring their clients to the National Ballet. But there will be no amazing Black ballet dancer who I can present if I'm not supported to cultivate that talent.

That's why a separate funding system is needed or a funding pot is needed for Black-led organizations, so we can assess their applications with other organizations that are comparative, that are similar. We're also ensuring that we're prioritizing the equity approach. Not all organizations need the same thing and not all Black-led organizations are at the same place as national and larger more mainstream organizations.

That separation in funding is really key to ensuring we're being equitable in our approach and distribution of the funding.

• (1745)

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Mr. Ihama.

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** I think Alica has done justice to the question, but if I have to add anything or amplify anything, it's that we need to understand that we can't compare apples to oranges, so to speak. With the injustices the Black communities and Black businesses have faced over time, we can't put the money on the table and say, "Why are they not going? The money is on the table." Well, look at the 11 generations—11 generations. It was Martin Luther King who once said that they want us to lift ourselves up by the bootstraps. Martin Luther King said, "What if you don't have a boot? What are you going to lift yourself with?"

We need to move from equality to equity. We need to begin to dismantle those systems and look at them. Like I said, the government can't do this alone. You need to call those people to the table and say, "We are about to give them \$10 million. How are you going to help? What do you need to change to support this work?" Until everybody is around the table, nobody is around the table.

Why are they not? For far too long they've been held down. For far too long they have been restricted. For far too long they have been limited. It is not just for far too long; even now it is still going on. It is tiring to be Black in Canada. It is exhausting to run a business as a Black person in Canada. I just told you we train on diversity, on Black. We train, but they hire the white. We apply. We do a proposal, and we read later on their website they just hired a company that's led by a white person to come and do anti-Black systemic racism in that organization. Come on.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** No, I get you.

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** This is the reality.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ihama.

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Yes, the bias is well documented.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you so much for your answers.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

• (1750)

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have the benefit of having three Black-led organizations in my community, the NACCA, which is the Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association; ABC, which is the Aurora Black Community Association; and the Aurora Black Caucus. I have had a number of conversations with them. I understand, and I hear exactly what we're hearing here as well.

I think we've heard enough in terms of what the drawbacks of this system are, the drawbacks of the systemic problems that you face.

I see that there were four organizations—Tropicana Community Services, Black Business Initiative, the Africa Fund, as well as Groupe 3737. Those are national high-level organizations. What I'm hearing is that organizations like NACCA or the ABC are not getting access because they're grassroots organizations. There's a gap between the distributors of the decision-makers and the people who need the funds because they aren't resourced well enough, and they don't seem to be able to get through.

What recommendations would you have to deal with the gap between the broader distributing group and the people who are actually looking for funding but don't have the resources to apply for the funding?

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Just a point of clarification, you're saying that the three organizations that are in your riding also haven't been able to receive funds from the Black-led organizations that were tasked with distributing the funding. Is that correct?

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** To start with, they aren't familiar enough with the process. I'm trying to find out how we can make these organizations more familiar with that process.

**Ms. Alica Hall:** I think one of the things that was really successful with the Youth Challenge Fund model—a designated fund—was that all of the staff who worked at the fund and the entirety of their roles were focused on building relationships with grassroots

organizations, youth-led organizations and young people on the ground.

As for the intermediary organizations that we have now, like Tropicana, Tropicana is in and of itself a charity. It runs programs in Scarborough for young people, safe spaces, after-school programs and so on. Because of this SCPI program, it has taken on the role of being a funder, but that is not its functional purpose or history. The staffing model that they have isn't actually conducive to being a funder because, for the past 30 years, they have been a charitable organization.

One of the other initiatives that I know the federal government is working on is an endowment, setting up a Black foundation. I would really encourage the government to accelerate and ensure that they are working on that. If you have an organization that is dedicated to distributing funding to these organizations, to building capacity, to supporting organizations over the long term, then you are going to have staff who can do that work on the ground, who can build relationships, who can go out and host focus groups, who can meet organizations in their communities.

We did have one of the representatives from the Africa Centre come over here. They are in Edmonton. They came to Toronto to meet some of the organizations on the ground. They had to hire all new staff. It was a very quick process for them. They didn't really have the infrastructure to be able to do that necessary outreach to ensure that they are reaching more rural communities, more emergent groups.

