



# **Project Agape's Response to "Call for concepts: Black-Led Philanthropic Endowment Fund"**

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## PROJECT AGAPE

Ottawa, ON

[info@project-agape.org](mailto:info@project-agape.org)

# Project Agape's Response to "Call for concepts: Black-Led Philanthropic Endowment Fund"

## 1. How can the Fund's philanthropic principles center the lived experiences and realities of Black communities, including in its governance?

Anti-Black racism, along with all forms of racism, can manifest in many ways that are sometimes undetectable by anyone besides the individual experiencing that discrimination directly, even to people of the same identity. Canada is a country that has racism built into the very fabric of its institutions<sup>1</sup>, and therefore every system in this country with which Black Canadians interact is contaminated by racism and associated barriers. Project Agape asks that the governors of the Black-Led Philanthropic Endowment Fund be sensitive to the "subtle scent of discrimination"<sup>2</sup>, and acknowledge that all forms of racial discrimination, including those that are seemingly trivial, must be addressed.

Furthermore, we ask that when selecting beneficiaries, the Fund considers the unique challenges experienced by Canadians living at the intersection of Blackness and other marginalized identities. This includes women and gender diverse people, people living with disabilities, people living in poverty, 2SLGBTQ+ people, immigrants and newcomers to Canada, and others.

Project Agape has identified two key strategies by which the Fund could manage these exceptional challenges. The first is to prioritize applications that speak to Canadians living at these intersections and address the issues that are faced by them. It is important that work made possible through the Fund not only avoid causing harm to these vulnerable groups, but also empower those who need it the most.

The second is to ensure a diverse array of experiences and identities among those selecting potential beneficiaries of the Fund. The proposal for the Fund specifies that the Fund will be led by Black Canadians, but does not specify whether the voices of disabled, female, gender-diverse, 2SLGBTQ+, poor, young Canadians will be heard also. Black people come in all varieties and have different needs and priorities. It is important that all voices are included to ensure that the key issues affecting our most vulnerable populations are addressed. For example, Project Agape, as a survivor-centered, female-led organization is especially interested

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<sup>1</sup> This is something that has been acknowledged by the Canadian government in its [Anti-Racism Strategy](#), and [according to Global News](#), Canadians seem to agree.

<sup>2</sup> See [Basi v. Canadian National Railway Company. 1988 CanLII 108 \(CHRT\)](#).

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to know how young Black women, as a group that faces disproportionate barriers to funding<sup>3</sup>, will be considered in this initiative.

### **2. How can the Fund remain accountable to Black communities and its governance reflect the diversity of these communities?**

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, small grassroots organizations have been key to supporting many of Canada's vulnerable populations as traditional social support networks have struggled to adapt<sup>4</sup>. For Black Canadians, mutual aid groups are often a lifeline for members of the population often overlooked by funding agencies<sup>5</sup>, and therefore the creation of the Fund addresses one critical issue. However, most of these groups, like Project Agape, are volunteer-driven and operated by a few, passionate people. Groups like these often do not have roles dedicated to researching grants and securing funding. Within Project Agape, members working to secure funding often fill more than one role within the organization, and therefore risk burnout only to be disappointed when funding does not come.

An identifiable strategy to address this issue is to make clear the *specific* criteria for selection with the description of the opportunity. For example, rather than describing a funding opportunity as "for Black female entrepreneurs", specifications might include: Black female entrepreneurs in tech; Black female entrepreneurs reporting less than \$100,000 in revenue; Black female entrepreneurs with fewer than 15 employees; etc. While this might require smaller-scale funding opportunities, it would ensure that funding needs are addressed across communities. It would also address the issue of smaller groups allocating far more resources relative to what they have at their disposal, only to face disappointment.

### **3. How should the Endowment Fund prioritize its investments and its granting?**

Project Agape would ask that grassroots organizations are prioritized for funding opportunities. As mentioned, grassroots groups have been an important community resource during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we learn to adapt and live with COVID-19 as a country, we are seeing a compound impact on health issues already faced by Canadians, such as substance abuse disorder<sup>6</sup>, and other social issues, such as housing and long-term care<sup>7</sup>. Black Canadians especially have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>8</sup>. Grassroots and small nonprofit groups are already struggling to meet the needs of their respective communities, a problem that will continue to exist in the aftermath of the pandemic, as Canada reopens and the social issues exacerbated by the pandemic are reckoned with.

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<sup>3</sup> In their [Impact Report for 2019-2021](#), Pitch Better Canada revealed that despite being highly educated as a group, Black female founders are still struggling to secure funding for their projects.

<sup>4</sup> See [How the rise of grassroots organizing changed the pandemic – and the non-profit sector](#), from *The Philanthropist*.

<sup>5</sup> See [Black Communities Have Known about Mutual Aid All Along](#), from *The Walrus*.

<sup>6</sup> See Global News: [New article examines the compounded harms coronavirus pandemic has on overdose crisis](#)

<sup>7</sup> See CBC News: [PSW draws attention to 'burnt out' staff as COVID-19 compounds long-term care crisis](#)

<sup>8</sup> See [More Exposed And Less Protected" In Canada: Systemic Racism And COVID-19](#), from the *Western Learning Network*

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Furthermore, while Project Agape recognizes the immediacy of all issues faced by Black Canadians, there are some Black Canadians living in marginalization on the basis of more than one identity. As mentioned above, intersectionality is a lens through which all projects hoping to address a social ill should shape their mission. Project Agape is of the mind that projects that are not inclusive of *all* Black folks cannot truly be considered pro-Black. Therefore, it is our view that projects for which intersectionality is a core value should be prioritized.

### **4. What should we consider when selecting an entity or entities responsible for the Endowment Fund?**

As mentioned above, an intersectional perspective is key to understanding the lived experiences of Black Canadians. That is why we ask that projects selected to be beneficiaries of the Fund consider intersectionality in their missions. Of the same vein, we ask that the entities responsible for the Fund are similarly driven. Preferably, we would prefer for entities responsible for the Fund to be diverse in their identities, as it is often difficult for one to accurately gauge the significance of barriers one does not personally face. A perhaps obvious example is the barriers faced in everyday life by Canadians living with disabilities. As most of our world is designed by able-bodied and neurotypical people, the inaccessibility of daily life in Canada to a significant portion of our country's population is shocking<sup>9</sup>. A diverse array of voices is crucial in any governing group to ensure that everyone's interests are adequately represented.

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<sup>9</sup> This December 2020 [Literature Review](#) released by Canadian Heritage provides a fulsome example of barriers to one group (Canadians living with disabilities) that may not have been evident to Canadians outside of that group. Even more precisely, Canadians living with one disability may not understand the challenges faced by Canadians living with another. The same concept applies to the groups within the group at the centre of the concept for this fund: Black Canadians.