

Achieving Racial Equity

Tools and Strategies for mid-sized Canadian Communities



Territorial Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that our work takes place on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl'íl̓wətaɬ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations, sovereign stewards of these lands and waters since time immemorial.

As we work to dismantle racism in this place, we also commit to fighting the continuing legacy of colonialism which has led to the violent displacement, cultural loss, intergenerational trauma and genocide of Indigenous peoples.

We hope that projects like this one will help build the understanding, capacity, and solidarity needed to eliminate these issues at their deeply interconnected roots, to truly create safer, more equitable communities for all.

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About Impact North Shore

Impact North Shore is a for-purpose, social impact organization with locations in North and West Vancouver. We are a registered charity providing services for newcomers and inclusive community building. We believe everyone thrives in strong communities and that all people have the right to fairness, equality, and dignity.



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Background.....	4
Reflections on Racial Equity.....	5
Contrasting Linear vs. Organic Strategic Approaches.....	6
The Community Garden.....	7
Working with the Strategy: A Case History.....	8
Understand the Land.....	9
Assess Conditions.....	9
Ebb and Flow with the Seasons.....	10
Honour Community Gardeners.....	10
Build Infrastructure.....	11
Share Tools.....	11
Tend the Garden.....	12
Celebrate the Bounty.....	12
Conclusion.....	13
Appendices.....	14
Comparison of Linear and Organic Strategy Elements.....	14
Strategy Execution Considerations.....	16
Racial Equity Community Garden Strategy.....	18
Racial Equity Community Garden Strategy Template.....	19

Introduction

Racial equity is the *intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures to prioritize measurable change in the lives of people of color*. It is about ensuring racial identity no longer predicts socioeconomic outcomes and that everyone has what they need to thrive, regardless of where they live or how they identify.

Through reflection and collaboration, the project identified strategies and tools that can help other mid-sized Canadian communities combat racism and foster inclusion and belonging. This project intentionally engaged organizations that are already committed to advancing racial equity in their work. These organizations spanned across three sectors that are commonly at the forefront of racial equity work in mid-sized communities: arts and culture, social services, and healthcare. Participating organizations had already taken crucial steps in their racial equity journey and were keen to reflect on their work to identify meaningful elements that allowed them to be successful. These organizations also expressed capacity and motivation to continue addressing systemic racism being experienced by Indigenous peoples and racialized communities using collaborative and intersectional approaches.

Over a six-month period, using mixed method research to solicit feedback on current racial equity approaches and efficacy, and perceived gap areas, 8 organizations across the three sectors participated in one-on-one meetings, focus groups and surveys. 500+ community participants, mainly those with direct experience of racialization, provided feedback through consultations and surveys on how they access community programs, services and spaces across the North Shore, gaps they perceive to exist, and scope for improvements.

This strategy is a culmination of learnings from the project in the form of a blueprint for how mid-size Canadian communities can approach racial equity.

Background

With a legacy of colonialism and racism, Indigenous peoples and racialized newcomers to Vancouver's North Shore continue to experience racism. The recent pandemic amplified racial tensions, especially pronounced through anti-Asian hate crimes. Impact North Shore surveys of im/migrant clients continue to reflect increases in respondents who indicate having experienced attacks, harassment, or discrimination based on their skin colour, ethnicity, religious affiliation or race on the North Shore. Responses to the 2024/2025 Impact North Shore client survey showed that experiences of racism remain high among respondents and among those who have experienced racism:

- 🌱 Many say they experienced racism in a work-related setting including job search
- 🌱 Many are not reporting their experiences of racism with almost half saying they didn't report because they don't believe that reporting it will result in a positive change

Survey results further indicate having experienced these incidents when applying for employment, and in public when accessing transportation and community services. Questions to newcomers about equitable access to organizations, programs, services and spaces across the North Shore, indicate there are inequities that racialized newcomers experience compared to their counterparts, which results in feelings of exclusion.

Reflections on Racial Equity

In the consultation phase of the project, we heard much from local organizations as they reflected on their racial equity work; how inspired they are to make meaningful change, and how this work often developed unevenly over time and did not grow in predictable ways.

