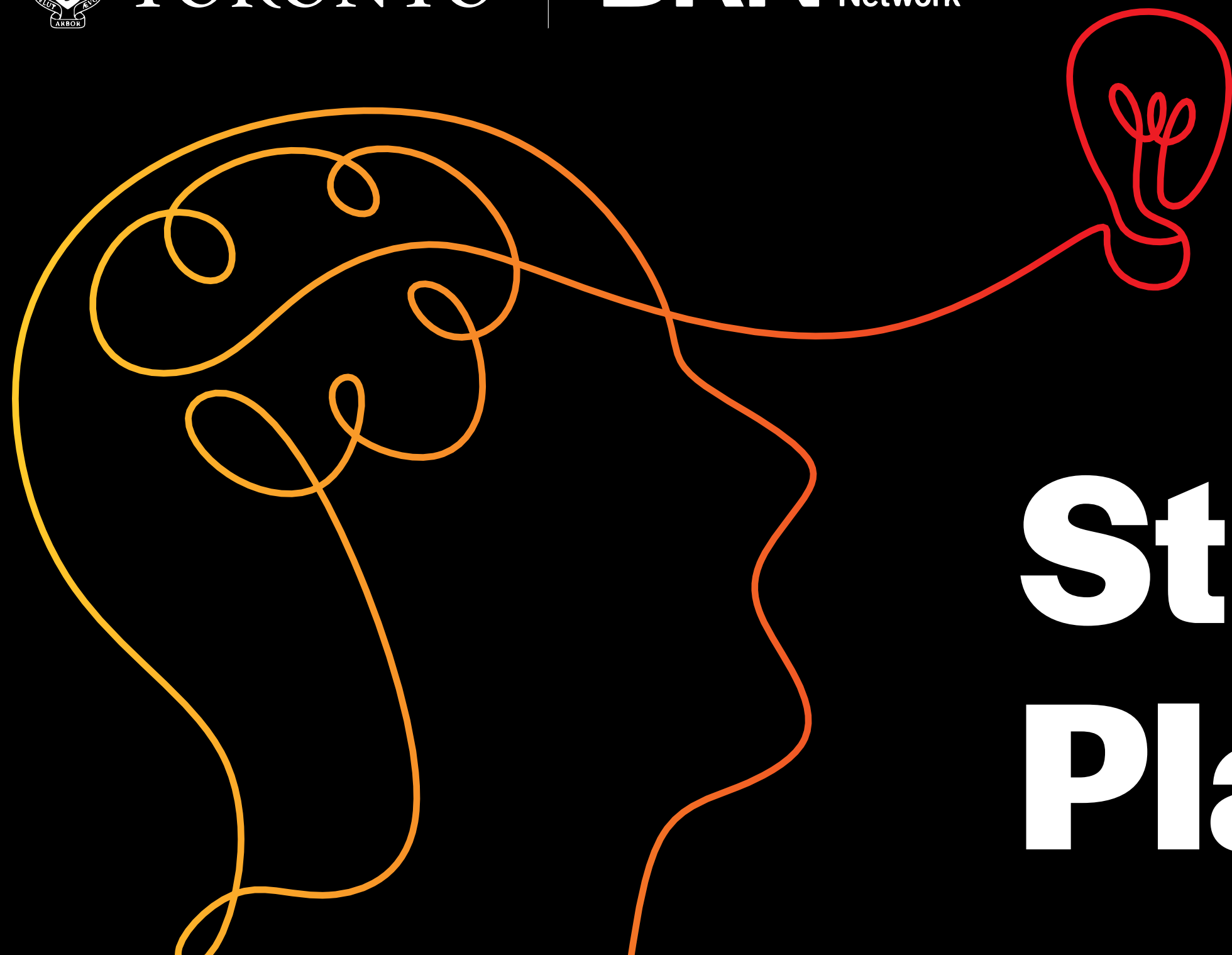




UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

**BRN** Black  
Research  
Network



# Strategic Plan

2021/22 – 2023/24

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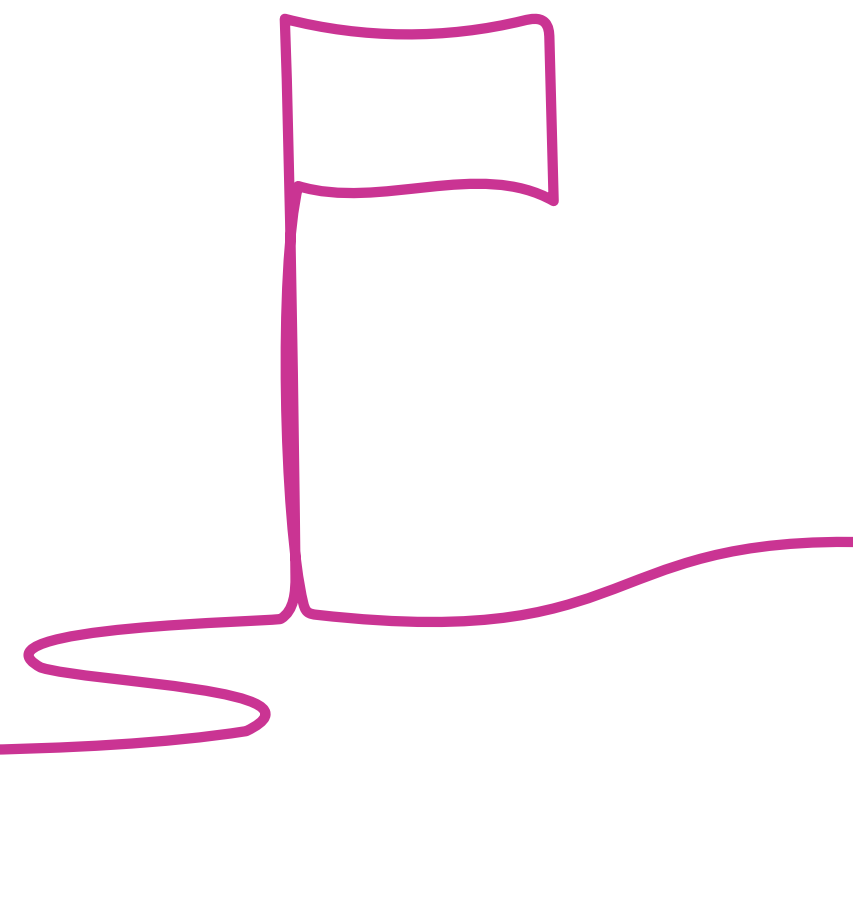
## BRN Mission

**The purpose of the BRN is to promote Black excellence at U of T and to enhance the research capacity of Black scholars within the university and on the world stage.**

This includes:

- Increasing the visibility of Black scholars' research accomplishments
- Sustaining a cross-divisional, interdisciplinary, network of Black scholars
- Facilitating robust research engagement across the University of Toronto and internationally.

The BRN includes U of T Black-identified faculty (research and teaching stream), librarians, postdoctoral fellows, graduate and undergraduate students.





**Historic and prevailing systemic anti-Black racism within academic institutions requires immediate and sustained action in order to dismantle the varied and significant barriers that are seeded within university hiring, mentoring, promotion, teaching, learning, and research practices, policies, and procedures.**

**Over many years, these embedded seeds of oppression have grown into a complex academic ecosystem that stifles and halts Black scholars' efforts to build networks, publish work, secure funding, obtain mentors, progress through the career ranks and/or advance into leadership roles.**

— Report of the University of Toronto  
Anti-Black Racism Task Force

# Establishing the BRN

In tandem with the national efforts (i.e. National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities) and local initiatives (i.e. The Institutional Anti-Black Racism Task Force and departmental EDI committees) that are being undertaken by the University of Toronto, a need for physical and virtual infrastructure was identified to facilitate University of Toronto Black researchers’ ability to find, connect, support, and collaborate with each other and an extended network of international scholars.

