



# THE ONYX INITIATIVE: A NEW NON-PROFIT BRIDGING THE SYSTEMIC GAP IN CORPORATE CANADA'S RECRUITMENT OF BLACK STUDENTS

*Bell Canada, TD Bank Group and CILAR Join as Premier Partners  
Ryerson, McMaster, Brock, and George Brown Amongst Initial Educational Supporters*

**TORONTO, ON (October 21, 2020)** – Launching today, the Onyx Initiative is a Toronto based non-profit designed to address the pervasive gap that exists in the recruitment and selection of Black college and university students for roles in corporate Canada. A highly anticipated endeavour that is a direct response to the ongoing realities of anti-Black racism, systemic bias, and socioeconomic inequities, the Onyx Initiative is an innovative mentorship and training model that is generating widespread interest and excitement with corporations, educators, and the community.

According to Statistics Canada, Black Canadians with postsecondary degrees are under-represented in higher paying occupational groups compared to their white peers, with some industries showing greater disparities than others. This data, and the acknowledgement by corporations themselves that identifying candidates is a key challenge, underscored the need for intervention and support at the college, university, and internship levels and throughout a student's career with a comprehensive new support program.

"Current hiring practices adversely and disproportionately affect Black students who are often contending with a lack of family or social networks, a lack of knowledge about opportunities, and a lack of mentorships," said **Nigela Purboo, Founder and Executive Director, Onyx Initiative**. "The gap is perpetuated in future years as these ambitious young people enter the job market, unable to secure positions in their chosen fields or equal opportunities for advancement within companies, which is essential for their progression into executive roles. The fact that so many brilliant change-makers are excluded from premier talent pools was not something we could just continue to observe."



Onyx's program features two pillars - **Mentorship/Coaching** and **Online Training** - both designed to ensure students are equipped to thrive in their respective workplace environments. The comprehensive curriculum includes various types of personal and professional development, including interview preparation, time management, conflict resolution, anti-bias training, navigating social media, crafting resumes/cover letters, oral and written communication, and Excel and PowerPoint basics.

“What elevates our model, conceptually and tangibly, is the dual value proposition we offer – create an expansive supply of high potential Black talent and nurture a growing demand for more inclusive internships and full-time placements,” said **Wayne Purboo, Founder, Onyx Initiative**. “By serving as a pipeline and providing mutually beneficial solutions for recruitment, retention and promotion, we will help ensure more equitable processes and deliver the type of meaningful change that transforms lives, both in the short-term and for generations to come.”

Onyx Initiative has received a wealth of corporate, educational, and community support since it was first conceived. Its launch is a result of extraordinary support from Premier Partners [Bell Canada](#), [TD Bank Group](#) and the [Coalition of Innovation Leaders Against Racism](#) (CILAR), Founding Partner [PwC Canada](#),

Corporate Partner [Manulife](#), and Media Partner [BNN Bloomberg](#). Each has contributed substantial expertise and experience over the past several months to further enhance the model, and have committed to providing vital information, ongoing resources, and student placement.

“Bell is committed to taking concrete steps to identify and eliminate systemic racism in our company and industry, and to embracing proactive measures to identify, recruit and advance Black talent across the Bell group of companies,” said **Bernard le Duc, Bell's Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer**. “We're pleased to partner with the Onyx Initiative to create a new pipeline between post-secondary institutions and corporate Canada that will further strengthen Bell's talent pool as we continue to build our diverse and inclusive workplace. Engaging and investing in our people is a strategic imperative for Bell and partnerships like the Onyx Initiative are critical to ensuring our company remains one of Canada's top employers for young people and a leading diversity employer.”



“Diversity and inclusion are fundamental to TD’s culture and core values and we’re proud to be a founding member of the Onyx Initiative,” said **Girish Ganesan, Global Head of Diversity & Inclusion, TD Bank Group**. “The Onyx Initiative’s unique blend of recruitment, retention and mentorship for Black university and college students is supporting the next generation of Black leaders in Canada.”

“The Onyx Initiative is a great program that will ensure organizations are benefitting from the wealth of talent of Black post-secondary students,” said **Melanie Burns, SVP Human Resources, Talent Management, TD Bank Group**. “At TD, our goal is to embed diversity and inclusion throughout our recruitment and retention processes. That is why our early talent philosophy is about building a pipeline for diverse employees so that they can thrive and build a career that drives innovation and contributes to our growth.”

“The Onyx Initiative is a unique opportunity for innovation leaders to step up and bring about change together,” said **Yung Wu, CEO of MaRS and founder of CILAR**. “We have an obligation to our young Black talent to remove barriers that are preventing them as future changemakers from securing opportunities within our organizations and across the innovation sector.”