They spoke about...

- 🌱 multiple factors and conditions that affected their JEDI (justice, equity, diversity and inclusion) work which included: uneven financial resources and gaps in funding, challenges in hiring, and retaining and supporting staff adequately
- 🌱 times when a project would unexpectedly flourish, and ideas that they had carefully germinated for years until the conditions were right for the project to develop
- 🌱 sudden investments into the work during the Covid-19 pandemic when anti-Asian racism increased dramatically, and when the murder of George Floyd in the USA in 2020 led to sudden increased support for calls for action against racism and the de-investment into the carceral systems that underpin the hold of white supremacy in the United States and Canada

- 🌱 how in the years following this upswing of public support, a malaise and de-prioritization of racial equity work appears to be in process
- 🌱 guilt for not achieving more and for not producing enough

North Shore community leaders also emphasized the immense emotional and psychological energy required to do this work. Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) leaders, particularly, reported that they experience re-traumatization from their own experiences of racism as well as the activation of generational trauma from colonialism and historical oppression, and their struggles to find models that honour BIPOC staff putting themselves in the center of often very challenging push-back. There was also immense joy shared about small projects and approaches that worked and an emphasis on the need to find de-colonized approaches to do racial equity work. An approach that centers togetherness and celebrates the success in ways that build a culture of hope and possibility. In honour of the many experiences and hopes of project participants, we have developed a strategic approach that embraces the organic and evolving nature of our collective capacity for racial equity work.

Before diving into the recommended strategy for a mid-sized community approach to racial equity work, let's look at the key differences of a linear approach versus the recommended approach of this strategy. For additional comparison of linear versus organic approach elements, please refer to [Comparison of Linear and Organic Strategy Elements](#) in the appendices.

Contrasting Linear vs. Organic Strategic Approaches

A traditional linear approach prescribes a sequential process to achieve goals. With defined starting and ending points, a linear approach assumes that progress is achieved along a straight line, moving from point A to point B. It follows a fixed path with predetermined resources and defines success through specific benchmarks, often relying on centralized leadership. While effective for predictable outcomes, it can be a limiting approach in the evolving landscape of racial equity, as it doesn't account for systemic change or emerging challenges.

By contrast, and in alignment with reflections throughout this project, an organic strategy offers an approach that is more flexible and adaptable. This recommended approach is future focused and responds to new opportunities and challenges as they arise within the existing contexts and capacities of individuals and organizations across the community. Success is measured by progress, learning, and the ability to adjust resources and leadership as needed, drawing on diverse perspectives to guide the collective effort.

Akin to gardening, racial equity work requires flexibility, patience, and the natural unfolding of growth overtime. In a garden, growth is diverse and at times untamed. Plants may sprout in unexpected directions, and new growth can emerge from places once thought dormant. This mirrors the unpredictable nature of racial equity work, where progress is often non-linear and shaped by complex, shifting conditions. The gardener, much like the champions guiding racial equity efforts, must continuously adapt, nurturing what flourishes and addressing challenges as they arise. The messiness of the process is not a setback, but a natural part of growth that requires ongoing reflection and flexibility in pursuit of transformation.

The need for a high level of adaptability is especially crucial when addressing complex, deeply entrenched systems of racism and inequity that require ongoing examination, learning, and adjustment. An organic strategy allows us to honor the diverse needs and experiences within each element of the community, responding to the unique conditions of each person or group. Similarly, a gardener must adjust what they do for different types of plants to flourish. The goal is not to achieve quick fixes or easy wins, but to build a healthy, sustainable environment where all can thrive over time and year after year building on the foundation that has been set.