I think ensuring that there is either adequate staffing at the intermediary organization that's chosen so that they can do outreach.... I know from working at the Youth Challenge Fund that we worked a lot of nights. We went out into communities late at night. We were in Scarborough. We were at Jane and Finch. We were hanging out at the community centre to let young people know that this grant was available to them, to socialize and think about what ideas they would want to bring to life and what they would want to see in their community.

You need to be there on the ground. These are not communities that have strong relationships or ties to government. We really need a staffing model and a funding model. I would suggest that the preference is to have a Black community foundation that can be there for the long term and can actually focus on just building capacity and building relationships instead of trying to be a charity and a fund

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** I'll cede the rest of my time to Mr. Coteau.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** How much time do I have Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Thirty seconds and diminishing.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Well, if that's the case, I won't ask a question.

I just want to say thank you so much to both of you for being here and sharing your expertise and your knowledge gained. We can't do this alone. Even looking for ways to find faults within the program to help build it, to discuss things like the return on investment, how the collaborative models work to create improvement, this is what we're here to do. I just want to say thank you for contributing to a program that I think is working, which I think is great. It also is new and innovative. It's going to continue to grow.

Thank you so much for your contribution and for being here today.

• (1755)

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Thank you for doing this important work.

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The question I would like to ask is along the same lines as Ms. Hall's answer to the question about the objectives of the program.

Ms. Hall, you said that the program should certainly be refined. The program is supposed to meet needs. I myself am not familiar with it. Is it too administratively cumbersome?

I ask because there was a report in the media about concerns raised by black-led organizations. The applications of these organizations had been rejected as they did not meet the eligibility criteria for black leadership. I don't have time to say more about this report, but is there enough flexibility, agility and knowledge from all quarters that finally the money, which is significant but not off the charts, can really address this?

How can we refine the program and make it more agile?

If you would like to provide a further response in writing, we would be happy to receive it. I think it will be useful for the future.

[English]

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** If I can jump in, I think your response is in the question: Is there much flexibility? The answer is no. I think that's a word that we've been referring to in this place.

It's like a new immigrant who has 20 years' experience in banking in Nigeria who comes here, and a Canadian who graduated from the University of Toronto two years ago. They both apply for a job. This one has two years' experience; that one has 20 years' experience. Automatically, the one with two years' experience gets it, because they say, "You don't have Canadian experience." He doesn't need that. What he needs is banking experience, not Canadian experience. He's applying for a job in a bank. He's not applying for a job to be a Canadian.

When we talk about equity, we have to look at it from every sphere. When you have money set aside, that application form, I can guarantee you.... Again, I've helped review over 100 application forms for organizations. They take the same one that they may use normally for the Canadian market and they just make a few

changes. I point to it and say "No, no. You have to recognize that we didn't have the same protection from creditors, the same access to credit. You have to understand that we have been dealing with this...."

The application process for anything, whether you want a job for a new immigrant, you want to apply for funding, you want to apply for credit, you are not.... I was working in the bank, and I didn't get a credit card until I went with my friend to Albion mall to see a woman who worked at the CIBC. She did me a favour by giving me \$500 because I'm a new immigrant.

Flexibility is critical to inclusivity. When we are building this program, don't bring people who have been doing programs for the Canadian market—

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Ihama.

I'd also like Ms. Hall to respond...

[English]

**The Chair:** Madam Chabot, your time has gone over.

Ms. Hall.

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Thank you.

I think there is a tendency with Black-led organizations, even if the money is being allocated by another Black-led organization, to put a lot of reporting and administrative structures in place. For a \$20,000 grant, I have a report that I have to fill out monthly. We have to say to them, "Hey, we're not doing this work every month. We're working with a consultant. We don't have something to report on every single month. Can we report quarterly?"

There is this tendency to over-report and put in a lot of administrative barriers. That's why I think there's a desire to ensure that the funding is allocated to the needs of the organization and not just a funding system that is prescriptive. Having an application, filling it out and then reporting every day until you basically end the six-month project isn't really helpful for the organization in terms of actually learning and putting the efforts in where they're most needed.

I agree that, of course, we have to account for how we're spending public dollars, but there is work to be done in terms of the trust with Black-led organizations and putting in administrative processes that make sense for the kind of work that's being undertaken.

• (1800)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hall.

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Thank you for the question.

