OCASI-Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) Policy

[Updated December 2023]

Overview

Introduction

“Racism and colonialism are anything but neutral” - Debbie Douglas, February 9th, 2023.

In June 2013, OCASI updated its Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Policy through consultation with leaders in the equity space. The policy was revised in 2003, and is a culmination of work and efforts that rely on the knowledge and experience of leaders and staff at OCASI member agencies.

Building on the work and relationships established during the drafting of the 2013 version, the revised ARAO Policy practiced a similar participatory approach involving extensive discussions, conversations, and decision-making. The process of this consultation demonstrates the benefits of democratic and collective work across levels. It has also revealed the including diverse voices and perspectives informed and improved this review.

The ARAO Policy development process acknowledges the value, collaboration, and commitment of OCASI members and agencies to confront racism and oppression in the im/migrant and refugee-serving sector and Canada.

Background

Efforts to combat racism must recognize and address the varying needs of protected groups[1] who have and continue to experience disproportionate rates of injustice and inequity due to the lasting legacies of colonialism and racism in Canada. Systemic and institutional erasure ensure the continued subjugation and exclusion of specific populations at disproportionate rates.

Consequently, certain groups have life chances and outcomes and their full participation, representation, and existence in Canadian society directly and profoundly impacted.

[1] Vis/invisible and personal characteristics are identified under Canadian federal, provincial, and territorial legislation that protects groups against discrimination. The Canadian Human Rights Act prohibited grounds including race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex (including pregnancy and childbirth), sexual orientation, marital status, gender identity and expression, family status, disability, genetic characteristics, and a conviction for which a pardon has been granted or a record suspension ordered . Along with these, The Ontario Human Rights Code protects people from discrimination in specific situations on 17 grounds: citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding), family status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, receipt of public assistance (in housing) and record of offences (in employment).

Accepting, maintaining, and implementing anti-racist and anti-oppressive work does not privilege racialized people. Instead, it recognizes and aims to correct inherent inequities in societal, structures and systems that create, maintain, or perpetuate disparities at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels.

While this ARAO Policy broadly covers anti-racism and anti-oppression, additional efforts should be undertaken to understand, demand, prioritize specific groups' needs, protection, and advancement.

Environmental Assessment

OCASI carried out an environmental assessment in November 2021 to identify changes needed to address and confront racism within the im/migrant and refugee serving sector.

The assessment produced several recommendations for OCASI and the immigrant and refugee-serving sector on building more equitable and socially just outcomes for all.OCASI continues to respond to and lead ongoing efforts to progress equity in the sector.

Jurisdictional Coverage and Oversight of Policy

OCASI provides this policy and implementation guide as one that sector organizations can adopt or adapt. OCASI is not responsible for organizational oversight and implementation of this/any ARAO Policy.

Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Policy

The Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) Policy has been adopted by **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION ("ORGANIZATION")** to understand, prioritize, and advance anti-racism and anti-oppression in our organization.

The ARAO Policy supports **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION ("ORGANIZATION")** proactively and systematically to address racism and oppression within our organization as an employer and as a service provider.

The ARAO Policy reflects legislation and the mission and vision of **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION ("ORGANIZATION").**

The ARAO Policy (revised 2023) is meant to inform **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION ("ORGANIZATION")** as a transformative workplace and service environment encouraging restorative, healing, and nurturing space for those who face racism and other oppressions that affect their ability to participate in Canadian life.

Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO)

Anti-racism and Anti-Oppression is a framework that supports identifying and challenging racist or oppressive systems. ARAO considers structural, institutional, ideological, and organizational practices that create and perpetuate power imbalances in society. ARAO aims to equalize power imbalances and change the values that create different forms of oppression and racism in communities and society.

Applying an Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppressive framework enables organizations to identify, respond to and critique different forms of oppression and racism with the goal of centering

equity and social justice within the organization with a potential for broader impact in Ontario and Canada.

See Glossary of Terms for definitions of each term.

Purpose

We recognize that racism, oppression, and social, systemic, and institutional barriers impact and can limit im/migrants' and refugees' contributions and potential to engage with organizations, their communities and Canada at all levels.

To this end, a sector-wide ARAO Policy aims to foster anti-racism and anti-oppression values and attitudes, and develop anti-racism-anti-oppression knowledge and practices within the im/migrant and refugee service sector.

Goal

This ARAO Policy provides direction to support organizations to align with the immigrant and refugee-serving sector's commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression.

Through support, availability of information, active participation and ongoing practices and commitment, the im/migrant and refugee serving sector can continually work toward ensuring equitable access to opportunity, service(s), service delivery, representation, and full participation of im/migrants and refugees in Ontario and Canada.