The Community Garden

Building on the recommended organic approach to racial equity for mid-sized communities, we have developed the Community Garden approach as it deeply honours the experiences and hopes of the many people who contributed to this project. The Community Garden approach to racial equity work lends itself to a method where connection and collaboration are foundational. Where relationality and togetherness open space to nurture those who are the gardeners of change, and open to give life to and honour the wisdom, knowledge and agency of each element of the Garden itself. To illustrate this approach, we have created the [Racial Equity Community Garden Strategy](#) outlines eight building blocks that provide a tangible way to map out fundamental elements recommended for a community-based racial equity strategy. These elements are:

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Understand the Land |  Build Infrastructure |
|  Assess Conditions |  Share Tools |
|  Ebb and Flow with the Seasons |  Tend the Garden |
|  Honour Community Gardeners |  Celebrate the Bounty |

Racial equity work happens organically and the path for navigating through these elements is unique to each initiative, organization and community. The section below provides an explanation for each of the key components of the [Racial Equity](#)

[Community Garden Strategy](#) approach, insights and actions from the research and project activities conducted as well as recommended strategies communities can incorporate into their racial equity work. Refer to appendices for additional [Strategy Execution Considerations](#) to ensure the strategy is customized to the unique needs the community.



Working with the Strategy: A Case History

Through the process of building the core elements of a racial equity strategy, appropriate for a mid-sized Canadian community, we also reflected on how our own work aligned and illustrated the Community Garden strategy in action. This section shows what we did, what we learned and recommended approaches for each element of the strategy.

Understand the Land

The land symbolizes the historical context that a community has inherited; what came before and the legacy of what has been left behind.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Centered the worldview and teaching of First Nations Elders at our events • Shared our stories and understanding of the history of our community through a racial equity lens • Created educational videos on the history of colonization and racism in our community	• There are many different understandings and knowledge around the historical and current impacts of colonialism and racism in our community • There are gaps and instances of erasure affecting how racism has shaped our community • The road to reciprocal relations with the land is a work in progress	• Learn new ways of relating to the land from First Nations Elders in your community • Acknowledge the stories of historical racism and colonialism in your community

Assess Conditions

The conditions symbolize the external factors that impede or enable a community's capacity.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Centered the work of anti-racism across all our community priorities in our local planning table for immigrant inclusion • Created educational opportunities to learn about specific forms of racism that exist in our community • Centered BIPOC voices so that services and educational opportunities are led by people with lived experience	• There are many forms of racism that create unsafe spaces and unequal access to resources, safety and leadership in our community • Active change requires centering BIPOC voices in leadership	• Create spaces for conversations about the structural nature of racism and how power structures are governed by white supremacy in your community • Understand that racism exists in many forms in your communities • Create opportunities for education to uncover how racism can remain hidden

Ebb and Flow with the Seasons

The seasons symbolize cycles that affect a community's ability to engage in racial equity work.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Identified that funding for anti-racism work is inconsistent and is often too little to influence systemic change • Created space for BIPOC folks to talk about the heaviness of the work of anti-racism and the need for rest and rejuvenation • Acknowledging that we are all in different parts of the cycle of flourishing, growing, harvesting and resting	• Our commitment to doing anti-racism work is life-long and needs to be built into the long term planning of our organizations • There are no quick fixes and pacing ourselves in the work is necessary • Centering and caring for BIPOC folks who are bringing their own lived experiences to the work is essential	• Adopt a long-term perspective for eradicating racism that centers hopefulness • Recognize that the work of anti-racism takes time and that there is no one right way or sequence to do the work

Honour Community Gardeners

The gardeners symbolize the many people doing racial equity work in the community.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Fostered relationships across sectors (art and culture, health and wellbeing, and community services) so we could share ideas of what has and hasn't worked in our community • Spoke about developing on-going opportunities to share our experiences of doing racial equity work – to uphold and learn from each other	• Our collective work does not have to be structured and organized to be effective – sometimes we work together, sometimes alone but we all are working for a common goal- racial equity • With few resources we are all making strides toward racial equity.	• Uphold the collective work and expertise of all who are championing anti-racism work in the community

Build Infrastructure

The infrastructure symbolizes the supports in place and/or needed in a community.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Created a Community of Practice portal for sharing knowledge and support • Curated a toolkit of anti-racism resources, approaches to support continued learning	• Creating shared infrastructure to benefit everyone • Learning from each other's work improves that quality and impact of initiatives	• Build Communities of Practice for sharing knowledge and resources • Establish relationships and work with others to create a robust support network