U of T can become a Canadian Black Academic Leadership Incubator that features Black excellence prominently, and not only through siloed EDI portfolios. In recognition of this, Black University of Toronto community members who are internationally renowned for academic excellence in their fields have come together to spearhead the development of the Black Research Network (BRN).

## U of T Anti-Black Racism Task Force

On September 23, 2020, Vice-President, Human Resources & Equity Kelly Hannah-Moffat, together with the President, and the Vice-President and Provost, announced the creation of the University of Toronto institutional Anti-Black Racism Task Force, noting the “important efforts being made on all three campuses to address anti-Black racism and advance Black inclusion” and acknowledging the need to build on the progress already made within the University.

In their institutional response, U of T President Meric Gertler, Vice-President & Provost Cheryl Regehr and Vice-President, Human Resources & Equity Kelly Hannah-Moffat said they “accept and embrace all of the recommendations of the Task Force,” and that they are determined to seize the “opportunity that the Task Force has identified for us.”

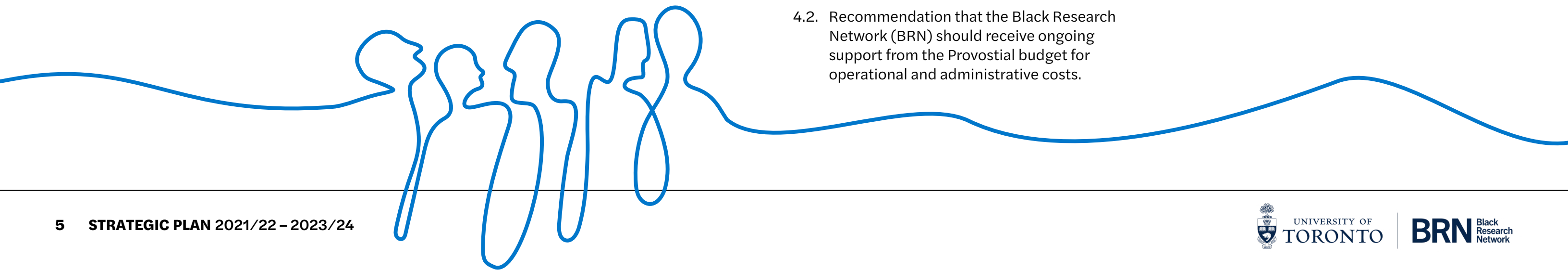
These recommendations include two that were specifically relevant to the BRN:

- 1.5. Recommendation that the Governing Council Secretariat develop partnerships with the Black Research Network, Black Faculty Working Group, and the Black Alumni Association.
- 4.2. Recommendation that the Black Research Network (BRN) should receive ongoing support from the Provostial budget for operational and administrative costs.

## Scarborough Charter

On October 1 and 2, 2020, Canadian universities, colleges, and other partners came together to facilitate a national conversation on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion, and to develop concrete actions for change in higher education and in our communities.

This work resulted in the creation of *The Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions and Accountability* (Scarborough Charter) sets out the following principles, actions and accountability measures that should guide the letter and spirit of the academic mission, across institutional levels within universities and colleges and at the sectoral level across Canada.





# BRN Founding Members

The BRN is the first research initiative in Canada to prioritize and support Black research excellence across all University Faculties, supporting robust multi-disciplinary research. The BRN is spearheaded by:



**Maydianne Andrade**

Professor of Biological Sciences and former Vice-Dean Faculty Affairs and Equity, at the University of Toronto Scarborough



**Alissa Trotz**

Professor of Caribbean Studies at New College and Director of Women and Gender Studies, University of Toronto



**Lisa Robinson**

Vice-Dean, Strategy & Operations, Temerty Faculty of Medicine and Professor in the Department of Pediatrics



**Rhonda McEwen**

President and Vice-Chancellor of Victoria University and Professor at the Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology at the University of Toronto

# Inaugural Director



**Dr. Beth Coleman**

Dr. Coleman is the inaugural Director of the University of Toronto's first Black Research Network and Associate Professor of Data & Cities at the Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology and Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, where she directs the City as Platform lab. Working in the disciplines of Science and Technology Studies and Critical Race Theory, her research focuses on smart technology & machine learning, urban data, and civic engagement.

