



## 2. COMMUNITY STRENGTH AND ENGAGEMENT

### Overview

This chapter focuses on engagement as defined in several ways. In the first instance, the Chapter considers the ways in which Black people in the GTA engage with different social, cultural and political communities, including through membership in clubs and community groups, volunteering, and voting. It also looks at engagement as a form of advocacy or mobilization, more specifically as a means of resisting racism. Finally, it examines how engagement, in the form of perseverance and a determination to bring about change, can be viewed as an attribute and asset of the Black community itself.

It should be noted that in this Chapter -- as throughout this report -- the term “community” can take on different meanings. In some cases, a community refers to a neighbourhood, the location in which a person lives or works. In other cases, a community is a group of people with similar interests or backgrounds, independent of location, such as a religious or cultural community. And in the case of BEP participants specifically, “community” can also refer to a racial (e.g., Black) or ethnic community that is local, regional or even international. These different types of communities tend to overlap. In this Chapter, “community” can be understood in any or all of these different contexts.

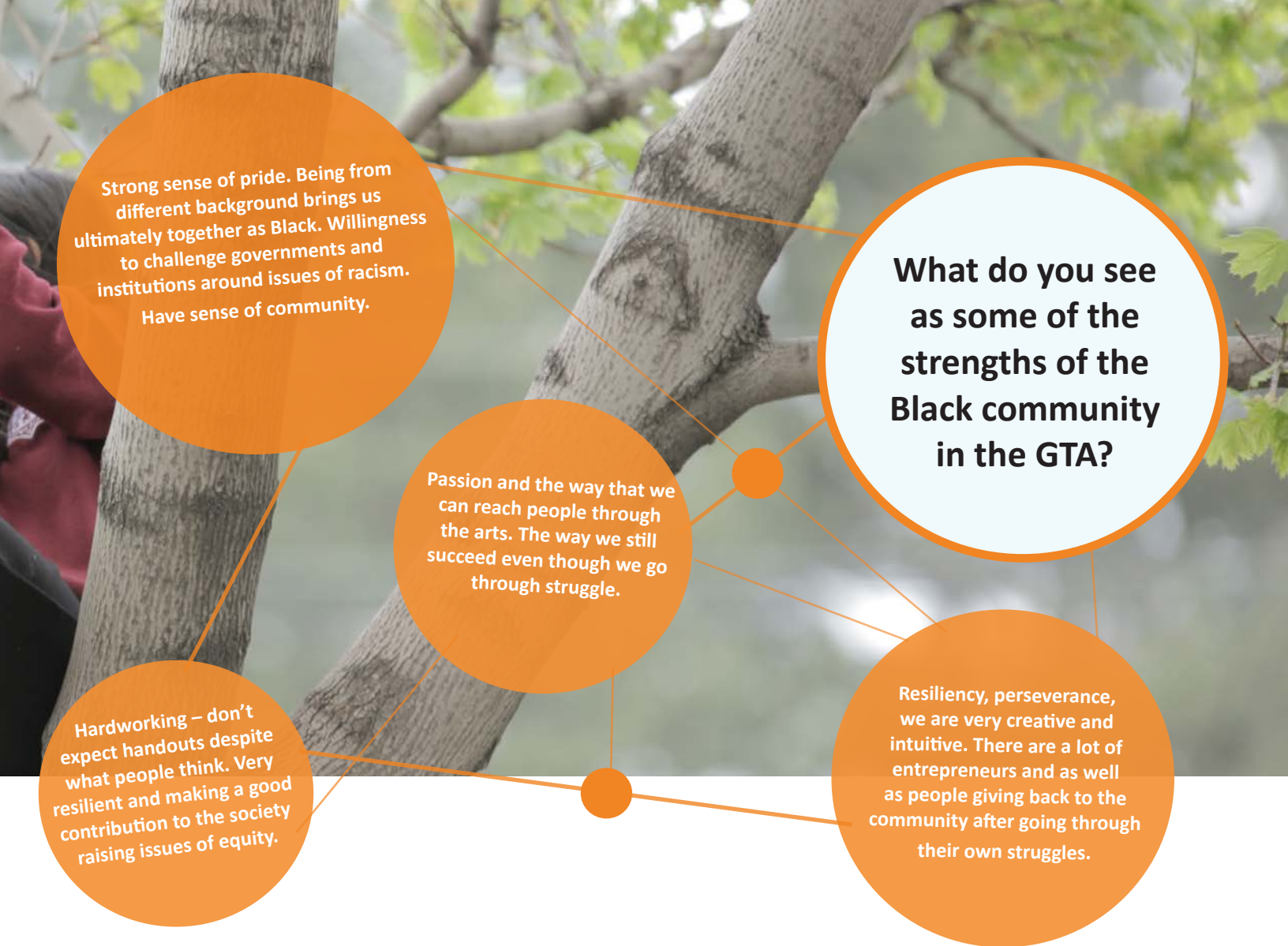
### Key Findings

BEP participants are active in their communities, and in some cases are more active than are Canadians on average. Most participants belong to one or more clubs or community groups, volunteer, follow politics and vote.

