

Equity & Anti-Racism Legislation Engagement

WHAT WE HEARD

Equity and Anti-Racism Legislation

Due to the importance of addressing hate, inequity and racism, Premier Houston invited members from the two opposition parties to join government members in forming an All-Party Committee to support the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives (OEA) in drafting the equity, anti-hate and anti-racism legislation to be introduced in spring 2022. The All-Party Committee began meeting in December 2021 and was supported by OEA.

OEA has been tasked with creating, in collaboration with partners and communities, a whole-of-government approach to address systemic hate, inequity, racism and ableism, promote diversity, and achieve anti-racist and equitable outcomes that improve the economic and social well-being of Nova Scotians.

The proposed legislation establishes a commitment to this work and provides Nova Scotians with a framework within which government will take action with community to identify and address systemic hate, inequity and racism. The legislation also enables government to require its partners in the public sector, like municipalities, villages, universities and colleges, and Crown Corporations, to take action in this area.

This legislation is the first of its kind in Canada to address hate, inequity and racism together. Nova Scotia is proud to lead the way in this important work, alongside partners and in collaboration with the communities we serve.

Engagement

As a foundation for this work, OEA engaged with Nova Scotians in January and February 2022 to gather their feedback on proposed elements in the legislation. OEA also drew upon insights from previous engagements with communities to honour the feedback communities have provided to government over the past years and decades.

This engagement is aligned with OEA's desire, in all its work, to 'work with' rather than 'do to' communities.

How we Engaged

We provided all Nova Scotians with multiple opportunities to engage on the proposed legislation, while making a focused effort to engage with those from or serving equity, marginalized and racialized communities. The opportunities we provided were:

- An intuitive engagement website (oeaengagement.ca) which allowed for written feedback and provided Nova Scotians with materials to review and comment on.
- An email address correspondenceoea@novascotia.ca, a phone line, and an online survey for more feedback opportunities.
- More than 70 virtual sessions both with specific communities and organizations and sessions open to the general public.

Who we Engaged

It is vital that this legislation is shaped by the voices of Nova Scotians and informed by other government departments.

During January and February 2022, OEA engaged directly with 1223 Nova Scotians through 71 virtual engagement sessions, totaling 107 hours of engagement.

- 744 Nova Scotians visited our engagement website and interacted with the legislation materials available;
- 56 Nova Scotians answered our survey; and
- Our Facebook posts reached 3,120 Nova Scotians.

What We Heard

Overwhelmingly the response to the proposed legislation was positive. Many participants expressed their hesitation, apprehension, and mistrust of government, but appreciated the efforts and opportunity to move the needle in a positive direction. Nova Scotians we connected with appreciated that legislation alone will not address all their concerns but see this as a significant step forward. The following themes emerged from the feedback:



Acknowledge Hate, Inequity and Racism Exists in Nova Scotia

Communities stressed the importance of acknowledging that hate, inequity and racism exist in the province. Acknowledging there are problems to solve is a meaningful starting point for this work. For Nova Scotians to understand the importance of this legislation, communities want the history of hate, racism, inequities, discrimination and colonization in Nova Scotia mentioned and acknowledged factually and clearly and not “watered down” or minimized.

Importance of Acknowledging Community-Specific Issues

Communities shared the importance of ensuring there is space within this work to address specific areas of historic and ongoing hate, inequity and racism. They noted that it will be important for government and its partners to be able to pivot to address emerging trends in hate, inequity and racism.

Educating Nova Scotians

People shared that government should enhance efforts to educate Nova Scotians on the historical and current lived experiences of equity, marginalized and racialized communities. This education also needs to be between communities to tackle intercultural racism, hate and discrimination.

This education needs to be formal—included in the curriculum for P-12 schools and post-secondary schools—and informal, through community workshops and education to aid in enhancing community voices and community stories.

Connecting Communities

Participants said that OEA should focus on connecting equity, marginalized and racialized communities with each other.

Communities gave OEA suggestions about how to make a community network/hub successful, including:

- ensure the network enhances and does not take away from existing groups and networks;
- have the network be co-developed by communities and government;
- have the network build connections between communities to address intersectionality and intercultural hate and racism;

- have the network provide support, education and training resources to communities, similar to the Anti-Racism Network in British Columbia (Resilience BC).

Changing How Policy is Made in Government

Government needs to make changes to the way it develops policies (legislation, regulations, policy, guidelines, etc.) that drive the development of programs and the delivery of services. Policy-making needs to involve communities more from the beginning in identifying issues to be tackled and determining what solutions are available. Engagement must be done at the beginning, end and throughout the development of policy.

Accountability is Key

It is important that government continue to connect with communities and engage on the work that will stem from this legislation. Communities are interested in the concept of an equity dashboard and an annual report to the Legislature.

It is important that government continues to develop new and innovative ways to be accountable to Nova Scotians.

A strategy should be guided and informed by communities and accompanied by an accountability framework that tracks progress and has consequences if action isn't taken.

Actions Matter in Creating Trust

Legislation is an important step forward, but the actions stemming from the legislation will be crucial in earning community trust. Words are not enough. Government must act on recommendations that have been made in past reports that have not been delivered on.