# BRN Governance Structure

Within the governance structure of the BRN, strategic and administrative leadership for the BRN is informed and supported by the founding members of the BRN (acting as the steering committee), Council of Deans and the Implementation Committee.

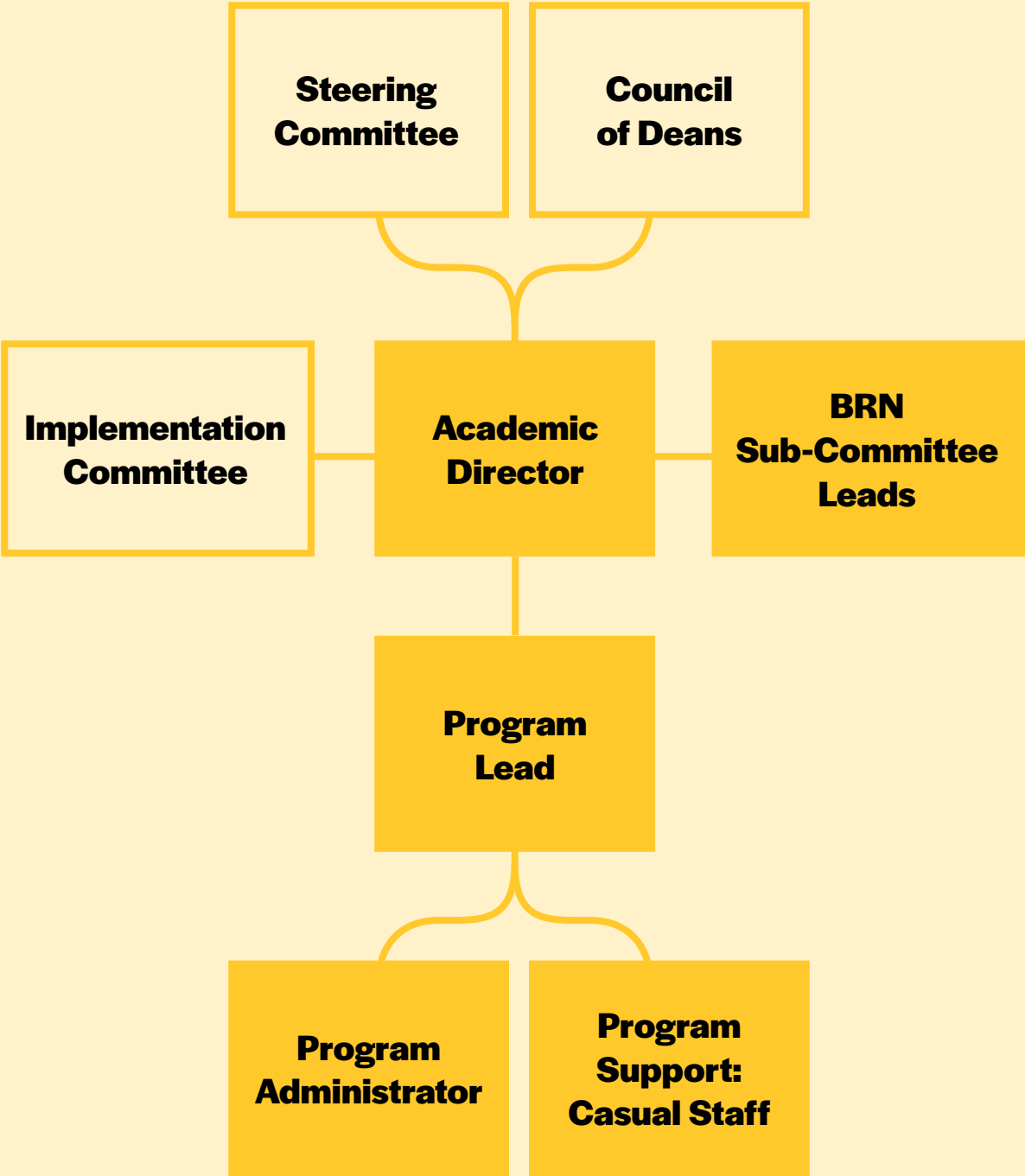
The core BRN team led by the academic director is made up of BRN sub-committees leads (advising and leading on specific BRN initiatives), the program lead, program administrator and casual staff, who manage delivery of programs and daily operations.

