



ROOTS
INSTITUTE

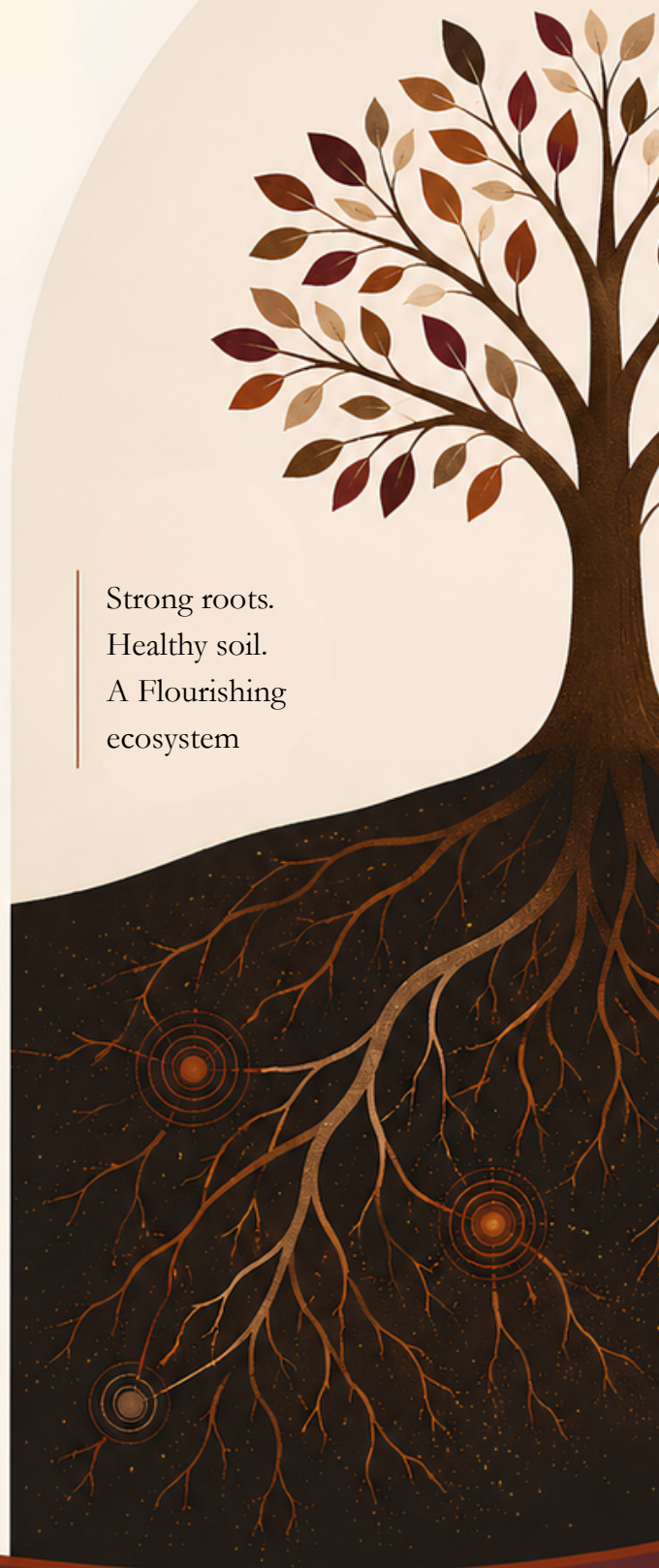
RESEARCH • OPPORTUNITY • ORGANIZATIONAL NAVIGATION
TENURE & SCHOLARSHIP • SUSTAINABILITY

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Supporting the Scholar
Building the Research
Developing the Leader
Strengthening the Institution

A Multi-Year Partnership for Faculty
Recruitment, Retention, Advancement,
Research Excellence, and Flourishing for
Canada's Higher Education Community

Strong roots.
Healthy soil.
A Flourishing
ecosystem





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ROOTS Institute is a collaborative initiative of:
Senomi Solutions Inc. + Coaching Imperative, LLC.
Together, the partners support the scholar, the scholarship, and the structural conditions of the campus community.

*Strong roots. Healthy soil.
A Flourishing Ecosystem*

Institute Overview

ROOTS Institute is a national, multi-year faculty career-development and institutional-capacity initiative launching in Fall 2026. Its inaugural programming centres Black faculty in Canadian higher education while contributing to a broader conversation about how universities support racialized faculty, women professors, and other scholars navigating patterned inequities in academic careers.

Canadian universities have made important investments in diversifying faculty recruitment and research participation. Yet recruitment is only the beginning. The more consequential question is whether scholars have equitable access to the research infrastructure, relationships, sponsorship, institutional knowledge, leadership development, and sustainable working conditions required to remain, advance, and flourish.

The ROOTS proposition

A scholar's talent is not the problem to be solved. The institutional question is whether the soil provides sufficient nutrients, room, protection, connection, and sustained investment for that talent to grow.

Domain	Faculty Development Focus	Institutional Question
R • Research	Research agenda, funding, labs/teams, partnerships, visibility	Do scholars have equitable access to the resources that make research careers possible?
O • Opportunity	Networks, sponsorship, nominations, collaborations, leadership pathways	Who receives advocacy, stretch opportunities, and institutional visibility?
O • Organizational Navigation	Power, politics, communication, conflict, resource negotiation	Are formal rules and informal norms legible and applied equitably?
T • Tenure & Scholarship	Review strategy, dossier readiness, scholarly identity, impact, promotion	Are criteria transparent and capable of recognizing diverse forms of excellence?
S • Sustainability	Well-being, boundaries, belonging, care, EQ/CQ, long-term career design	Can faculty succeed without sacrificing health, identity, relationships, or purpose?

