

Africa Centre

2016-2020
Strategic Plan



Our 2016-2020 Strategic Plan

This five-year strategic plan reflects our commitment to the long-term success of the Africa Centre. It describes our strategic priorities – the fundamental things we must do as an organization intent on advancing our core purpose and vision for the future. In crafting these priorities, we have reflected on the past, examined the present, and made decisions about

how we need to evolve and where we need to focus to achieve our goals.

The next five years will be characterized by considerable growth and change. Through this, we will remain committed to our core purpose and reason for being. This is the foundation of our Strategic Plan.

Our Vision: A Community Engaged. A Community United.

We envision an African Centre that will serve as the hub of the community and provide an atmosphere which is welcoming, that shows respect for diversity and that supports all members of all interests and abilities.

We envision a strong, relevant and engaged African Canadian community in Edmonton achieved through empowerment and advancement of the community, connection to one's African Canadian identity and through deep social and economic integration

Our Mission: Maximizing Opportunities.

The Africa Centre strives to create opportunities for access and full participation of members of the African community in all aspects of society. This includes educational, cultural, social and economic endeavors that ultimately contribute to the holistic development and wellness of the African individual, family and community.

In this regard, the Africa Centre exists to maximize the incredible potential that exists within the individuals that make up our community. We are in the business of maximizing opportunities!



A Case Study in Our Success: Isaac's Story

Isaac was born in 1996 in London, England to Eritrean parents. When Isaac was eight, the family packed their bags and moved to Edmonton. Coming from London, it was not hard for him to get settled since his first language was English and England and Canada were similar in many ways. As an Eritrean, however, it was a different story. He sensed that he was different, and even though he was born in the western world, he was made to feel that in some ways, he did not belong. His schoolmates used to invite him to sleepovers, yet his parents never allowed him to go, and he did not understand why. He thought his parents were strange and overprotective. He was not even allowed to take the bus like other kids his age. Now, he can appreciate the fact that they drove him to school every day, but at the time, he did not feel normal.

When Isaac was twelve, he attended summer camp for the first time, a relatively new one being offered by the Africa Centre in partnership with BGCBigS. There, he found other kids who were just like him; who ate food with the same unique smell and spoke his language. Children whose parent's rules were like his parents rules and there was no need to explain things endlessly to reduce the risk of being teased by his peers.

He enjoyed the summer camp a great deal and made many longstanding friends. He remembers well the reputation he acquired for being the one to choke on carrots every time his friends wanted to make him laugh. At first, it was embarrassing but gradually, he realized that it was not a big deal and became less self-conscious. Developing meaningful relationships with the camp leaders was an important factor in Isaac's. One of the camp leaders was studying petroleum engineering in university, at the time, and Isaac found it fascinating that as part of her training, she got to blow things up. Another camp leader offered a workshop on how to prepare a résumé. Isaac saved the material from the workshop for years and referred to it when he applied for his first job at the Africa Centre's summer camp a couple years later. He enjoyed the camp so much that he kept coming back every summer, and every summer he was surprised at how fast the summer flew by. His parents also registered their sons in Africa Centre's after school program during the school year, where they spent some time doing homework and then played soccer or played with the Xbox.

When he was too old to register for camp, he decided to volunteer one summer and then the following year, he applied to work as a camp leader, himself, so that he could continue making it enjoyable for other children. As a post-secondary summer student, he learned how to use creative problem-solving to encourage the children to co-operate with him, especially with some of the more difficult children.

Now, in third year of university studies and working a part time job, Isaac has a bright future ahead of him. The positive environment that nourished him to be a well-rounded man, who feels a sense of belonging and acceptance in both his own cultural community and that of the mainstream one, will further his contributions to Canadian society.

He credits the Africa Centre with helping to shape his identity and giving him healthy, relatable role models. He is able to see himself not as abnormal or weird but as he is; a Canadian, an Eritrean, and an Englishman. Nothing abnormal about that.



As a community, we need to learn to live together, to face challenges together and to reach out to one another. We all have a stake in the success, health and prosperity of our community. Africa Centre has a key role in bringing our community together to address Pan-African issues and opportunities.

Tesfaye Ayalew
Africa Centre Founder and Executive Director

Our Beginnings

Since opening in 2007, the Africa Centre has become a meeting place for a growing a community, a support system and a resource hub for African Canadians in Edmonton. The leadership of the Council for the Advancement of African Canadians in Alberta (CAAC) has relentlessly pursued its vision of creating a safe and welcoming community hub.

Africa Centre was created out of passion and need. The Centre's founder observed a profound need to augment and enrich the supports provided to new Canadians and, in particular, to African refugees and immigrants in Edmonton. The challenges faced by a refugee are staggering. Though the government provides a basic level of support, the path to stability, integration and prosperity is long and difficult. That is where the Africa Centre comes in.