**The mandate of the BRN Council of Deans includes:**

- Reviewing the initiatives execution of the strategic plan and recommending directions for growth
- Marshalling university resources to support the initiative
- Advising on major changes to the research initiative
- Reviewing the initiatives annual reports and providing feedback and future vision

**The mandate of the BRN Implementation Committee includes:**

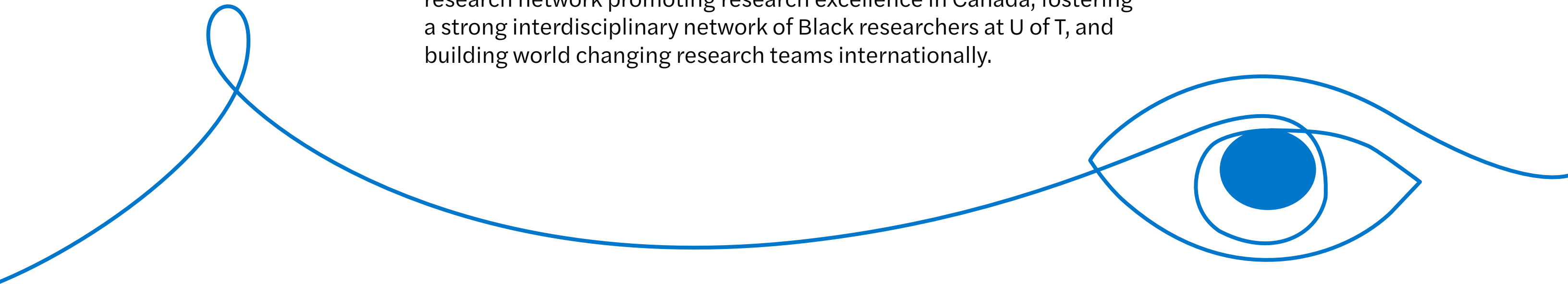
- Providing ongoing advice, helping the initiative overcome challenges, and identifying and securing opportunities
- Providing access to divisional resources to support the initiative in achieving its objectives and milestones
- Advising on the BRN program and budget



# Strategic Direction

## Vision

As a University of Toronto Institutional Strategic Initiative, the vision of the BRN is to be recognized as the foremost Black academic research network promoting research excellence in Canada, fostering a strong interdisciplinary network of Black researchers at U of T, and building world changing research teams internationally.





# Approach to Strategic Planning

In November 2020, consultations were conducted with black-identified faculty to collect input on the digital and physical spaces that the Black Research Network will occupy, the events the BRN will curate, how it will be structured, and the resources needed to support continual progress (staff, grants, systemic reform, etc.).

Consultations focused on and around these three questions:

1. Does the working vision of the BRN support your vision of what a BRN could accomplish? If not, what improvements could be made?
2. Does the working vision speak to the intended impact and benefits the network could have on teaching, research & community?
3. In one year if we declared the BRN a success, what would that look like?

# Themes that emerged from the consultations

1

**Purpose - Research Excellence**

- It is important to communicate the vision and mission of BRN, and why it is needed, to the broader University community, and ensure that the University is living its stated values.
- Make visible the research excellence that is already present among black-identified faculty (not a deficit narrative).
- The BRN should be both inclusive (e.g. Tenure stream vs. Teaching stream, faculty vs. students), and focused on its core mandate.