Scope

The scope of the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) Policy is to identify, recognize and address anti-racism and anti-oppression across the im/migrant and refugee serving sector. The ARAO Policy is available for all OCASI member agencies to adopt or adapt.

By adopting this policy, **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION ("ORGANIZATION")** commits to aligning with the purpose and goal of addressing and confronting racism and oppression in Ontario. The organization will be **autonomous/independent and accountable** for introducing, implementing, and upholding an ARAO Policy in good faith.

Intersectional Lens

An intersectional lens and feminist lens, including Black-feminist perspectives and reference to disability justice, were applied. When implementing this ARAO Policy, adoptees and signees/organizations should undertake and enforce the policy and its application using an intersectional lens.

That includes considering grounds protected under The Ontario Human Rights Code and equality rights protected under Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. An intersectional lens will also consider social determinants of health.

Due to the overlapping and intersecting ways racism and oppression manifest or arise in individual experience and Canadian society, we must take careful and intentional action to produce equitable, accessible, and tangible outcomes for Indigenous peoples, Black and racialized peoples, marginalized groups, and for im/migrants and refugees.

Policy Integration

The ARAO policy aims to support ongoing work to combat racism and oppression in organizations, with broader impact in the sector and society.

We recognize that using and applying an intersectional lens as part of the integration and implementation process is essential to the organization's ability to implement this policy and carry out its purpose.

While understanding the subject matter of anti-racism and anti-oppression will vary, we have set forth with this policy to assert and support challenging racism and oppression within organizations and the sector by:

- Confronting systemic and institutional inequities through practice and policy.
- De-centering whiteness and white privilege to challenge the perpetuation and support of inequity in the im/migrant and refugee serving sector and society broadly.
- Providing a resource to support organizations to confront racism and oppression.
- Supporting the economic, social, religious, and political advancement of Black and other racialized employees, marginalized groups, and im/migrants and refugees.
- Creating equitable access to opportunities and participation (life, work, and community) in organizations and service delivery.
- Challenging how knowledge is created, including how organizations serve and support employees and clients.

Critical integration and application across the sector will assume the policy will not apply unilaterally but instead uniquely support organizations in addressing, confronting, and remedying racist or oppressive acts. Therefore, introduction and implementation are intentional acts that require organizational practice to engage and enact this policy.

Policy Pillars Considerations for Adaptation/Adoption of ARAO Policy

Organizations can refer to the pillars to align with policy objectives to support internal implementation and the mission of the sector to combat racism and oppression. Four areas, also called Pillars, align with policy areas and have been identified to create consistency across member organizations choosing to adopt or adapt a version of this policy.

1. Organizational Accountability (Mission, Values and Beliefs
    a. Identify what the organization **champions (mission, values, beliefs)**, **overall commitment (why/how the organization stands behind its mission and vision,** and **aims (impact)** (1.1)
2. Organizational Guiding Principles
    a. Identify a commitment to **address, challenge and eliminate racism and other oppressions** within organizational systems, policies and practices and influence/impact societal changes (2.1)
    b. Must identify Commitment to **advancing solidarity** with First Nations, Inuit & Metis peoples **through relationship building and repair with Indigenous communities** (2.1)
    c. Must identify the intended **purpose** of the policy (2.2)

3. Organizational Implementation
    a. Identify **persons** who will be responsible for **implementation, upholding and oversigh**t of the ARAO Policy (3.1)
4. Related Policies
    a. Identify and list **related policies or resources** that will support the implementation, oversight and upholding of the ARAO Policy (4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

Invitation for Adaptation/Adoption

In this spirit, we invite OCASI member agencies to introduce this document to support the ongoing effort to address racism in the im/migrant and refugee serving sector. Member agencies can also refer to the Implementation Guide to support the organization in introducing, implementing, and socializing ARAO and a respective policy.

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the collaborative efforts of OCASI staff, the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Advisory Panel and ASHARE Group Inc. We also highlight and thank the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Advisory Panel members for their ongoing engagement, commitment, and tremendous championing and contributions.

The advisory committee comprises representatives from OCASI member agencies within the council.

2022-2023 OCASI Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Policy Advisory Panel

- Nicolas Arnaud-Goddet
- Joan Simpson
- Rifat Hussain
- Kelly MacKenzie
- Magdiel Hoste
- Wessam Ayad
- Selahadin Getahun
- Shaneeza Nazseer Ally
- Cesar Peralta
- Nadia Umadat
- Migdalia Jones
- Brittney Emslie
- Angelica Hernandez
- Titi Katibi

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