

# Community Anti-Racism Action Strategy

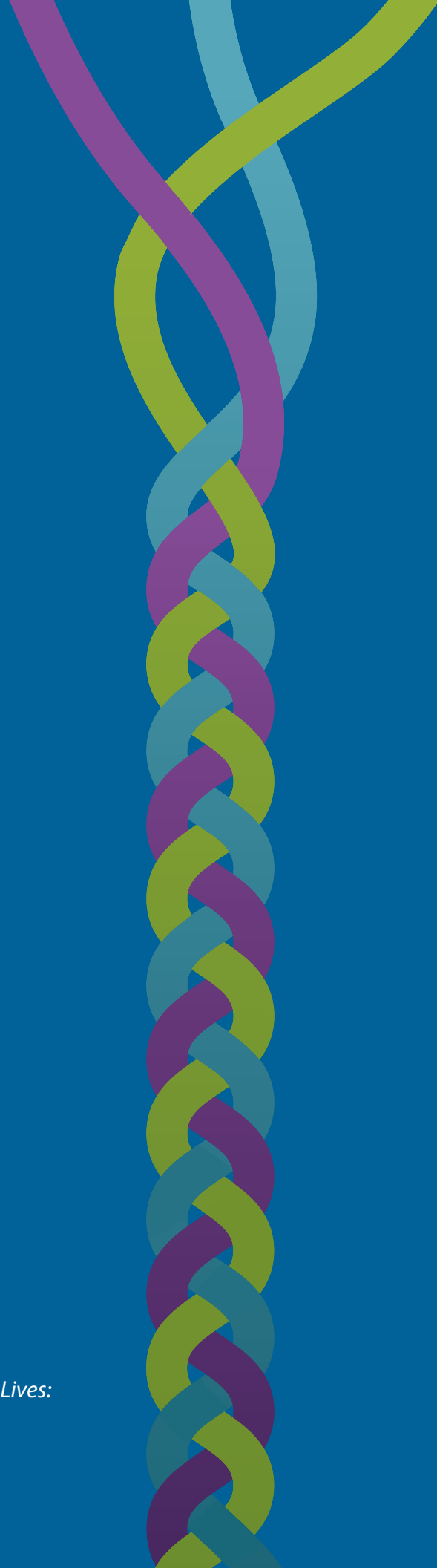
Weaving a Shared Path Forward  
for an Anti-Racist Calgary

*Executive Summary*

April 2023



Developed to inform the *Dismantling Systemic Racism, Transforming Lives:*  
*The City of Calgary Anti-Racism Strategic Plan 2023-2027*



The title of this report, *Weaving a Shared Path Forward*, is an invitation to ways of being, doing and knowing that are grounded in Indigenous teachings and the importance of creating positive relationships, being a good relative, living in reciprocity and a taking actions towards creating a future that includes all of us.

The path we are journeying on towards being racism-free is being made by us, by the strands we weave intentionally to create the future we desire.

This report is intended to reflect what we heard. It is our hope that the words carry the messages as they were intended. It has been an honour to sit together and learn. So many thanks for the courage, honesty and wisdom imparted to us.



# Note on Terminology and Language

Through discussions with the project team and a review of current perspectives (including the Center for the Study of Social Policy<sup>1</sup> approach), we recognize the importance of terminology and language. The terminology used to describe colonized groups has frequently been used to impose on, and exercise control over these groups, and can reflect the inequitable relationships and power dynamics embedded within these relationships. However, terminology can also be used to empower, reclaim, and redefine identities. Renaming and reclaiming language is an important component to move toward racial justice.

In this report we use the word “Indigenous communities” as an inclusive term to describe individuals and collectives who consider themselves as being related to and/or having historical continuity with First Peoples. This includes all those whose civilizations flourished in what is now known as Canada; the United States; the Americas; the Pacific Islands; New Zealand; Australia; Asia; and Africa, prior to European colonization. There is an incredibly rich diversity of Indigenous communities here in Calgary, and we have attempted to ensure that they are represented in the text wherever possible.

