POLICY BRIEF: BEING BLACK IN AI (Canada)

Date: February 2026
From: CanAfro Research Institute, Waterloo, Canada
Title of Source Report: *Evidence, Trends, and Policy Futures at the Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and African, Caribbean, and Black Communities in Canada*

1 | THE CANADIAN IMPERATIVE: FROM DATA SILENCE TO ACCOUNTABLE AI

Canada's ambition to lead in responsible artificial intelligence may be undermined by a uniquely Canadian scenario: a prevalent "data silence." The systematic failure to collect race-disaggregated data in healthcare, policing, and technology renders algorithmic harms against African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) communities invisible and unauditable. This invisibility occurs alongside a second failure: the exclusion of ACB expertise from the governance boards designing policies like the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA).

This exclusion is costly. ACB Canadians (4.3% of the population) hold less than 2% of AI leadership roles, face a 10–18% wage gap in tech, and receive under 1% of venture capital. This "brain drain" of overlooked talent weakens national innovation. Furthermore, treating "Black" as a monolith obscures critical differences-between the intergenerational barriers facing African Nova Scotians and the de-skilling of recent highly educated immigrants-preventing effective policy. Equitable AI is not a secondary social goal but a foundational prerequisite for Canada's competitiveness and credibility. This brief outlines a path to transform systemic exclusion into a structured advantage.

2 | APPROACH: A GROUNDBREAKING, CANADA-CENTRIC ANALYSIS

This brief is based on the comprehensive report *"Being Black in AI"* (CanAfro Research Institute, 2026), which establishes a new benchmark for Canadian AI equity analysis by:

- **Diagnosing the "Data Silence":** Treating the absence of race-disaggregated data as a core governance failure.
- **Applying a Decolonial & Data Sovereignty Lens:** Proposing learning from First Nations' OCAP® principles (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) to establish ACB Community Data Sovereignty as a cornerstone of ethical AI development.
- **Disaggregating the ACB Experience:** Analyzing distinct barriers and opportunities for Canadian-born Black communities versus recent African and Caribbean immigrants.
- **Employing Mixed Methods:** Combining quantitative labour force analysis with qualitative insights from ACB tech professionals and a review of Canadian and international policy frameworks.
- **Providing a Multi-Stakeholder Action Plan:** Outlining accountable actions for government, industry, academia, funders, and community builders, supported by a concrete 36-month implementation roadmap.

3 | POLICY OPTIONS: A BLUEPRINT FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Transformative progress requires moving from voluntary commitments to binding, accountable action. The following policy options are derived from the report's evidence and tailored to Canada's specific context.

1. Legislate Equity and Data Sovereignty in the AIDA

Action: As outlined in the report's Multi-Stakeholder Action Matrix, amend the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA) to mandate:

- **Public Equity & Human Rights Impact Assessments** for high-impact AI systems, co-designed with affected ACB communities.
- **ACB Community Data Sovereignty Principles**, ensuring communities govern data about them throughout the AI lifecycle.

2. Shatter the Data Silence with Mandatory Transparency

Action: Condition all federal AI funding, procurement, and public-sector deployment on public, race-disaggregated reporting of workforce demographics, leadership representation, and algorithmic performance disparities.

3. Launch the Black Innovation & AI Sovereign Fund

Action: Create a $100M blended-capital fund to provide patient capital, non-dilutive grants, and technical support for ACB-led AI startups and community-based innovation. This directly counters the chronic sub-1% VC funding rate and harnesses generative AI's economic potential for community-led growth, as analyzed in the report.

4. Guarantee Inclusive Governance by Law

Action: Legislate minimum thresholds (e.g., 30%) for ACB representation on all federal and provincial AI advisory, ethics, and grant review bodies. Inclusion must occur at the point of design, not as an afterthought.

5. Fix the Pipeline with Differentiated Supports

Action: Fund targeted, demographically-aware programs to bridge the 50% attrition rate of ACB students from undergraduate to PhD levels. This requires distinct strategies for supporting Canadian-born Black youth in STEM and accelerating credential recognition for immigrant professionals.

6. Mandate Independent, Community-Informed Bias Audits

Action: Require rigorous, third-party bias testing for AI systems in high-stakes public domains (e.g., hiring, policing, benefits allocation). Auditing standards and datasets must be developed with ACB experts to move beyond technical checks toward meaningful accountability.

For detailed evidence, analysis, and a roadmap, see the full report: *Being Black in AI* **(CanAfro Research Institute, 2026).**