**The Chair:** We'll now conclude the first hour with Madam Zarrillo for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Yes, and I'm okay to have ceded some of my time, because those answers were so important. I just want to dig in—

**The Chair:** That's fine, but I'm going to give you your two and a half minutes now.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you.

Ms. Hall was just talking about applications and reporting and administration.

Perhaps you could give us some thoughts on whether the application itself should be a little bit different. You mentioned the reporting and how it is a barrier at this point in time, and how right now the fund is administered through four different groups that I know of. Is that the way to go, or should we think about some changes there as well in relation to this grant fund?

**Ms. Alica Hall:** I found the application to be streamlined and good in that sense. It was focused on capacity building. There were set kinds of projects that we could apply for, so that process I found to be efficient.

The reporting process, as I mentioned, I think is still a bit too onerous and not necessarily useful in terms of getting the government and these organizations information that is necessary or that they can action.

The final area was—

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** —how it's administered through four different groups.

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Yes.

In this scenario, I would say that if you have to use an intermediary, then, yes, having Black-led organizations that are regionally spread out is important to reaching groups on the ground, but I think the best-case scenario to implement this project, and given the fact that the federal government has already initiated a process to establish an endowment for a Black foundation, would be to have a Black foundation leading this kind of work.

Why? They'll have dedicated staff who are focused only on funding, and if you get the right kind of strategic and research-oriented foundation, they'll be able to do this work over the long term. They'll be able to do research to assess whether or not the funds are actually reaching the targeted demographic. They'll be able to build relationships. They'll be able to do ongoing outreach, so if people didn't get accepted into round one of funding, they'll continue to do that outreach so that they will potentially get funding in round three or round four. This is really all they are focused on and tasked with doing, so they can be really invested in this work.

I think Tropicana has done a great job given that they've taken on this role, but it is a lot of work for a charitable organization to be a funder, to think strategically, to do outreach, and then also to lead a regular day-to-day charity.

I would say that it's best for the government to focus on creating a Black community foundation. I think the Foundation for Black Communities has done a really great job so far in developing research and starting to deliver grants, and that approach should be explored further.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Zarrillo.

Thank you to the two witnesses, Ms. Hall and Mr. Ihama. Obviously your commitment and passion showed through in your testimony before the committee today. I want to thank you for appearing.

With that, we'll conclude the first hour of the meeting. We have a few administrative items to deal with when the witnesses are excused.

Again, on behalf of the committee, thank you for your contribution today.

**Mr. Nosakhare Alex Ihama:** Thank you so much for having us.

God bless you. We appreciate you.

**Ms. Alica Hall:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I would ask for the indulgence of the committee.

As you know, we need to approve a budget for the study we're currently doing. I believe you have it. It has been circulated. It's \$9,300 to do this study.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the budget?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I see consensus, so the budget is adopted, Madam Clerk.

I would just remind the committee members that this was a one-hour meeting. The committee approved two full sessions, so we'll need to schedule another hour. Looking at Monday, depending on the availability of witnesses, there will be two panels on this issue. On Wednesday, the first hour will be on this study, and the last hour will be on drafting instructions for the report.

I would again remind members that when you're submitting witness lists, the more contact information you can provide, the better, because then the clerk can reach them. Some of you know some of these organizations personally, so if you have direct personal contacts, it makes it easier to line them up for the committee.

Constituency week is October 10 to 14.

We'll start the disability study on October 17.

I know, Madam Zarrillo, you were interested in that.

This is the schedule we will be proceeding with.

Clerk, you wanted to make a comment on the Centennial Flame.

• (1805)

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer):** Yes.

I have a quick comment on the Centennial Flame. As we discussed, the committee requested that we circulate all the old material from June to all the members, but in the meantime, the wonderful people in House of Commons communications and the graphic artists have been updating those documents.

Revised documents, including the householder, sample social media posts and the poster will be circulated to all the members so that you can help us promote the 2022 Centennial Flame award to all individuals in your ridings and outside.

This material can be shared with other members. We're just trying to help promote this to get the message out, with a revised deadline of October 31.

Thank you for that.

**The Chair:** I had forgotten at our first meeting to introduce a new analyst who has joined the team, Matthew Blackshaw.

My regrets, Matthew.

With that, if there's no further business before the committee, I will call for a motion of adjournment.

The meeting is adjourned.

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