

## **Code Black Communicator Network's Manifesto for the Eradication of Anti-Black Racism in the Communications Industry**

This manifesto was created in light of the recent mass awareness of anti-Black racism generated across all facets of life.

[Code Black Communicator Network](#) was created to support and provide a space for Black communicators; it was also designed to give a roadmap to Black people in communications who need support to navigate predominately white spaces in their places of employment and throughout their career journey - addressing subjects like securing internships, career transitions, meaningful mentorships and managing microaggressions, among a vast array of topics.

We created this manifesto to highlight some of the practices that create and support barriers for Black professionals within the communications industry. Our intention is to not only address the impact of these practices, but also to identify actions that can be taken by organizations to create a more equitable and safe workplace and industry. Statements of solidarity and one-time donations are not enough to correct long-standing practices that uphold cultures of exclusion. We are calling on communications practitioners, agency leaders, and industry networks to commit to long term actions and permanent policies to address anti-Black racism.

### ***1. Be specific - Acknowledge that anti-Black racism is real and systemic racism is experienced by Black people in a specific way***

#### **Current Situation**

New attention on anti-Black racism is being diluted by conversations around racial prejudice experienced by BIPOC. Anti-Black racism is presented in specific ways and those systemic barriers and prejudices are not experienced by other people of colour.

#### **Why This Matters**

General conversations around racism do not address the specific barriers experienced by Black people. Specific problems required specific actions.

#### **Actions**

- a. Name it.

### ***2. Hiring - Prioritize diversity in recruitment***

#### **Current Situation**

There is currently, as well as historically a scarcity of Black talent in the communications/marketing industry. One cause is a lack of awareness of the sector among black students, as former Black generations haven't worked in the industry. This paired with a lack of representation among senior team members often make Black

professionals feel as though “I’m not welcome/comfortable here since no one looks like me.”

### **Why This Matters**

A lack of Black representation means a lack of diversity of lived experiences, and hinders the evolution of the communications industry.

### **Actions**

- a. Review hiring process: where are jobs posted?
- b. Connect with hubs that support Black people.
- c. Prioritize hiring Black senior leaders, not solely junior level employees or support staff (i.e. administrative roles).

## **3. *Media - Actively seek and support outlets that serve the Black community***

### **Current Situation**

Black or “Ethnic” media as they are usually referred to by the industry, aren’t currently regarded in the same light as “mainstream” media outlets. Black outlets are sought only for pitching and partnerships for campaigns that are targeted to the Black demographic. They are generally relegated to the back of the line on red carpets and often don’t get access to speak to talent.

### **Why This Matters**

Black outlets deserve the same amount of access granted as their white counterparts, to truly diversify the lens used in media storytelling and expand the trajectory of your communication.

### **Actions**

- a. Give red carpet access and placement to Black media.
- b. Research notable and influential Black people and celebrities and treat them with respect. Acknowledge and educate yourself about a star system that is likely unknown to you.
- c. Include on media lists.
- d. Pitch Black writers beyond race and social justice topics.

## **4. *Influencers - Recognize the talent of Black creators beyond Black campaigns***

### **Current Situation**

Black creators are often overlooked for their talent unless they are being sought for a Black focused campaign. Despite being the catalysts of many cultural trends Black creators often have lower metrics. They tend to not be considered for non Black specific campaigns, and when they are, they are often under compensated.

### **Why This Matters**

Black people don't only buy products that are designed and marketed specifically for them (and the same would be said for any other race). As a result, limiting Black creators to only speak to Black audiences systemically stifles Black voices and leads to little diversity and representation in the content that we consume.

### **Actions**

- a. Pay Black creators and recognize the value of their audience.
- b. Include Black creators in campaigns and experiences.
- c. Black creators are not a monolith; ensure that the Black creator makes sense for your brand/campaign. Black people are not interchangeable.

## **5. *Press Trips - Use press trips as an opportunity to connect with Black media***

### **Current Situation**

Black media often aren't included on press trips unless the campaign is Black focused. When they occasionally are invited, potential safety issues for Black media aren't considered (e.g. travelling to an area that has historically been known for anti-black racism attacks).

### **Why This Matters**

Black media provide an opportunity to diversify your brand/organization's storytelling opportunities and press trips provide the ability to connect with them and build relationships. When travelling with Black media, it is imperative to carefully consider their safety in advance and to ensure that potential issues that might arise (e.g. them being more likely to be questioned by authorities) are mitigated as much as possible.

### **Actions**

- a. Ensure that Black media and influencers are both considered and included for press trips.
- b. Ensure that destinations selected for press trips are safe for Black people.
- c. Ensure (be doubly sure) that all travel documentation, per diems and room bookings are organized for Black press trip attendees.

## **6. *Internships - Be diligent about creating opportunities for Black talent to gain internships***

### **Current Situation**

Internships are generally a challenge to secure for those looking to break into the communications industry, but it is exceptionally more difficult for those who are Black. Often these internships are awarded based on pre-existing relationships (e.g. a senior leader at the agency hires an intern because they are the daughter of a friend from university).