Four in five BEP participants belong to at least one type of club or community group, a proportion that is higher than that of Canadians on average.<sup>25</sup> BEP participants are most likely to belong to religious organizations or places of worship and local community organizations.<sup>26</sup> One in two also belongs to, or participates in, organizations or informal social groups that specifically address the interests of the Black community (see Figure 11).

Two in three BEP participants say they have volunteered at least some of their time during the past 12 months. Participants are more likely to volunteer than the national average, and those who volunteer tend to give more of their time than do Canadian volunteers on average.<sup>27</sup>

Religion and spirituality also constitute an important form of engagement for BEP participants. As mentioned previously, religious organizations are among those in which BEP participants are most likely to be active, with one in two currently belonging to this type of organization, and three in



Strong sense of pride. Being from different background brings us ultimately together as Black. Willingness to challenge governments and institutions around issues of racism. Have sense of community.

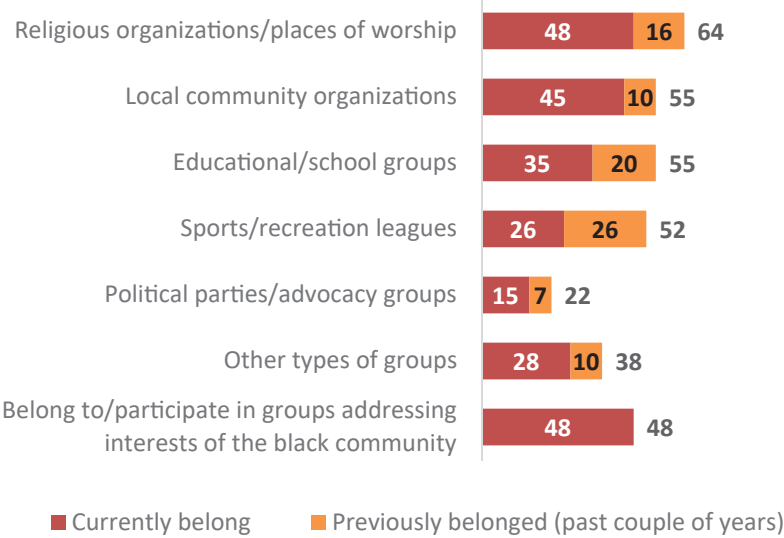
**What do you see as some of the strengths of the Black community in the GTA?**

Passion and the way that we can reach people through the arts. The way we still succeed even though we go through struggle.

Hardworking – don't expect handouts despite what people think. Very resilient and making a good contribution to the society raising issues of equity.

Resiliency, perseverance, we are very creative and intuitive. There are a lot of entrepreneurs and as well as people giving back to the community after going through their own struggles.

**(11) Participation in organizations and groups**

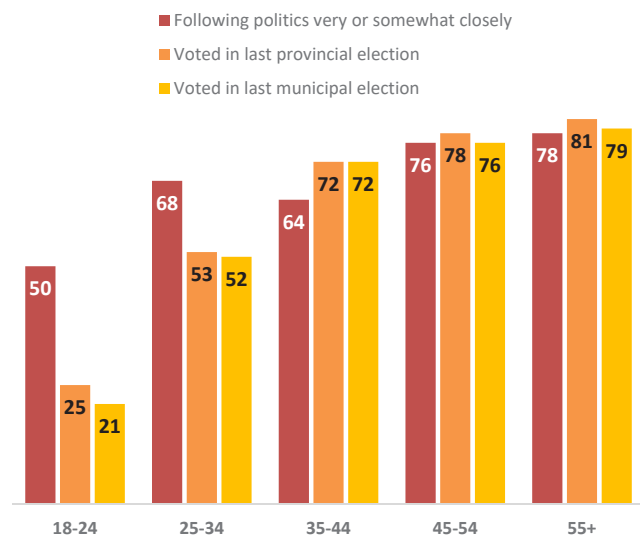


five having belonged in recent years. Beyond membership in a religious organization, BEP participants are very likely to say that spiritual values play an important role in their lives – nine in ten participants say that this is the case. Data from a national population survey (the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey) confirms that those indicating African or Caribbean heritage are much more likely than other Canadians to indicate that spiritual values play an important role in their lives.<sup>28</sup>

