

Anti-Black Racism Working Group (ABRWG)

Who are we?

The Pickering Public Library Anti-Black Racism Working Group (ABRWG) is a community-based group, focusing on Library services through a lens of anti-Black racism. Consisting of appointed community volunteers, the ABRWG reviews community feedback, identifies priorities and collaborates with library staff to create and implement action plans for improvements and enhancements to library services as well as internal processes. Recommendations and action plans focus on addressing identified systemic discrimination impacting the library experience for community members who self-identify as Black.

Current ABRWG Members



Charmain
Brown



Nicole
Facey



Salome
Odeny



Romina
Diaz
(Co-Chair)



Scerena
Officer



Samantha
Adebisi



Teronie
Donaldson
(Co-Chair)

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ABRWG Impact

900+
Hours of
Collaboration

ABRWG members have volunteered over 900 hours since October 2020.

These hours have been spent meeting with staff and community members through formal meetings, community engagement events, and co-designing action plans to address the key priority areas.

The work of the ABRWG has resulted in 5 sets of recommendations and work plans, each clearly outlining strategies and accountability measures, for addressing concerns, gaps, and barriers identified through community feedback.

All 5 work plans are in implementation with progress reports due annually, presented by staff to the ABRWG.

In 2025, 2 new recommendation lists are being developed with implementation to begin by year end.

5
Recommendation
Lists and Work
Plans

200+
Library
Professionals
Reached

To extend the impact of the ABRWG, a one of a kind community-based group when it comes to the public library sector, ABRWG members alongside library staff have presented to over 200 public library professionals from across Canada and the United States at international library conferences. Plus the work has been shared in other library forums.

The Ontario Public Library Service Awards recognizes Ontario's public libraries for creative library service ideas. In 2022 the ABRWG was shortlisted for the Minister's Award for Innovation.

The above information is based on data from October 2020 to July 2025.

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Consultation and Collaboration

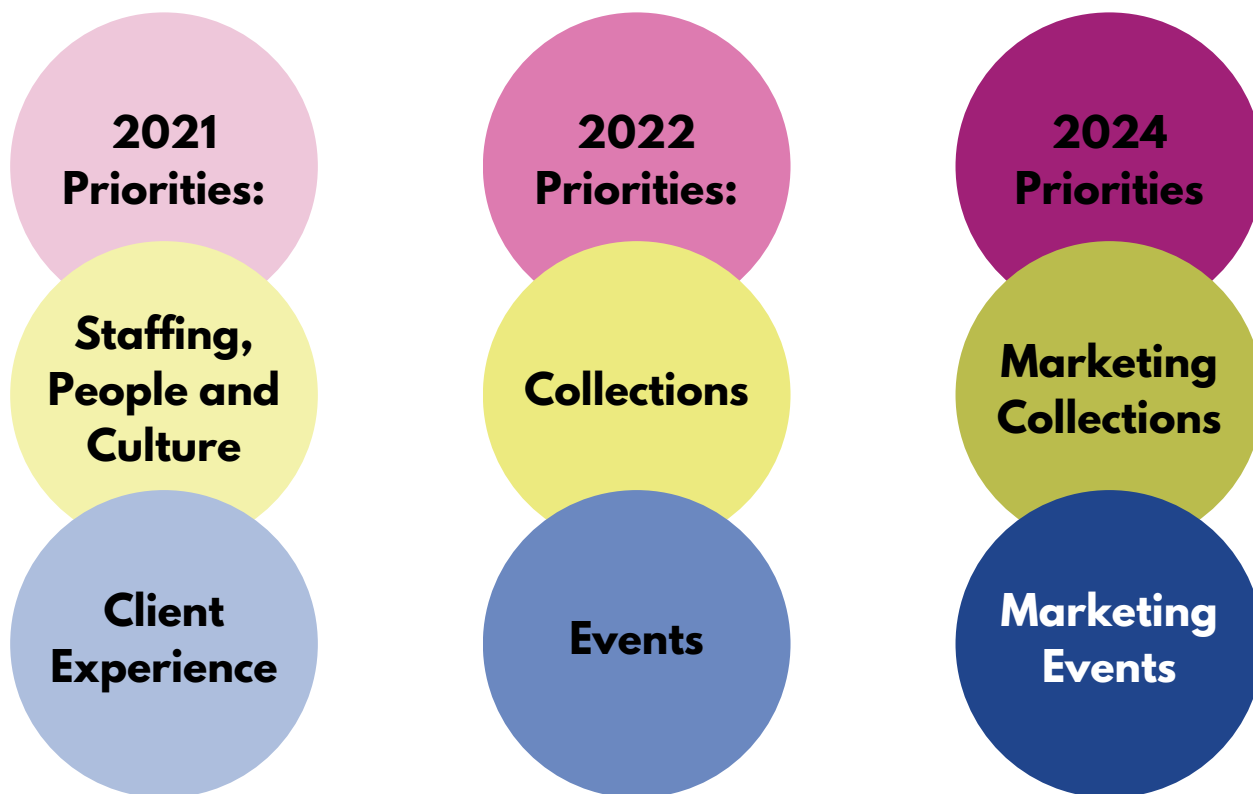
Together, the ABRWG and library staff co-designed a consultation and collaboration model that aims to provide ABRWG members with a thorough understanding of existing library processes and practices, so that discussions are informed and transparent.