2

**Mentorship and Pathways**

- The BRN offers a great opportunity for mentorship of junior faculty.
- Exploring the needs of graduate students and post-docs can build ‘pathways’ for future academic excellence: “Can BRN strengthen the pool of students to graduate studies?”

3

**Community, Collaboration and Partnerships**

- Physical and Digital spaces are required to build community, in both formal and informal settings.
- Interdisciplinary/cross-divisional approach is required to ensure areas where blacks are underrepresented (e.g. STEM).
- The BRN should operate across all three campuses.
- The BRN should avoid duplicated efforts from other university groups, but coordinate their activities to best serve the community and not overburden those who participate.

4

**Funding and Investment**

University funding can and should come in many forms:

- Staff/Admin support for Faculty
- Research funding through grants to improve research capacity
- Fellowships/stipends for faculty to allow them to make a meaningful contribution to the BRN and its goals.
- Non-competitive grants where applicable to decrease bias and improve grantee diversity ([Research Funding: The Case for a Modified Lottery](#))

# Strategic Pillars

## 1 Research Excellence

Enhancing the visibility of research excellence of U of T Black-identified scholars, by creating new and leveraging existing platforms at the university, locally and globally.

## 2 Mentorship and Pathways

Enhancing the experiences of U of T Black-identified scholars by providing mentoring and other relevant support that strengthen future academic excellence.

## 3 Community, Collaboration and Partnerships

Building an interdisciplinary and cross divisional community of Black-identified scholars across the U of T tri-campus, providing virtual and physical spaces for formal and informal engagements and leveraging opportunities for partnerships and collaboration at the university, locally and globally.

## 4 Funding and Investment

Enhancing the visibility of research excellence of U of T Black-identified scholars, by creating new and leveraging existing platforms at the university, locally and globally.

# 1

## Research Excellence

Enhancing the visibility of research excellence of U of T Black-identified scholars, by creating new and leveraging existing platforms at the university, locally and globally.

### Initiatives

#### YEAR ONE

##### Mapping the Network:

Researcher profiles, articles, and video series

Faculty and postdoctoral research grants

Matching grants for graduate researchers

#### YEAR TWO

Major Research Clusters  
SGS Doctoral Student Support Grants

BRN postdoc fellowship  
Visiting scholars' sponsorship

Research Collaborations  
Undergraduate and Graduate Research Assistantships

#### YEAR THREE

SGS centralized funding

### Outcomes

Increased visibility for Black Researchers at U of T and externally

Increased access to platforms to showcase Black Researchers Excellence at U of T and externally

Increased participation of Black Researchers in major research projects

Increased access to research funding opportunities for Black Researchers

### Measures

- BRN member's contributions to knowledge in multi-disciplinary research fields e.g., Scholarly Contributions, Translation Outputs (invention disclosures, patents, etc.)
- BRN member's unique multi-disciplinary research engagements e.g., panels, papers, outreach, trainee programs, etc.
- BRN member's access to research grants and awards

# 2

## Mentorship and Pathways

Enhancing the experiences of U of T Black-identified scholars by providing mentoring and other relevant support that strengthen future academic excellence.

### Initiatives

YEAR ONE

**Professional Support Services:**  
Producing guidelines for  
Mentoring Junior Faculty at U of T

YEAR TWO

**Professional Support Services:**  
Black Faculty recruitment  
and retention

YEAR THREE

### Outcomes

Increased professional support services aimed at improving Black Researchers' experiences at U of T

### Measures

- Shared Resources developed by the BRN or its members leading to increased access to knowledge or research support

# 3

## Community, Collaborations and Partnerships

Building an interdisciplinary and cross divisional community of Black-identified scholars across the U of T tri-campus, providing virtual and physical spaces for formal and informal engagements and leveraging opportunities for partnerships and collaboration at the university, locally and globally.