Historically, members of the Black community have used places of worship as a space of education, community building and resistance. Oftentimes, this was the only place to educate young Black people because the state would not provide education (or quality education) even when Black community members were allowed to enter schools. Intense levels of anti-Black racism politicized these spaces. Preachers and pastors became political organizers and community protectors.<sup>29</sup>

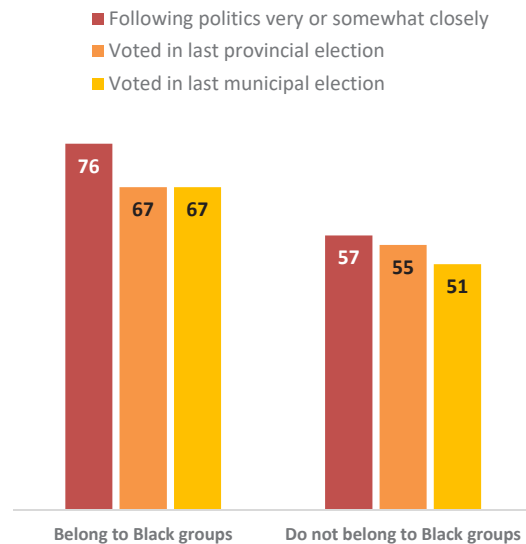
Community and political engagement is strongly related to both age and educational attainment. Compared with younger individuals, older participants volunteer more hours and are more likely to belong to groups that specifically address the interests of the Black community, to follow politics closely, and to vote in elections (see Figure 12). Compared with those whose highest level of education is a high school diploma or less, those who have a university degree are more likely to belong to political or community organizations, to belong to groups that specifically address the interests of the Black community, to volunteer, to follow politics, and to vote in elections.

(12) Political engagement (by age group)



BEP participants who are engaged with community organizations primarily serving the Black community tend to also have higher than average involvement in the political life of the broader community. This suggests that engagement with the Black community and with the broader community are complementary rather than alternative activities, and that progress in resisting racism involves, among other things, engagement with mainstream political institutions and processes (see Figure 13).

(13) Political engagement by membership in Black groups



For some BEP participants, community and political

engagement are linked directly to experiences of dealing with racism. When asked what they have found to be useful as ways to deal with their experiences with unfair treatment because of being Black, about three in ten report trying to deal with these experiences on their own or to ignore them. Just as many, however, say they overcome or deal with these experiences by advocating against them or challenging them, while one in five say they share these experiences or talk about them with family, friends or the community.

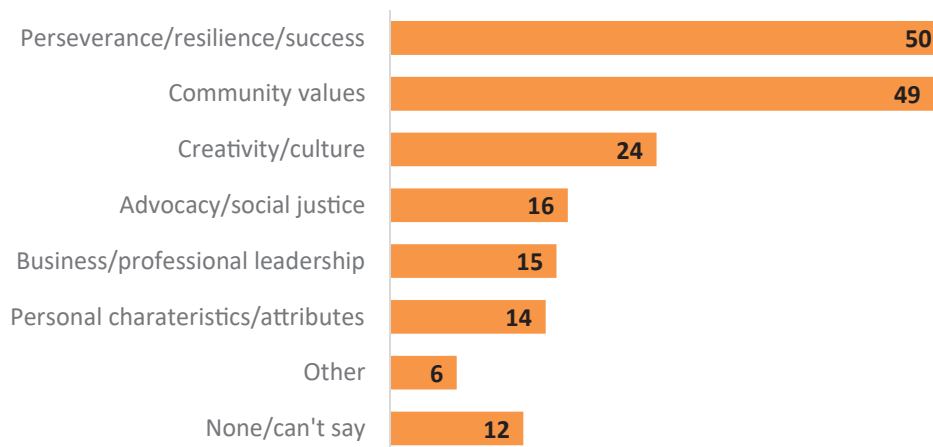
Some of the other strategies that BEP participants use to deal with unfair treatment could also be considered forms of engagement. These consist of working hard to prove those who perpetuate racism are wrong, educating themselves (for example, about anti-racism) or educating others about their behaviour, or expressing themselves through writing or art.

In this context, it is notable that experiences of discrimination are associated with more (and not less) political and community engagement – again suggesting that for a many BEP participants, engagement and activism is one form of response to anti-Black racism.





### (14) Strengths of the Black community



Participants who say they have experienced discrimination are also more critical of public and political institutions, but do not turn their backs on political participation. For instance, they tend to follow politics more closely, to vote in elections either as much or more than average. They have a tendency to join political parties or advocacy groups, local community organizations, and groups that specifically address the interests of the Black community. Most notably, they are more likely to express the view that people like them can have a big impact on making their community a better place to live. Individuals who are more likely to say they have experienced discrimination also articulate a stronger sense of Black identity (see Figure 13).