“As we all work towards eradicating systematic racism, it’s important to have leaders who have been fortunate to take the elevator up in their career, to now send the elevator down for others,” said **Armughan Ahmad, Co-Founder CILAR**. “CILAR together with Onyx will place a particular focus on Black youth development to provide equal opportunity in our fast-growing innovation economy.”

Onyx’s educational partners, Ryerson, McMaster, and Brock Universities and George Brown College, have also lent their invaluable time and talent to help identify the barriers to Black student success within corporate Canada and offer strategic solutions to increase representation. All partners will serve as liaisons for Onyx to engage with student career centers, Black/Caribbean Student Associations and other relevant campus grassroots organizations.

Although Onyx is primarily focused on the critical transition period between post-secondary education and entry level opportunities, the need to help students along the entire career path is also paramount and will be achieved via partnerships with notable community organizations, such as Lifelong Leadership Institute which works with students



at the high school level preparing them for college and university success, and BlackNorth Initiative whose mandate is to increase the representation of Black professionals in leadership and executive roles.

“We have been overwhelmed by the generosity and excitement of our premier, founding, and educational partners,” said Nigela. “This is a pivotal moment when we all must decide which side of history we will stand on, and we’re thrilled so many amazing partners have chosen to be on the right side with us.”

“Our holistic approach will ensure that once students secure positions, they feel confident enough in their abilities to thrive,” added Wayne. “As Black Canadians, we know first-hand the obstacles these students face and the cycle of inequality it perpetuates. To have leading businesses and institutions immediately recognize the need for and importance of our mandate has been deeply gratifying.”

Onboarding of students to the Onyx Initiative program will begin immediately, along with its expansion to additional corporations, colleges, and universities. For more information, please contact Onyx’s Director of Outreach, Keenan Lewis Jeppesen at [keenan@onyxinitiative.org](mailto:keenan@onyxinitiative.org).

### **About Onyx Initiative**

Onyx Initiative is a non-profit organization founded by entrepreneurs and philanthropists Wayne and Nigela Purboo in the wake of the global social justice movement and the subsequent call to action. The organization was established on the simple premise that all young people seeking meaningful employment and advancement should have an equal opportunity to do so. Onyx’s purpose is to expand the Black talent pipeline via cohesive, mutually beneficial partnerships to close the current systemic gap in the recruiting and selection of Black university and college students for roles in corporate Canada. Onyx’s model is based on a dual and complimentary value proposition – leverage post-secondary educational resources to create an expansive supply of high potential Black talent and collaborate with prominent businesses to nurture a growing demand for more inclusive internships and full-time placements.



## **About Bell**

Canada's largest communications company with more than 22 million consumer and business connections, Bell provides advanced broadband wireless, TV, Internet and business communication services throughout the country. Bell Media is Canada's premier multimedia company with leading assets in television, radio, out of home and digital media. Founded in Montréal in 1880, Bell is wholly owned by BCE Inc. (TSX, NYSE: BCE). To learn more, please visit [Bell.ca](https://bell.ca) or [BCE.ca](https://bce.ca). The Bell Let's Talk initiative promotes Canadian mental health with national awareness and anti-stigma campaigns like Bell Let's Talk Day and significant Bell funding of community care and access, research, and workplace leadership initiatives throughout the country. To learn more, please visit [Bell.ca/LetsTalk](https://bell.ca/LetsTalk).

## **About TD Bank Group**

The Toronto-Dominion Bank and its subsidiaries are collectively known as TD Bank Group ("TD" or the "Bank"). TD is the sixth largest bank in North America by branches and serves over 26 million customers in three key businesses operating in a number of locations in financial centres around the globe: Canadian Retail, including TD Canada Trust, TD Auto Finance Canada, TD Wealth (Canada), TD Direct Investing, and TD Insurance; U.S. Retail, including TD Bank, America's Most Convenient Bank<sup>®</sup>, TD Auto Finance U.S., TD Wealth (U.S.), and an investment in The Charles Schwab Corporation; and Wholesale Banking, including TD Securities. TD also ranks among the world's leading online financial services firms, with more than 14 million active online and mobile customers. TD had CDN\$1.7 trillion in assets on July 31, 2020. The Toronto-Dominion Bank trades under the symbol "TD" on the Toronto and New York Stock Exchanges.

## **About the Coalition of Innovation Leaders Against Racism**

The Coalition of Innovation Leaders Against Racism (CILAR) is a diverse group of senior business leaders in Canada committed to fighting anti-Black and systemic racism and creating pathways for diverse professionals to co-create the innovation economy. Using the strong institutional influence of its members, as well as a system-focused approach, CILAR aims to have a wide network impact to tackle racism. CILAR's commitment to long-term sustained progress underpins the investment its members will make together to make lasting change.



## **SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS**

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## **MEDIA CONTACT**

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