We use the term “Indigenous” over the constitutionally-defined Canadian term “Aboriginal” as it is now more commonly used. The use of the term “Indigenous” allows individuals and communities to use the term in ways that are meaningful to them. Exceptions to our use of the term “Indigenous” have been made of necessity when we are citing resources that use different terms.

This report has capitalized the terms Indigenous, Black, Racialized and White to respect and signal an understanding of the history and racial identity of these groups. Capitalizing White reflects our understanding that not naming White as a Racialized category risks perpetuating the assumption of White as raceless, superior, neutral, and standard.

The report also uses the term antisemitism without hyphen based on the approach of the federal government that has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition.

The report also uses the terminology ‘we’ or ‘our’ to indicate: The City of Calgary Anti-Racism Program, The Anti-Racism Action Committee, and the community engagement team of Habitus Consulting Collective and ActionDignity. This type of language is used to locate ‘who’ is behind the report and is a ‘de-colonizing’ effort, to acknowledge the worldviews that shape this writing. See [Appendix A](#) for a more comprehensive glossary of terms.

The term The City (uppercase) is used to refer the municipal government and the city (lowercase) is used to refer to Calgary.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://cssp.org/>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**“We do want to be part of the larger community, we do want to be included... we want to be your neighbours, we want to be your friends, employers, employees.”**

**Alberta Ability Network engagement**

## City of Calgary's Community Anti-Racism Action Strategy

The City of Calgary is committed to creating a Calgary where Indigenous, Black and other Racialized communities feel safe, welcome, included and are treated with dignity.

### Who can take action on the strategy?



Image 1: Key Strategic Actors

*Systemic racism is a clear driver of the persistent inequities in our community- impacting differently across lines of gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, age among others.*

Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities want immediate, meaningful, and accountable change to address systemic racism. Systemic racism is a clear driver of the persistent inequities in our community, impacting generations across lines of gender; disability; class; sexual orientation; religion; and age (among others). This is an issue of life and death, leading to poor outcomes in health, social and economic well-being.

The City of Calgary is committed to creating a Calgary where Indigenous, Black and diverse Racialized communities feel safe, welcome, included and are treated with dignity. The Community Anti-Racism Action Strategy (the Strategy) offers recommendations on shifting The City of Calgary as an overall system, including recommendations for actions that focus on underlying policies, structures and procedures.

The results of community engagement conducted during this project add to previous evidence that racism and discrimination are rooted in our history, and are persistent, complex, pervasive, intractable, and corrosive. Racism and discrimination create limited awareness of, and access to services; a sense of othering and insecurity; fear of mistreatment; and increase the risk of re-traumatization. The Strategy focuses on addressing the root causes of racism through a systems approach within the municipal jurisdiction. However, it recognizes that this work needs to also address a wide range of concerns within the community.

It is a direction-setting document to guide the bold and courageous actions, that are needed to bring systemic change to the municipal government, as well as the broader city of Calgary. The primary focus of the recommendations provided by the community are directed to the municipal government. While there are other organizations and businesses tackling anti-racism, the municipal government remains a vital force for addressing systemic racial inequity.

The Strategy also identifies several actions that others can take swift action on. To become actively anti-racist and working towards racial equity requires The City of Calgary to work alongside other actors. This includes the Anti-Racism Action Committee; civic partners; civil society/non-profit/community organizations; charities; and provincial/federal governments. Despite certain limitations, The Strategy offers strong recommendations that are directed towards the municipal system as a whole, and also specific recommendations for social programs and services such as: Affordable Housing; Social Programs; Neighbourhood Support; Parks & Open Spaces; Recreation Services; Public Transit; Bylaw Education & Compliance; Calgary 9-1-1; Fire & Emergency response; and City Planning & Policy.

This work also needs to function effectively in parallel with the recommendations made through the White Goose Flying Report (2016) and other ongoing efforts at The City working to address racial inequity.