Concerns Regarding Safety in the Workplace

Many community members raised concerns regarding hate, inequity and racism at their place of work. Some were unaware how to raise issues, while others have seen a lack of meaningful consequences for the offending act, or even experienced retaliation for raising the issue.

Communities want the province to analyse the effectiveness of current processes and consider what changes and improvements need to be made to create physically and psychologically safe workplaces.



Be Explicit about Addressing Intersectionality

Communities highlighted the need to ensure that we are intentional in this work about addressing how intersectionality can affect individuals and communities.

When an individual is from more than one community, they can face hate, inequity, and racism from both communities as well as from the broader population. For example, a transwoman who is African Nova Scotian (ANS) may experience hate, inequity, and racism from both the ANS and 2SLGTBQQIA+ communities, as well as hate, inequity, and racism from the broader population and systems and programs that were designed without her in mind. Her unique experience and the intersectionality of her experiences must be considered when addressing systemic hate, inequity and racism.

Immigration and Education Recognition

Immigrant communities raised concerns regarding the lack of recognition for foreign education credentials and the additional costs associated with returning to school for credentials they currently have from other jurisdictions.

Social Media and Online Racism

There was significant conversation and dialogue regarding hate, racism, and discrimination experienced through online platforms and social media. Communities urged government to address these issues as they do not feel safe online and do not believe enough has been and is being done to address this unique concern.

Create Shared and Inclusive Language

In this space, language is important, and its impact can be significant. Communities and government partners expressed the need for common understanding about the various terms being used within the legislation, like systemic hate, inequity and racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, ableism, and the work that will flow from it. These terms need to be defined with community in the strategy.

Some communities felt left out on government forms and wanted to feel more reflected and included. Members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community discussed the need for revisions on government forms to be inclusive of their identities and preferred pronoun usage.

Clarity on Scope of this Work

Within the strategy work, it will be important for government to identify the communities that are included in this work. For example, while it may be obvious to some that racialized communities, such as African Nova Scotians and people of Indigenous descent, are part of this work, whereas communities, such as the 2SLGTBQQIA+ community and persons living with disabilities may not as easily see themselves as included.

Need to Involve Youth

Adding to the feedback on the need for better education, communities shared that in the upcoming strategy work there needs to be an emphasis on engaging with and acting explicitly with youth.

Survey Responses

Following each virtual engagement session, participants were sent a survey to complete, if they desired. The survey was also located on the OEA engagement site for any visitor to complete. The survey is attached for reference in Appendix A. The following section of this report speaks to what we heard in the surveys.

In response to the proposed **guiding principles**, 61.4% of all respondents agreed with the principles. Suggestions for other principles included:

- The existence of systemic racism must be explicitly and openly acknowledged.
- Although equity and anti-racism is a shared responsibility, it should not be shared equally. The marginalized are not responsible for the hate and racism against them.
- There needs to be a principle that acknowledges the role government has played in systemic racism, discrimination, and inequity in our province at all levels.

In response to the five proposed **focus areas**, 61.4% of respondents agreed with the principles. Respondents suggested government consider adding a focus area specifically on youth.

Suggestions for the **community network** were included earlier in this report (on P4).

In relation to **equity and race-informed data**: communities overall support improved collection and interpretation of equity and race-informed data across government. They agreed that collection and use of the data needs to involve communities. Feedback stressed that the data be used to unite and not further divide communities.

When we asked Nova Scotians what **success** will look like if this legislation is passed and implemented effectively, this is what they shared:

More inclusion and representation

- Less segregated communities in Nova Scotia.
- Communities being genuinely involved in government work.
- Inclusive groups of marginalized people reporting feeling heard, respected, and included in this work with their goals and ideas actually being implemented.
- More equity, marginalized and racialized persons in leadership and governmental roles.
- Being truly inclusive of all equity-seeking people.
- Communities feel valued, needed and validated.

More inclusive education

- When education on communities is meaningfully embedded into the curriculum, where colonial history is not taught as history.
- Implementing anti-racist education. Utilizing resources, content and lesson plans that are reflective and inclusive of all cultures.

Safer communities and workplaces

- Safe and inclusive workplaces throughout the province.
- No tolerance for incidents of racism.
- Equity, marginalized and racialized people feeling safe.

Greater awareness

- Greater awareness of the impact of hate, inequity and racism on individuals and communities, and demonstrable progress towards achieving equity for all Nova Scotians.

Better training

- Mandatory “meaningful” diversity training with lived experience for all public servants and public-facing organizations.
- Employees in areas such as health, law and education regularly engage in anti-hate and anti-racism training.

Better accountability

- Those most responsible for systemic failure – including the police and government – are properly held accountable.

What's Next

If the proposed legislation is passed in the Legislature in spring 2022, OEA will begin reaching out to Nova Scotians shortly afterward to discuss specific actions to be included in a strategy to address hate, inequity and racism in the province.

These actions will focus on the various sectors that most impact equity, marginalized and racialized communities in the province, for example: justice, health, community services, education and employment.

Contact us:

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Or via our engagement site at:

oeaengagement.ca