Share Tools

The tools symbolize the resources available in a community to achieve racial equity.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Hired a researcher to search for, assess and organize a broad range of resources relating to racial equity • Provided access to all organisations working towards racial equity in our community	• Many of us had spent long hours looking for ideas, resources and tools to base our work on • There was a need for a collection of curated resources which will support our time resources in the future by reducing duplication in underfunded environments	• Build a library of tools for your community to share and use in their racial equity work • Curated tools and resources can include best practices and ideas from other communities and as well as your own

Tend the Garden

The act of tending symbolizes identifying and removing undesirable barriers as well as identifying and nurturing unexpected desired growth in the community.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Hosted conversations to create space for open discussion of the challenges of racial equity work	• There are common barriers such as limited funding and lack of dedicated staffing • Sometimes unforeseen results emerge that inspires pivots or future initiatives	• Proactively identify and address barriers • Iterate and develop what works over time • Adopt an agile approach that allows for flexibility, collaboration and continuous improvement

Celebrate the Bounty

The bounty or harvest symbolizes the tangible result of racial equity work in your community.

What we did	What we learned	Recommended Approaches
• Recognized that a community's success in becoming anti-racist looks like many different things, and each has it's own transformative power	• We all had different approaches, resources and successes and we loved them all • There are very few opportunities to cheer for each other's work	• Celebrate the many successes of your communities collective anti-racism work • Create momentum by showcasing the anti-racism/ racial equity work of multiple stakeholders

Conclusion

The Community Garden metaphor offers a powerful approach for understanding the complexities of racial equity work. Just as a garden requires care, patience, and ongoing adjustments to thrive, racial equity efforts demand adaptability, intentionality, and long-term commitment. By recognizing the importance of conditions, history, support systems, and collaboration, communities can create an environment where equity can flourish. Success in this work is not immediate but unfolds over time, with each effort contributing to a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient ecosystem. Ultimately, the goal is to build a thriving, equitable space where all individuals have the opportunity to grow and succeed.

This approach envisions that communities are at the centre of creating change and through collective work we uphold each other and the contributions of all. Using this metaphor highlights that care, patience, and intentionality are required to create a thriving, inclusive environment. Just like gardening, racial equity work requires adaptability, attention, and patience to be successful.

Appendices

Comparison of Linear and Organic Strategy Elements

This comparison can help clarify the strategy we propose and how it contrasts with a more rigid, predetermined linear strategy.

Component	Linear Strategy	Organic Strategy
Approach	Preparation and planning	Adapting and responding
Process	Set steps	Emergent process
Resources	Specific tools	Flexible resources
Outcomes	Targeted outcomes	Evolving results
Goals	Short-term goals	Long-term growth
Leadership	One leader	Collaborative effort
Timeframe	Fixed timeline	Fluid timeline
Flexibility	Minimal flexibility	High flexibility
Measurement	Specific metrics	Qualitative and quantitative metrics
Adaptability	Limited adaptability	High adaptability

Approach: A linear strategy involves detailed planning with clear, predefined steps, working well when the problem and solution are clear. An organic strategy emphasizes adaptability, evolving in response to changing circumstances, feedback and allowing for flexibility and regular adjustment.

Process: The linear process is structured with set steps that must be followed in a specific order. Success depends on sticking to this predetermined sequence, assuming that change can be controlled through careful planning. An organic strategy follows an emergent process, where steps are not predefined. As the work unfolds, the process adapts to new insights and challenges, making it flexible and open to innovation.

Resources: Resources in a linear strategy are specific and fixed, including budgets, tools, and designated team members to support the work. The assumption is that having the right resources at the outset ensures smooth progress. Organic strategies use flexible resources that can be adjusted as needed. Resources, whether new tools, team members, or data, evolve with the strategy, responding to real-time needs.