ABRWG members engage directly with key library staff involved with leading the various services areas, and collectively identify ways existing library processes and practices could be enhanced to address concerns and gaps identified by the community.

Through these discussions, recommendations and work plans are developed. Library staff are then responsible for the implementation and must provide progress reports as part of the ABRWG's annual work plans.

Priorities

Based on community feedback and the lived experiences of ABRWG members, priorities were developed to ensure the resulting recommendations and actions plan would directly address the concerns, gaps, and barriers identified by community residents and library clients.



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Staffing, People and Culture

Based on ABRWG discussions regarding People and Culture (also referred to as Human Resources), the following problems were identified:

- Clients do not see themselves in the Library's workforce and this prevents a sense of belonging, welcoming, or safety.
- There is a lack of staff training accountability as it relates to diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and anti-oppression (AO).
- Concerns were raised about the lack of transparency and a lack of demonstrated DEI and AO considerations in the Library's current recruitment process.

Recommendations from the ABRWG

Enhance Interviews and Job Posting Reach

- Hiring interview questions should include situations regarding various instances of prejudice that measure the applicant's insight into their lived DEI/AO experience and training.
- Job listings should be advertised on platforms frequently used by the BIPOC community.
- Interviewing panels need to show diversity and consist of interviewers with DEI/AO and anti-racism lived experience or extensive training.

Transparency in Recruitment

- Offer general information sessions facilitated by staff in related positions advertised, so interested applicants can ask staff questions about their experiences working at the library.
- Job postings should include a distinct statement about seeking applicants who identify as people of colour and with lived experience, and list DEI/AO experience/training as an asset.

Staff Training

- Implement assessments for staff, after all DEI/AO training to measure knowledge gained and individual application.
- DEI/AO questions should be included in annual performance reviews to ensure staff are held accountable for demonstrating progress.
- Regularly bring forth examples of prejudice in staff meetings to ensure scenarios can be identified and articulated. Leadership must follow up where there are concerns and/or knowledge gaps are observed.

Client Experience

Based on ABRWG discussions regarding Client Experience, the following problems were identified:

- Clients experience negative interactions with staff that involve microaggressions. This leads to a lack of trust and disengagement.
- Black youth observe and experience hyper-surveillance by staff and security guards. This has led to reduced library visits and/or reduced use of services.

Recommendations from the ABRWG

Security Guard Training

- Regular assigned security guards should be required to participate in DEI/AO training with library staff.
- Prepare DEI/AO training resources for substitute guards that can be provided on site for the day of the substitute assignment.
- Offer separate training for security guards specific to their job at the library.

Staff Engage with Clients

- Enhance client experience and sense of belonging for visitors. Communicate with clients about staff roles and responsibilities to meet their needs (including clarifying the expectation of staff “roving”).

Evaluate RFP

- Establish a clear understanding of what is included in the City of Pickering’s Request for Proposal (RFP) process and structure for hiring a third-party security company and evaluate the existing DEI/AO assessment process.