## Approach to the Calgary Community Anti-Racism Strategy

On June 15th, 2020, Calgary City Council passed a Notice of Motion entitled “Calgary’s Commitment to Anti-Racism” and directed The City to build a Community Anti-Racism Action Strategy that would engage Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized community members. Council’s Commitment to anti-racism required a dedicated team to deliver on actions and priorities, and The City put together an Anti-Racism Program Team, that is responsible for co-creating the Anti-Racism Strategic Plan and Framework. This plan will contain actions to mitigate and remove systemic racism for Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities. The City of Calgary’s Anti-Racism Program, the circle of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and the Anti-Racism Action Committee worked with external consultants Habitus Consulting Collective and ActionDignity to develop this strategic document.

The work to build The Strategy took place from March 2021-August 2022. The work was designed over three tiers listed below:

- Tier 1** was the broadest in scope, reaching over 2500 Calgarians. A co-development and participatory design were used, involving 31 community organizations; 32 co-hosts working in the equity and anti-racism sector; and 12 community brokers, who helped to reach hard-to-access populations. Their stories and voices form the core foundation of this report. The process involved community engagement sessions, focus groups, surveys and one-to-one interviews. For many Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities, this was one of the first times they had an opportunity to share their experiences with The City. Based on our evaluation, the process felt safe and empowering for them.
- Tier 2** involved four strategic discussion sessions with 17 issue champions from the community, and six from The City to provide strategic guidance and input that included reviewing findings from Tier 1.
- Tier 3** involved returning to all groups and communities involved in the first two tiers of work, and sharing the final report for feedback.

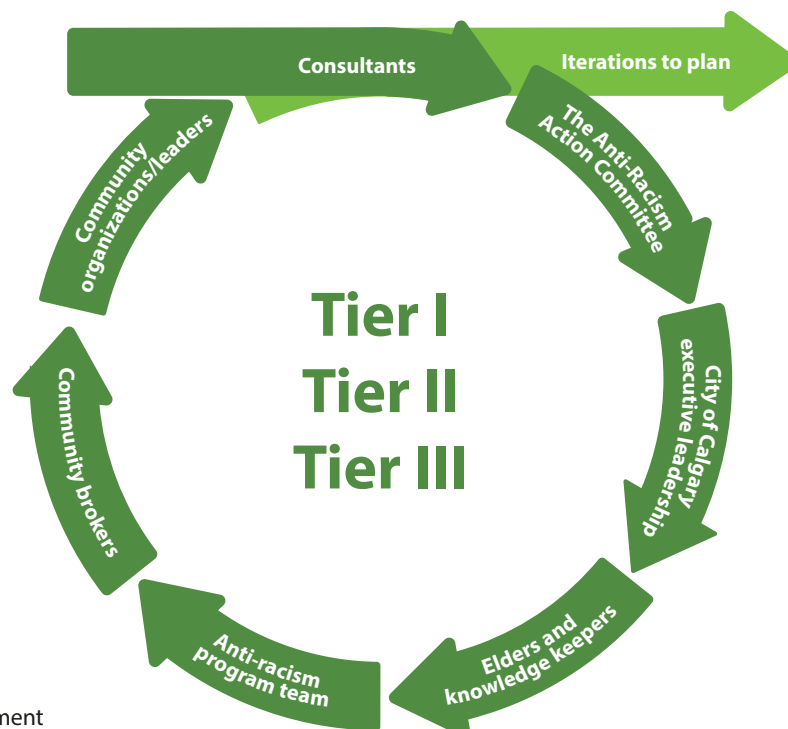


Image 2: Community Engagement

## Organization of Recommendations

Transformative change is needed both at The City and in our community to become an anti-racist city. The recommendations for The City are focused on the programs and services that were highlighted in the public hearings<sup>2</sup> and the 'What We Heard Report' in 2020<sup>3</sup>:



**Social Programs and Services:** Affordable Housing; youth/seniors programs; disability/accessibility services; immigrant/newcomer and refugee services; and Indigenous services.