Finally, community and political engagement emerges as a one of the characteristics of the Black community that BEP participants value and admire the most.

When asked about the strengths of the Black community in the GTA, about the community's most important contributions to making the GTA a better place to live, and about what makes it unique or distinct from the many diverse groups that make up the Greater Toronto Area, BEP participants point to a variety of attributes.

Perseverance, resilience, success and community values are some of the main attributes BEP participants mention as strengths of the Black community (50%). Community values were also mentioned by almost half of the participants and creativity/culture was referenced by nearly one quarter (see Figure 14).

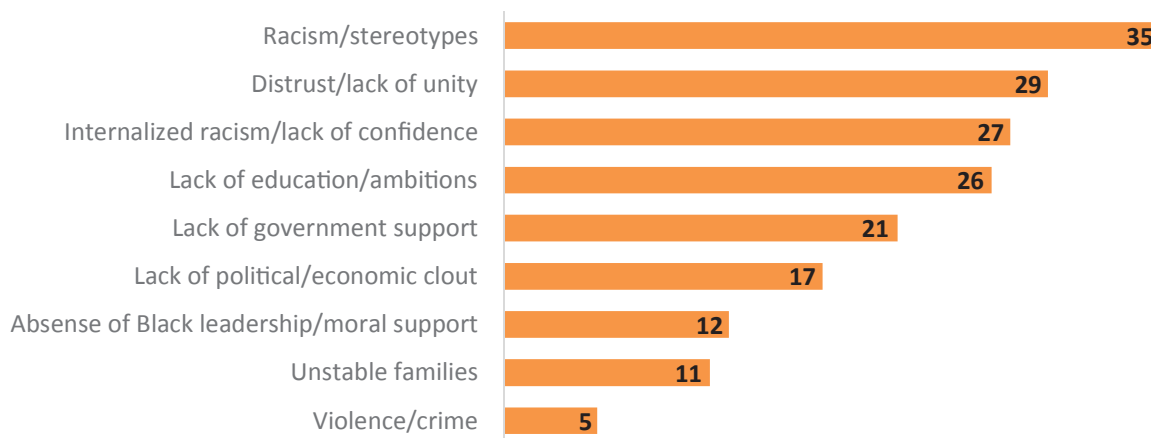
<b>(15) Hopes for the Black Community</b>	
<b>MAJOR THEMES</b>	<b>%</b>
Build a stronger community / culture (unity, support, inclusiveness)	61
More political advocacy / social consciousness (equal opportunity)	35
Stronger education system / success	30
Less crime/violence / better policing	25
Stronger leadership / role models	21
Better media representation	20
Support for youth / future generations	19
More career development / employment opportunities	16
Better quality of life / standard of living	15
Stronger family / friend relationships	9
Stronger identity / sense of self	8
Improved community / government services	7
Better health care for Black community	4

Many BEP participants define their hopes for the black community in terms of building stronger communities/culture (61%) as well as for more political advocacy/social consciousness (35%) along with a stronger education system/success (30%). Other things identified as hopes include education (e.g., greater success in education for Black people) and improvements in the criminal justice system and relations with police (see Figure 15).

BEP participants are most likely to ground their hopes and confidence in the community’s ability to achieve these goals in its determination, awareness of obstacles, commitment to change, optimism and strength.

This focus on determination and perseverance – the ability to meet challenges and overcome adversity – is consistent with the emphasis that many participants place on racism and the perpetuation of stereotypes when asked to identify the biggest challenges for the Black community in achieving its goals. Across the GTA, it is women aged 35 to 54 who are most likely to emphasize this challenge (55%, versus only 14% of men in this age group), along with those born in Canada (46%), and those whose primary racial identity is other than Black, African Canadian or Caribbean (53%) (see Figure 16).

### **(16) Greatest challenges facing the Black community**





Intense divides among black people and self-interest. It is very easy to turn a Black person against another [Black] person. We have a lack of vision.

Being silenced, and not controlling the narrative. All too often we have other people telling our stories. We need to tell our own stories.

Systemic racism. Not enough from community, government. Lack of cultural practices and benchmark behaviours that unifies us. No sense of self and identity. Historical traumas and beliefs keep many black people trapped in certain mindsets. It's hard to break the cycle. No mental or emotional support in our communities or families.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges for the Black community in achieving its goals?**

Access to information...  
lack of good examples of role models/leaderships...  
losing patience, too focused on short-term pleasures...  
lack of non-music, sports, success stories.