The Africa Centre was created to support the needs of immigrants and refugees in a way that goes beyond the basics of housing, language training and employment. In a holistic, wrap around and community based way, the Africa Centre seeks to build a healthy, strong and highly engaged community made up of healthy, strong and highly engaged members.

The refugee experience is not an easy one. In the first year of landing, refugees face a myriad of challenges as they learn a new language, seek out employment, housing, transportation, healthcare, a network of friends and navigate a complex system of supports, bureaucracies and inequities. Through this process, the Africa Centre provides supports and services to assist the complicated, demanding and stressful settlement process.



What We Do

In carrying out this important role, Africa Centre works to:

- Promote early learning to African Canadian families and offer educational opportunities to pre-school children.
- Provide educational opportunities and support to African Canadian school-aged children to help them succeed in the Canadian school system.
- Educate and empower African Canadian women, youth, seniors and others to help them integrate into Canadian society.
- Educate and increase the Canadian public's understanding of and appreciation for African culture.
- Educate African Canadians about the Canadian political process in order to encourage respect for and participation in the democratic process in Canada.

Our Unique Approach

Capitalizing on the knowledge, expertise and perspective of our rich community, the Africa Centre has developed a unique approach to designing and delivering our services. This approach is foundational to our ability to achieve our vision.

Our approach is characterized by the following attributes:

- **We adopt a Pan-African approach in everything we do.** This approach is fundamental to supporting a united African community in Edmonton.
- **We utilize existing assets in the community.** We believe that our community (in the broadest sense of the word) is rich with experience, skills, perspective and passion needed to achieve our vision. We are committed to leverage them in carrying out our vision and mission.
- **We work in a model of partnership and collaboration.** Our programs leverage our strength in program delivery through caring and creative partnerships with a range of organizations that have expertise in areas we do not.
- **We adopt a “system approach” in the development of programs.** The needs of our users are broad and interconnected. An example of this is the connection we observe between programming for parents and corresponding programming for children. In order to maximize participation in our adult programs we have considered the need for childcare. Our programs are designed to reflect the realities of the community we serve.



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- **Our programs are inclusive.** Our programs are designed to support children, teens, adults and seniors in a way that engages the entire family instead of selected members.
- **Our programs are available year round/all days.** We recognize that the needs of our users are neither seasonal nor limited to weekdays. Our programs are designed to provide supports and service when they are needed the most – including after school, weekends and over the summer school break.
- **Our programs are developed in a “start and grow” model.** Small successes are leveraged to create sustainable, relevant and well-attended programs.
- **Programs represent the needs of African Canadians in Edmonton.** They are responsive and meaningful to a range of settlement needs including the most vulnerable. We are constantly evolving our program offering based on feedback from users and the emerging needs of our community.
- **Our programs include a series of events that engage the broad community in opportunities to learn, play, recreate, celebrate and honour.** We believe that these events are an important aspect of uniting our community.

What Our Environment Is Telling Us

The five-year planning horizon will be characterized by continued change in our strategic environment. After consulting with leaders in our community and reflecting on our strategic environment, we identified the following foundational considerations:

- **Our community tells us that we need to foster collaboration and inclusion and to strengthen our partnerships in order to be effective in delivering our vision and mission.** In this emerging complex environment, priority must be made on strengthening relationships and building partnerships to solve complex issues. Internal decision-making needs to value inclusion and support all African communities. Externally, the Africa Centre needs to collaborate with other groups working to achieve similar goals.
- **Our community tells us that there is a need to improve communication.** Communication from both a governance perspective and a member perspective requires energy and focus. Communication at the governance level needs to be open, transparent and inclusive to advance the Africa Centre vision and mission. This will require that the Centre develop a model to engage its stakeholders and translate “what we hear” into policies and programs. Advanced communication tools such as social media, website and email could be better utilized to support Africa Centre’s needs, adding additional resources to communication would be beneficial.
- **Our community tells us that we have strength in our ability to connect people, resources and information.** From this strength we are able to act as advocates for social change: Africa Centre provides a link for common interests. By banning together in a Pan-African approach, the Centre becomes a strong advocate for the needs of the African community in Edmonton
- **Our community tells us that youth are tomorrow’s leaders and therefore should be made a focus for the Africa Centre.** There is a significant opportunity to empower our youth and help them reach their full potential. A focus on education, mentorship and youth engagement should be a priority for the Africa Centre moving forward.
- **Our community tells us that we offer a unique value by providing integrated services through a ‘hub’ model. They also told us that there is opportunity to ensure diverse representation of people and communities within ‘hub’.** Africa Centre demonstrates a competency to provide integrated services for a diverse group of people. The challenge is seeking fair representation for the diverse needs of the group and responding with a truly Pan-African approach.
- **Our community tells us that education, coaching and mentorship is required to support deeper, richer, and more meaningful integration.** Education, mentorship and coaching in many areas such as language, employment, “Canadian life” and life experience would significantly advance Africa Centre’s goals.

