



Why a Public Equity & Anti-Oppression Statement?

Citizens for Public Justice, May 2022

In November 2019, CPJ staff and Board of Directors engaged in a three-year strategic planning process that concluded with the approval of objectives aimed at improving allyship, diversity, and intersectionality within the organization. Specifically, as part of our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, CPJ established the following objectives:

- Deepen public justice analysis through an intersectional¹ and human rights lens.
- Integrate Indigenous perspectives through allyship aligning with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.
- Increase exposure to more diverse audiences.
- Work in collaboration and seek out new partnerships.

CPJ has a long history of calling for public policy based in human rights and that promotes the flourishing of all people and all of creation. As a result, much of our public policy research and advocacy focuses on closing the inequitable gaps in Canadian society and addressing the systemic barriers that disproportionately impact First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people; people of colour; people who are 2SLGBTQIA+; women and gender-diverse people; people living with disabilities; and people with precarious immigration and citizenship status. CPJ has partnered regularly with other faith-based and non-faith-based organizations across the country to seek just and sustainable policies, recognizing that the “common good” is bound up in our collective liberation.

In an effort to provide **clarity**, **consistency**, and **accountability** across all our activities, both internal and external, CPJ began the process of developing a public statement of our commitment to equity and anti-oppression for people of all abilities, races, ages, ethnicities, religions, socio-economic status, immigration or citizenship status, sexual orientations, and gender identities and expressions.

Clarity. Current and prospective members, donors, volunteers, staff, and partners require clarity on where CPJ stands as an organization with respect to our understanding of “public justice.” This allows people to make an informed decision as to whether or not to engage with CPJ. It does not necessarily require that partners, volunteers, or donors have identical beliefs or practices, but it does allow CPJ to outline the values and practices that we are committed to upholding in all we do.

¹ An intersectional approach recognizes that even within marginalized groups, experiences vary depending on overlapping identities. This term, [originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw](#), related to race and gender identity in particular.



Consistency. As a justice-seeking organization, CPJ wants to ensure our internal processes are consistent with our external advocacy. We also want to ensure that our values, principles, and best practices are applied consistently across all our activities and partnerships, from research reports to advocacy campaigns, to local events across the country. We believe our audience and participants should know what to expect when they engage with a CPJ-produced or affiliated resource or activity.

Accountability. CPJ regularly advocates for public, rights-based accountability mechanisms. By making a public Equity & Anti-Oppression Statement, CPJ is likewise trying to promote transparency and invite accountability from our community, both internally and externally. In issuing this statement, our staff, Board of Directors, volunteers, donors, partners, and other members of civil society are invited to monitor and evaluate our progress, help us see our blind spots, and seek just remedies in instances of harm. Staff and Board members will also use the statement to guide our internal planning and practices, as well as reporting and evaluation procedures.

How was the public EAO Statement developed?

In early 2019, CPJ staff proposed the development of a public statement affirming 2SLGBTQQIA+ identities. This initiative arose out of questions from prospective members, staff, and volunteers who wanted to know CPJ's stance, as well as a desire for consistency with our public policy research and advocacy, in which we often noted the systemic marginalization experienced by people who are 2SLGBTQQIA+.

As we sought feedback on this process and proposed statement, we were encouraged to situate the affirmation of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people within a broader anti-oppression statement. It was felt that this would provide a helpful context for why CPJ was releasing this statement, and not other theological or doctrinal issues.

From July 2020 to January 2022, CPJ's staff and Board of Directors engaged in a series of discussions facilitated by Bernadette Arthur of Co:Culture Collective. Together, we built a shared understanding of key terms and concepts related to equity and anti-oppression, of CPJ's historic and contemporary understanding of "public justice," and of what justice requires of us, as an organization and as individuals. We proposed and discussed specific wording, key concepts, and actions that would flow out of these commitments. We heard from former and current CPJ staff and board members about what this statement could mean for us as an organization, and what a statement like this could have meant for individuals if it had been in place before.



Throughout this process, we learned the importance of moving at the pace of trust and understanding, seeking to build consensus and shared commitment. We had to learn to resist the temptation to get a statement out quickly, choosing depth instead of speed. We wanted a statement that, like CPJ, was “inspired by faith to act for justice,” and that would permeate every aspect of our work and relationships. As sections of the statement were approved, we began to integrate them into our internal planning and practices, operationalizing our commitments as we went.

Our statement reflects both where we are now as an organization, as well as where we want CPJ to grow. We know we have not yet arrived at eradicating all possible biases and barriers from our policies and practices, but we believe releasing this public statement is one critical step in a lifelong journey that we are committed to traveling together.

Next steps for CPJ staff and Board members include developing a process for reporting grievances related to the Equity & Anti-Oppression Statement; integrating our commitments into our 2022 personnel policy review and 2023-2025 strategic planning process; and developing ongoing learning opportunities for CPJ staff and Board internally, as well as public learning opportunities to engage CPJ members with the Equity & Anti-Oppression Statement.