**Transportation Services**



**Parks, Recreation and Culture**



**Public Safety<sup>4</sup> & Bylaws**



**Building planning and business<sup>5</sup>**

Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities were asked to specifically focus their attention to these services but also spoke more broadly to areas where The City could amplify or leverage its role as a key partner to bring service improvements in health, education, employment, immigration, and policing. The Strategy offers several actions that community can directly act on to help build an anti-racist city.

In this report you will first be provided a background summary around how this work was designed, and the data collected. Next, you will read key themes and voices from Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities that highlight the gaps in services, challenges to access, safety, representation, and investment. The final section will detail the strategic actions recommended by the community, based on four key levers<sup>6</sup>. Companion documents have been shared with The City, which also provide specific recommended actions, including results-based accountability measures and impact opportunities for each of the services.

## Key Community Findings

Racism is acutely impacting our Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities. People's experiences, and the themes in their experiences, demonstrate that racism is embedded in, and continues to be, perpetuated through various systems, policies, and everyday interactions. This stunts the ability of Calgary to become a truly inclusive, economically vibrant, and welcoming city.

Based on Tier 1 community engagement, key findings are collated into four themes:

---

<sup>2</sup> A three-day special meeting was held on July 7, 2020 by the Standing Policy Committee on Community and Protective Services. It was on Calgary's commitment to anti-racism. It included a panel of experts and a public hearing on systemic racism.

<sup>3</sup> The community engagement approach is detailed in the methods section.

<sup>4</sup> A separate report around recommendations for Calgary Police Services was provided to CPS and will be included in their public reporting.

<sup>5</sup> This is not a specific City service but was identified by the community as a key area for change.

<sup>6</sup> Levers can also be seen as catalysts for change.





## 1. Lack of Representation

Insufficient representation of Indigenous, Black, and diverse other Racialized individuals and their experiences/stories/images presents and creates challenges such as: a lack of safety, a sense of 'othering', and perpetuating discrimination and stigma. It creates the conditions by which people feel excluded, ignored, and misunderstood by others and by the systemic structures that shape their lives. Frequently-mentioned places that lacked diverse representation were workplaces, healthcare, educational facilities, and political processes.



## 2. Underinvestment

Community members spoke about unequal and inequitable distribution of resources across Calgary neighbourhoods; underinvestment in important services; lack of culturally-appropriate services; and food deserts- urban areas where it is difficult to buy affordable or good quality food, in parts of the city where racial/ethnic minorities reside. These challenges made Indigenous, Black, and diverse other Racialized community members feel they were ignored or overlooked by The City.



## 3. Lack of Awareness, Accessibility and Responsiveness of Services and Resources

Several challenges and opportunities were identified in relation to service access and utilization including challenges in learning about, making sense of, and navigating City of Calgary services. Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities experienced services that were not responsive to, or inclusive of their needs, which led to distrust of services, unwillingness to access services, and at times negative perceptions within broader community networks.



## 4. Failure to Ensure Safety

Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized community members shared experiences of mistreatment in their interactions with City of Calgary services such as Police, Fire, Emergency Management & Community Safety. Challenges included slow response rates; harsh verbal and physical treatment; their safety concerns being exacerbated or downplayed by the police; and safety services being used against them by neighbours and other members of the public. Feelings of being unsafe due to ethnic/racial identity were common as they live, work, and travel around the city.

## Strategic Recommendations

The City has a significant impact on community well-being and can shift the tide if it acts with urgency. Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities engaged believe that without addressing the foundational issues within The City government itself (internal), any anti-racism efforts in the community are bound to fail. Image 3 highlights the root causes that need to be addressed through this Strategy.

While most often anti-racism efforts are focused on making changes in the community through services or individual policy revisions, these have been unsuccessful in sustaining change. While smaller incremental actions are relatively easier to take in the short-term, they are unlikely to address the change to the system that is needed. Big, transformative changes are likely to have the greatest impact, and need more internal discussions, time and alignment. These big, transformative changes have been discussed below.