Youth Voice

- Staff should create an ABRWG youth-focused subcommittee to further understand the matters of surveillance and security interactions. This committee should include Pickering teens to represent and engage other teen community members.

Collections

Based on ABRWG discussions regarding Collections, the following problems were identified:

- The current collections lack diversity and representation for the Black community, which results in clients feeling underrepresented and a lack of inclusion when using the print and digital collections.
- Black authors (Canadian and global) and Black history, and stories from the African and Caribbean diasporas are underrepresented in the existing available collections.

Recommendations from the ABRWG

Collection Procurement

- Ensure Library staff responsible for selecting collections materials are action-oriented in sourcing and creating diverse collections and actively collaborate with people who identify as Black where lived experience is not represented. These could include industry peers, community members, subject matter experts or interest groups.
- Create a procurement plan focusing on improving representation in collections. Identify methods to begin tracking procurement and growth of diverse materials over time.
- Raise community awareness and understanding of the opportunity to suggest materials for addition to the library's collections.

Collection Curation and Promotions

- Create a process to ensure all library staff have the knowledge, skills and tools needed to include diverse materials in all promotions.
- Create and promote book/resource lists featuring Black content year-round.
- Develop in-library and virtual displays that promote and spotlight the Black experience.

Library Events

Based on ABRWG discussions regarding library events, the following problems were identified:

- There are insufficient offerings of Black-focused events at the library.
- Current events offered at the library lack Black staff facilitators and Black external presenters which leads to a reduced sense of belonging for many clients.
- Event staff may not be able to effectively plan and lead Black-focused events on their own due to a lack of lived experience.

Recommendations from the ABRWG

Year-Round Events

- Use the 'DEI Date of Significance Calendar' to identify and train staff on significant opportunities throughout the year to highlight through events outside of February (Black History Month).
- Each functional area of the Events Team must host one event every other month focused on Black history, stories, or culture.
- Offer a 5-Minute Film Festival (5MFF) "Black Filmmakers in Film" series film club during the 2023 5MFF season with a community partner.

Representation in Facilitators

- Promote the Events Submission Form to make it more known and accessible within the Black community. This will encourage more input and ideas into events.
- Simplify the Events Submission Form. Add an option to provide recommendations for Black-focused events.
- When reviewing proposals, prioritize events proposed by Black facilitators, organizations, and community members.
- Share resources about event partnership opportunities across functional areas to raise staff awareness about local Black facilitators and Black-focused organizations.

Welcoming Event Spaces

- Conduct recurring and relevant DEI/AO and ABR training/learning for event staff to challenge mental models and prejudices to enhance welcoming spaces at events.
- Reflect diversity in the public promotions for library events.
- Create a clear framework to ensure event spaces are safe, inclusive, and set the expectation for all to contribute to a sense of belonging.
- Reflect diversity and support Black community members by purchasing prizes for events, event supplies, and catering, through local Black-owned businesses.

Marketing Collections and Events

Based on ABRWG discussions regarding marketing collections and marketing events, the following problems were identified:

- Current events marketing and collections marketing may not reach and/or resonate with Black community members effectively.
- Promotions do not adequately include diverse imagery and event descriptions do not adequately create a sense of belonging or representation.

Recommendations from the ABRWG

Increase Black Community Representation in Events Promotions

- Review all event titles, descriptions, and photos used in event promotions for improvement. Look for opportunities to connect with diverse library clients and utilize more diverse photos of real clients and staff.
- Highlight Black facilitators involved with events.

Create Space for Black-Focused Content on Website

- Create a landing page for Black content on the library's website.
- Highlight events with Black facilitators, book lists and resources.
- Feature more connections to the ABRWG page to keep the community informed about the work and outcomes.

Increase Visibility of Diverse Voices in Collections Promotions

- Promote diverse Black voices in the collection. Create a monthly list that focuses on obscure content in the collection and highlights Black voices.
- Create featured content of ABRWG members showcasing recommendations from our collection. Highlight diverse items in the collection by getting members to highlight items they recommend. This content can be used on social media and put on the Black resources page on the website.

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