### **Why This Matters**

Opportunities for internships are vitally important for those getting a start in the sector which is directly correlated with the ability to grow the amount of Black talent in the communications industry.

### **Actions**

- a. Adopt a paid internships only policy.
- b. Ban nepotism and enact an equitable application/interview process.
- c. Don't hire for (cultural) "fit".

## **7. *Media Response - Hold media outlets accountable for racial bias in storytelling***

### **Current Situation**

Media coverage isn't immune to microaggressions and stereotyping. Racial bias in reporting is unfortunately a reality.

### **Why This Matters**

We rely on the media to deliver fact based, unbiased news as they shape the stories that we consume daily. If crafted stories strengthen stereotypes, negative narratives will continue to plague the Black community.

### **Actions**

- a. Be an ally and a leader. Be vocal in calling out media outlets with content that perpetuate stereotypes.

## **8. *Attribution - Acknowledge the contribution of Black creators***

### **Current Situation**

Black creators have repeatedly had their content "borrowed" from them with no attribution. Additionally, traditional metrics have led these creators to be overlooked, when in fact, they hold major influence globally.

### **Why This Matters**

Crediting creatives is about equity and respect. Looking beyond traditional metrics opens the door to appreciating that the true influence goes beyond numbers.

### **Actions**

- a. Credit and compensate Black content creators for their work.
- b. Understand and respect the value and impact of Black creators and networks beyond metrics. The Black community is the barometer for innovation and trends.

## **9. Marketing/Advertising - Commit to representing Black talent on both sides of the camera**

### **Current Situation**

Black talent is rarely featured in brand campaigns and even more rare is the hiring of Black creatives to lead creation, whether through creative direction, videography, photography, or graphic design.

### **Why This Matters**

Black talent in front and behind the camera required accurate representation and beneficial in the production of fresh ideas born through new perspectives. When Black talent are selected for campaigns, they are generally paired with Hair and Makeup artists who lack knowledge of how to properly care for Black skin and hair, creating an uncomfortable situation for the talent and subpar visuals.

### **Actions**

- a. Ensure Black people are represented on both sides of the camera.
- b. Prioritize working with third-party vendors who have diverse staff.
- c. Hair and Makeup professionals should be experts in Black hair/skin regardless of the ethnicity of the talent.

## **10. HR - Mandate anti-bias training for HR**

### **Current Situation**

In light of the current anti-Black racism movement that continues to grow, Black employees have to sort through their myriad of feelings within the workplace. Most HR professionals aren't specifically trained on how to help Black employees and their organization navigate racism and racial bias.

### **Why This Matters**

The workplace is a microcosm of broader society. If racial bias exists outside, then it exists within organizations as well. The manifestations may be overt or covert. If HR is not aware of what workplace manifestations of anti-Black racism and bias look like, they will be unable to address it within the organization.

### **Actions**

- a. HR should be trained and competent in helping Black people navigate the work environment, including best practices in acknowledging and addressing both overt and covert manifestations of racism.
- b. Include a pledge to uphold antiracist policies and behaviours in employee contracts.
- c. Consider how Black employees are supported through consistent occurrences of violence against Black people.

## **11. Inclusion and Diversity Committees - Create a safe space for Black employees**

### **Current Situation**

As awareness of anti-Black racism continues to grow, employers are turning to their Black employees for a “gut check” on statements and anti-racism strategies.

### **Why This Matters**

This new responsibility is often added on top of their core responsibilities and even skill set. The request to assist companies in navigating anti-racism strategies can make Black employees feel that they cannot decline regardless of whether they have the desire, emotional capacity or experience. Additionally, the time requirement may cause them to miss out on other opportunities more inline with their true desires.

### **Actions**

- a. Black people may be willing to support out of a sense of duty or responsibility, but they are enduring extra emotional labour, which their non-Black colleagues are not. Consider how you share the load.
- b. Ensure that Black employees feel free to decline if they feel it is not in their best interest.

## **12. Advocacy and Access - Listen to Black people and create lasting policies**

### **Current Situation**

The current attention on anti-Black racism has allowed for long-standing deep rooted issues to dominate mainstream focus. Activism by way of statements, donations and programming is at an all time high providing new resources to fight anti-Black racism.

### **Why This Matters**

Despite the influx of support for the cause, all news cycles, the focus will shift. Once trending conversations move on, performative activism will die out, but there will still be much work to do to correct systemic barriers Black people. This is not a moment; it's a movement.

### **Actions**

- a. Commit to creating a culture of inclusivity through ensuring that leaders are “walking the talk” and there is a timely anti-Black racism action plan put in place with clear deliverables.
- b. Consider intersectionality of race, gender, socio-economics, physical ability etc. in all anti-Black racism strategies.
- c. Make long term commitments rather than one off donations.

- d. Partner with organizations and individuals that have a track record of combating anti-Black racism.