# Theory of Change

## POOR ROOTS lead to poor outcomes

## STRONG ROOTS leads to positive outcomes

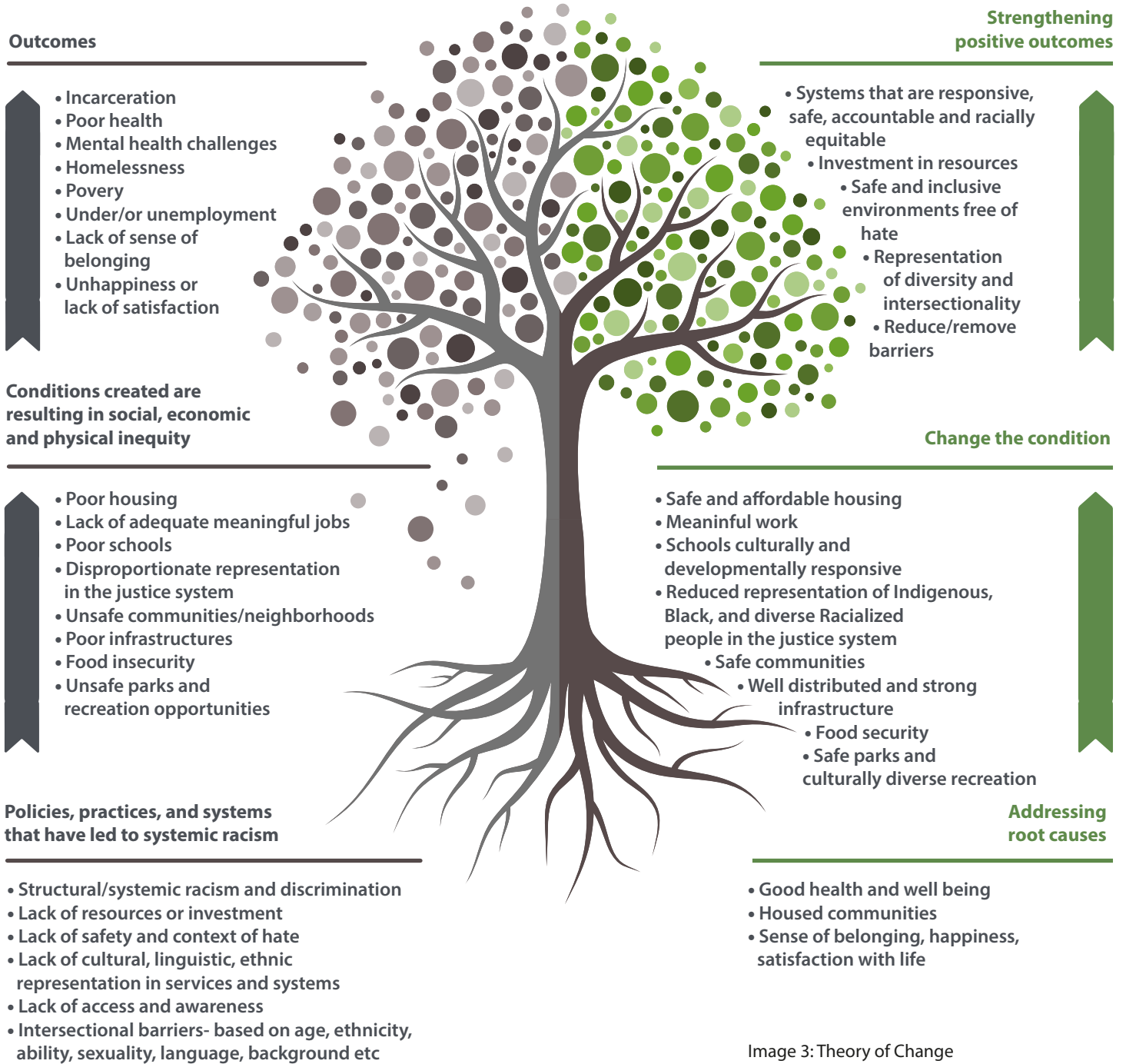


Image 3: Theory of Change

Our theory of change proposes that in order to build an anti-racist city, the municipal government must activate four key levers of change. A lever can be understood as a decision-making tool or frame that can dynamically be used to shift, direct and change public services, policies and structures. These levers, once activated, can create a cascade of changes across services and processes within a system. The levers are: **strengthen representation** to ensure services are informed or led and designed by Indigenous, Black and diverse Racialized communities; build a **participatory and impact-focused governance** model for empowering Indigenous, Black and diverse Racialized communities to lead change; **improve service accessibility and responsiveness** to create racial equity in services and their impacts; and **increased accountability** to the community through measurement and transparency.



Image 4: Key Levers of Change

Key recommendations for transformative change are identified below:

- 1. Representation** of Indigenous, Black, and diverse other Racialized individuals (with attention to intersectionality such as gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, ability among other criteria) employed in front-line as well as management and leadership positions. Key **recommended actions by community** include:
  - increase representation of Indigenous, Black, and diverse other Racialized individuals within The City leadership and staff. This includes addressing barriers around hiring, retention, and promotion;
  - track and publish data on representation including demographics of employment across The City;
  - increase racial (intersectional) representation within all City public materials, images, information, and events.
- 2. Participatory governance** allows for communities to actively collaborate throughout any political process. Impact-driven governance ensures that community role does not end with co-development, but instead effectively focuses on community impact as the central metric to assess efficacy of policies, services, and programs. Key **recommended actions by community** include:
  - create an anti-racism policy and declaration that will support the sustainability of anti-racism work for future generations. This will help to build links to previous reconciliation and equity work;
  - adopt a shared racial equity framework to standardize anti-racism work across The City. The framework is currently being developed by the Anti-Racism program team with the aim of supporting a shared vision of racial equity;
  - create an anti-racism and equity office to ensure alignment across The City. It also places equity outcomes at the highest priority with other corporate goals such as safety, thereby ensuring sustainability through financial resources and staffing for this work;