Outcomes: Linear strategies aim for specific, targeted outcomes that are predetermined. Success is measured by whether these goals are met according to the plan. Organic strategies focus on evolving results, viewing success as part of an ongoing journey. Instead of fixed goals, success is measured by continuous learning, adaptation, and progress.

Goals: In a linear strategy, goals are often short-term and measurable, focusing on immediate outcomes that lead to long-term objectives. Organic strategies prioritize long-term growth, with goals centered around sustainable change. These goals are flexible and adapt as new challenges and opportunities arise.

Leadership: Leadership is typically centralized, with one leader or a small group guiding the process and ensuring adherence to the plan. Control and structure are key. Organic leadership is collaborative, involving a team effort. Leadership is shared among members, stakeholders, and community partners, promoting collective decision-making and diverse perspectives.

Timeframe: A linear strategy works within a fixed timeline, with a clear start, end, and set milestones. Time is a resource to be managed tightly. In an organic strategy, the timeline is fluid. There is no fixed endpoint; the strategy evolves based on progress, with flexibility to extend, pause, or accelerate efforts.

Flexibility: Flexibility in a linear strategy is limited. Changes are often seen as disruptions, and deviation from the plan is discouraged. Organic strategies are highly flexible. They embrace change and encourage adaptation based on new information, feedback, or external factors.

Measurement: Measurement in linear strategies focuses on specific, quantitative metrics. Success is determined by whether predefined outcomes are met. Organic strategies use a combination of qualitative and quantitative metrics, measuring progress not only by final outcomes but also by learning and adjustments along the way.

Adaptability: Adaptability in a linear strategy is limited. The focus is on following a set plan, and adjustments are only made in response to major disruptions. Organic strategies are inherently adaptable. They are continuously reassessed and modified based on new information and external changes, making them better suited for complex, evolving challenges like racial equity.

Strategy Execution Considerations

Executing a racial equity strategy requires ongoing adaptation, collaboration, and resilience in the face of uncertainty. The following key considerations provide important references for navigating this process, ensuring that the strategy remains responsive, inclusive, and impactful.

<u>Intersectionality</u>	Recognizing the unique needs of individuals shaped by intersecting identities such as race, gender, and ability is important to an effective equity strategy. Just as diverse plants in a garden thrive when their specific needs are addressed, individuals within an organization require tailored support. One-size-fits-all is not the best approach. Applying an intersectional lens ensures that all individuals have the opportunity to thrive, fostering a more inclusive and resilient environment.
<u>Sustainability and Long-Term Investment</u>	Achieving sustainable, meaningful change in racial equity requires ongoing, long-term investment, much like the continuous care needed to maintain a thriving garden. This commitment involves allocating resources such as time, money, training, and staffing to support sustained progress. Just as a garden flourishes through consistent effort over multiple seasons, racial equity work requires persistent attention and deep integration into organizational culture and policies. Long-term sustainability relies on systems that support ongoing growth, including training, mentorship, and policy reviews.
<u>Community-Centric Approach</u>	A successful equity strategy thrives on collaboration and interconnectedness, much like the traditional Three Sisters planting method in gardening, where corn, beans, and squash grow together, each supporting the others. Corn provides a structure for the beans to climb, beans fix nitrogen in the soil, and squash spreads to protect the roots. Similarly, the success of equity work depends on shared ownership and collective effort, where every individual and group, whether leadership, staff, or external partners plays a vital role in achieving the organization's goals. Leadership guides and nurtures the ecosystem of equity, fostering collaboration rather than control. Just as the Three Sisters support each other's growth, diversity within the organization strengthens resilience, and external partnerships bring new perspectives and resources, amplifying the organization's ability to create lasting change. In this approach, ownership and responsibility lie with the entire group, not just specific individuals or leaders, avoiding burnout and fatigue from the