- **Donor and Funder expectations are shifting.** Funders appear to be shifting their focus and resources to initiatives with a broader scope, often to service providers that offer a larger and more amalgamated group of services. Municipal governments are increasingly resource-constrained. In order to ensure funding stability, we need to be able to demonstrate the value we add.
- **We are aligned with the priorities of our major funders.** Edmonton and Alberta's interest in eliminating poverty is reflected in their respective policy agendas. As an organization funded in part by the City of Edmonton and Province of Alberta, we are working to address this issue through education, mentorship and other activities aimed at preventing poverty in our community. Additionally, we see an increasing focus on gender equality in the policy priorities of our local, provincial and federal governments. This too is an area that we are active in providing programming and services.
- **Public sector resources are limited; demonstrating return on investment is critical.** The budgets and resources of our public-sector funders are increasingly limited and the expectation to demonstrate value for money is also increasing. This implies that we must make effective and efficient use of funder dollars and demonstrate the outcomes we create.
- **During this time of economic downturn, the magnitude of implications on employment significantly increases,** therefore there is a need to understand the reasons why African Canadians are unemployed or under-employed: Especially in this time of economic uncertainty, we need to understand the factors that contribute to the lack of employment and the potential role for the Africa Centre in addressing issues and opportunities.
- **Technological advances, if utilized, will improve communication.** Many opportunities exist to leverage technology to connect with and engage stakeholders. This requires an investment in the Centre's website and social media tools.
- **Participant needs are shifting.** There is an opportunity to adapt and evolve our program delivery model to better serve the shifting needs of our participants. We need to focus on meeting them where they are at by focusing on our outreach program.
- **The exciting possibility of a new facility is on the horizon.** Working in partnership with the City of Edmonton, we have begun a process to develop a concept plan for a new African Multicultural Centre.
- **We observe that immigrant and refugee access to traditional settlement services is declining.** Through the work we do, we have learned that immigrants have unique needs that are difficult to accommodate through traditional settlement services. The need for culturally sensitive, refugee-centered services is critical to achieve desired settlement outcomes.



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Strategic Objectives and Goals

Strategic objectives are the outcomes we will create as the result of our work. Taken together, they describe the ways in which we will achieve our vision and help our community to maximize its potential. In the context of our strategic plan, they form the guide posts we will use to focus our efforts and resources. Our four strategic objectives are:

- **Advancement and Empowerment.** The Africa Centre is a support to African Canadians in achieving their own goals.
- **Identity.** The Africa Centre works to maintain a connection to Africa and supports an understanding of African practices, customs, values and beliefs.
- **Integration.** The Africa Centre works to improve economic and social integration of African Canadians into Canadian society and culture.
- **Engagement and Alignment.** The Africa Centre focuses on issues and opportunities common to all African Canadians and, in doing so, serves to create a community unified by common goals.



Advancement

To advance our objective to support our community in achieving its individual and collective goals, we have established the following goals:

- **Goal One:** Deliver a youth leadership program aimed at fostering the core values of Leadership and Citizenship: community participation, leadership, political participation, self-reflection and empowerment.
- **Goal Two:** Develop and implement a comprehensive program to support the advancement and empowerment of African Canadians of all ages (youth, adults, etc.). The focus of these programs should be on mentorship aimed at employment, intercultural competence and building business and community connections.
- **Goal Three:** Deliver a series of programs to support children and youth to succeed in school and life. The focus of these programs should be on early learning and academic advancement.



Identity

To strengthen and maintain the identity of the African community in Edmonton, we have established the following goals:

- **Goal One:** Expand program offerings to include ones that promote cultural exploration, belonging and pride for children, youth and families. This includes efforts to examine what African culture and identity is and provide opportunities on a regular and ongoing basis to express that identity.
- **Goal Two:** Celebrate the unique and diverse African heritage through a series of festivals and events that engage the African community and Edmontonians alike.
- **Goal Three:** Advocate and promote the teaching of African history in our education system.

Integration

To achieve a deep level of economic and social integration, we have established the following goals:

- **Goal One:** Influence and improve the “settlement system” process, experience and outcomes for African Canadians by developing partnerships to support a richer, deeper and broader integration and the development of intercultural competence.
- **Goal Two:** Promote political and civic engagement amongst the African Canadian community.
- **Goal Three:** Support immigrants and refugees in the settlement process through the creation of a formalized referral system. This goal is about intentionally leveraging the assets in our community to the benefit of our community.

Engagement and Unification

In order to engage and unify the African community in Edmonton, we have established the following goals:

- **Goal One:** Strengthen the entire African community by working with community/cultural associations to develop and achieve their own goals.
- **Goal Two:** Utilize relevant communication tools and regular two-way communication, support community engagement and celebrate successes.



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