  - increase collaborative work internally to support the implementation of the Strategy;
  - take a co-development approach to program and policy design and implementation; and
  - strengthen community engagement activities.
- 3. Accessibility and responsiveness** address economic, linguistic, geographic, systemic, and other barriers that may prevent or limit people's ability or willingness to engage with services. Key **recommended actions by community** include:
  - collect racially disaggregated data on service access and outcomes for Indigenous, Black, and diverse Racialized communities (this action is also recommended in other levers). Involving community members in this process shows greater efficacy and impact;
  - implement systemic changes to ensure services are responsive to access needs. These include first language translation, ensuring information is provided in ways community can understand and technology supports;
  - increase awareness of City services and community opportunities through non-traditional streams. Support new, community-based methods to promote and raise awareness of City services and how to access them to raise public awareness. Ensure services account for cultural, linguistic, disability/accessibility, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religious, age among other contexts of families and communities; and
  - implement training for all staff and integrate related performance metrics into staff reviews.

**4. Accountability** both within The City and the community of Calgary attached to tangible and measurable outcomes. Key **recommended actions by community** include:

- build a joint accountability framework that encompasses all City services and subsidiaries including Calgary Police Service, Calgary Arts Development, Calgary Economic Development, and Calgary Housing Company, amongst others;
- create an independent auditing body/group composed of trained evaluators, equity specialists, and community leaders including the Anti-Racism Action Committee to review the progress made on racial equity goals;
- strengthen transparency in public engagement and communication. Use a network approach with grassroots / community organizations working on anti-racism goals to create a clear and consistent model of communication and engagement channels;
- strengthen lines of accountability of The City programs and services to City Council on anti-racism actions through regular impact reports;
- build direct accountability to community and citizen committees in service delivery;
- strengthen processes that enforce individual accountability within The City alongside systemic accountability. This can include actions that build competency, knowledge and training for City staff/leadership, as well as enforce policies and procedures to build an anti-racist City government; and
- build accountability around previous and current racial equity work with the public. This can be a part of the auditing process identified above.