	heaviness of this work. This collective responsibility ensures that the work of racial equity is sustained and nurtured by the whole organization.
<u>Resistance and Resilience</u>	Challenges such as resistance, harmful practices, and external pressures are inevitable in any equity strategy, much like pests, weeds, and unpredictable weather in a garden. Resilience is key, just as gardens endure droughts and extreme conditions, the organization must remain committed despite setbacks. Pruning outdated systems and practices and weeding out harmful behaviors are crucial to keeping the strategy on track. External pressures may disrupt progress, but creating a supportive environment helps the organization weather these storms and maintain momentum toward its goals.
<u>Strategic Uncertainty</u>	Strategic uncertainty refers to the unpredictable factors that shape outcomes in complex systems. Just as gardeners cannot control the weather or prevent pests, racial equity work operates within a dynamic environment influenced by political, social, and economic forces. Embracing this uncertainty and adapting strategies is key. Flexibility and ongoing learning, like adjusting care based on environmental conditions, are necessary to respond effectively to new challenges and opportunities. Continuous evaluation allows the organization to refine its approach and stay on course toward long-term equity goals.



Racial Equity Community Garden Strategy



UNDERSTAND THE LAND

The land symbolizes the historical context that a community has inherited; what came before and the legacy of what has been left behind.

Just as a gardener works with the land's existing conditions, to be successful communities need to recognize the legacy of systemic inequities and inherited structures that shape its work.

ASSESS CONDITIONS

The conditions symbolize the external factors that impede or enable a community's capacity.

Just as soil and weather influence what thrives in a garden, the current culture, policies, and power dynamics determine what can grow and how well it flourishes.

EBB AND FLOW WITH THE SEASONS

The seasons symbolize cycles that affect a community's ability to engage in racial equity work.

In gardening, growth follows cycles, with different plants thriving at different times. There are times for planting, nurturing, and harvesting. Timing is crucial, and not all things will grow at once.

HONOUR COMMUNITY GARDENERS

The gardeners symbolize the many people doing racial equity work in the community.

Many gardeners come together to create a community garden. Sometimes they work together and sometimes they work independently but in parallel to foster growth and development of the garden as whole. The gardener champions the garden, guiding and ensuring growth. Together, the gardeners create a resilient ecosystem. Transformation takes time and requires consistent care, focus, and effort.

BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE

The infrastructure symbolizes the supports in place and/or needed in a community.

It is necessary to provide plants with the support they need to grow strong and healthy, whether through raised beds or trellises. Supports are critical to the sustainability and success of racial equity initiatives.

SHARE TOOLS

The tools symbolize the resources available in a community to achieve racial equity.

Taking care of a garden effectively requires the right tools. Sharing resources with other gardeners strengthens the community toolkit.

TEND THE GARDEN

The act of tending symbolizes identifying and removing undesirable barriers as well as identifying and nurturing unexpected desired growth in the community.

In gardening, unwanted and overgrown plants compete for resources and we remove excess growth to promote healthier development. Similarly, in racial equity work, we need to address barriers like systemic racism and at the same time amplify opportunities as they arise.

CELEBRATE THE BOUNTY

The bounty or harvest symbolizes the tangible result of racial equity work in your community.

Through careful planting, tending, nurturing, patience, and trust the garden will eventually yield results. Those engaged in racial equity work understand that transformation takes time. When the time for harvest arrives, it's not just the fruits and flowers that are celebrated but also the journey and effort that made them possible.



Racial Equity Community Garden Strategy



Use this template to map out the components of the Racial Equity Community Garden for your community



UNDERSTAND THE LAND

What is the legacy of systemic inequity in your community?



ASSESS CONDITIONS

What are the current culture, policies, and power dynamics at play in your community?



EBB AND FLOW WITH THE SEASONS

What are the cycles, and their effects on progress, in your organization and community?



BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE

What structures are in place to support racial equity in your community?



SHARE TOOLS

What strategies and resources have been successful in your community? How can they be shared?



HONOUR COMMUNITY GARDENERS

Who are the key players and champions of racial equity in your community and how are they supported?



TEND THE GARDEN

What barriers or challenges exist in your community and how can you remove them? How can you amplify what going well and unexpectedly?



CELEBRATE THE BOUNTY

What results, learnings or outcomes have driven progress in racial equity work for your community?