### Initiatives

#### YEAR ONE

**BRN-led and collaborations:**  
Speaker Series  
BRN networking events

#### YEAR TWO

**Researcher Gatherings** (e.g. symposia, brown bag research presentations, writing groups, workshops)

#### YEAR THREE

BRN-BFN gala  
Black Studies Summer Seminar Sponsorship

Black Excellence Research Centre

Federally supported Black Entrepreneur Program

BRN-Division/ Faculty/Dept. collaborations (new and existing)

### Outcomes

Increased number of BRN members

Increased opportunities for Black Researchers to network, build connections, and explore research collaborations

Increased platforms to showcase Black Research Excellence

### Measures

- New community members
- Audiences reached through Public Engagement, Outreach & Communications
- New Collaborations/ Partnerships within U of T and externally

# 4

## Funding and Investment

Advocating for internal and external research funding to increase and improve research capacity of U of T Black scholars.

### Initiatives

YEAR ONE

ISI Funding

YEAR TWO

University Fund

YEAR THREE

Major Foundation  
Gift

### Outcomes

Increased funding for BRN and its members' research projects and initiatives

### Measures

- Value of BRN Funding
- Value of multi-disciplinary Funding Secured (from grants and partnerships) by the BRN and its members



# Milestones

As the BRN navigates building its strategic pillars, these are some of the year-to-year milestones to strengthen the organization and its community.

## Year one

- Official launch of the BRN
- Consultations and development of the BRN strategic plan
- Recruitment and on-boarding the BRN team, website development, building social media presence
- Initiation and development of key U of T stakeholder relationships – Divisional Leads, Council of Deans, Researchers, etc.
- Development of BRN initiatives and the launch of pilot program

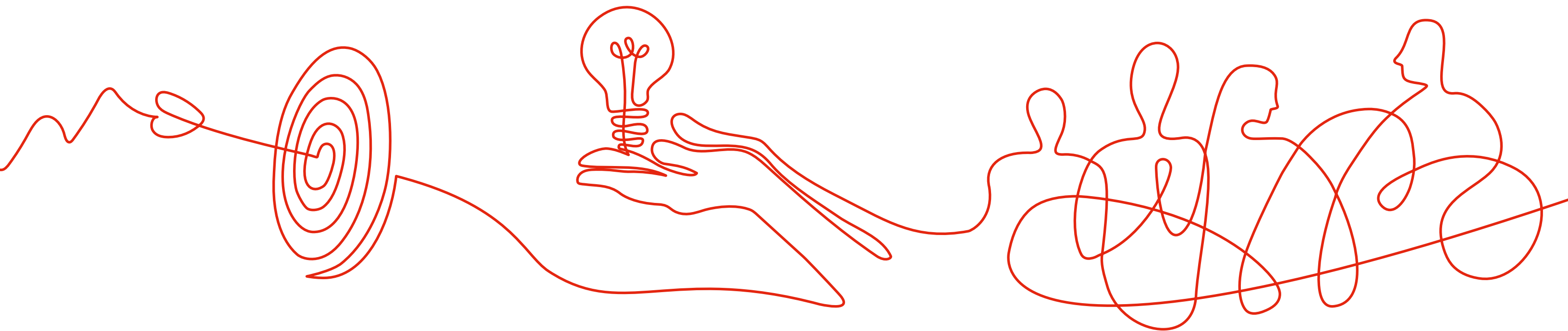
## Year two

- Launching new and strengthening existing BRN initiatives
- Participation in major research projects
- Building internal and external partnerships and collaborations
- Community engagement across the tri-campus

## Year three

- Strengthening existing BRN initiatives
- Developing the next 3-year BRN strategy

# How BRN makes a difference



Centering research on historically marginalized populations and locations across a diversity of disciplines

Elevating innovative and novel research methods across a diversity of disciplines

Building and sustaining communities of research and practice that serve Black researchers in diverse forms of excellence