Why ROOTS Is Needed

Recruitment and Retention are Different Challenges

Within a relatively short period, new faculty may be expected to establish a research agenda, publish, secure grants, teach effectively, supervise students and employees, build laboratories or research teams, contribute to service, develop professional networks, navigate institutional politics, and demonstrate readiness for tenure and promotion. Doctoral preparation rarely teaches faculty how to manage all of these responsibilities simultaneously.

The ROOTS Institute situates these demands within a wider Canadian context. Academic mental health is strongly connected to workload, performance expectations, job design, precarity, and caregiving, not only to individual coping. Women faculty can carry disproportionate caregiving, emotional labour, mentoring, and academic housework. Racialized faculty continue to encounter inequities in representation, promotion, leadership, evaluation, networks, and research opportunity. Black faculty may experience these pressures alongside distinct anti-Black barriers, including racialized scrutiny, disproportionate service and EDI requests, cultural taxation, isolation, contested authority, limited access to informal networks and sponsorship, and inadequate institutional protection when racism causes harm.

These conditions are not evidence that faculty lack resilience or readiness. They reveal the interaction between individual careers and institutional systems. ROOTS therefore rejects an either/or choice between developing faculty and changing institutions.

Dual Responsibility

Faculty deserve tools, networks, knowledge, coaching, sponsorship, and research support that expand agency. Institutions simultaneously bear responsibility for fair workload, transparent evaluation, equitable access to opportunity, psychologically safer workplaces, and responsive systems.

From Recruitment to Flourishing

The Institute is aligned with the direction of Canadian higher education and research policy, including the Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan, SSHRC's Action Plan for Black Researchers, and the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education. These frameworks increasingly move the sector from representation alone toward equitable participation, inclusive excellence, Black flourishing, and accountability.



What ROOTS Fellows Receive

ROOTS follows the academic career rather than offering a collection of isolated workshops. Each Fellow develops across five interconnected domains that correspond directly to the ROOTS model.

R • RESEARCH

Fellows develop a coherent research trajectory and the infrastructure needed to sustain it. Support includes research agenda development, grant strategy and funding pipelines, publication planning, research partnerships, laboratory or research-group development, team design, and long-term research enterprise planning. Each Fellow develops a personalized Research Enterprise Blueprint.

O • OPPORTUNITY

Fellows intentionally expand the relationships and opportunities that shape academic careers. ROOTS supports mentoring, sponsorship, nominations, scholarly visibility, invited opportunities, cross-institutional relationships, collaboration, and pathways into research and institutional leadership. The goal is not simply to help scholars network, but to increase access to advocacy and consequential opportunity.

O • ORGANIZATIONAL NAVIGATION

Academic institutions have formal systems and informal cultures. Fellows develop institutional discernment: understanding authority, influence, decision pathways, organizational culture, race, institutional history, and power. They practice negotiating resources, protecting research time, managing service expectations, navigating conflict, recognizing racialized dynamics, deciding when to engage or escalate, and building allies without carrying institutional problems alone.

T • TENURE & SCHOLARSHIP

Tenure and promotion should not become urgent only when a dossier is due. Fellows develop an individualized Tenure & Scholarship Map informed by university requirements, discipline, faculty association or collective agreement, and career goals. Support addresses annual and mid-term review, research, teaching, service, scholarly visibility, dossier development, external referees, Associate Professor advancement, and eventual Full Professor strategy.

S • SUSTAINABILITY

ROOTS recognizes that an academic career is built by a whole person. Through coaching, emotional and cultural intelligence, reflection, peer community, and BLKEQ® practice, Fellows examine purpose, boundaries, belonging, relationships, emotional well-being, recovery, workload sustainability, and long-term career design. Sustainability is treated as a condition of academic excellence, not a reward after overwork.

Leadership Is Woven Across ROOTS

Faculty frequently become supervisors, mentors, principal investigators, project leaders, employers, committee chairs, and public representatives before receiving formal leadership preparation. Leadership development is therefore not a separate sixth domain. It is woven across all five ROOTS areas.

- Research leadership: building teams, laboratories, collaborations, and healthy research cultures.
- People leadership: supervision, delegation, mentoring, communication, feedback, accountability, and conflict navigation
- Relational leadership: emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, trust, boundaries, and difficult conversations.
- Institutional leadership: understanding governance, politics, decision-making, resource allocation, and influence.
- Scholarly leadership: developing a recognizable intellectual contribution, public presence, and capacity to shape a field.
- Stewardship: creating opportunity, mentorship, and institutional pathways for the scholars who follow.

BLKEQ and the Whole Scholar

Black Emotional Intelligence, BLKEQ provides ROOTS with an Afrocentric framework for understanding emotional experience, leadership, community, institutional systems, and collective well-being. Within ROOTS, emotional life is understood as relational, cultural, historical, embodied, communal, and systemic.

Two questions held together

What is happening within me? | What is happening around me?

This distinction helps Fellows develop agency without interpreting every difficult institutional experience as a personal deficit. It also helps institutions avoid using resilience, coaching, or wellness programming as substitutes for addressing inequitable workloads, exclusion, biased evaluation, hostile climates, or unhealthy organizational conditions.

Cohort-Based Hiring Deserves Cohort-Based Development

Canadian universities increasingly use cohort, cluster, and targeted hiring strategies to recruit Black scholars. ROOTS extends the logic of cohort recruitment into sustained development. Rather than hiring scholars together and then dispersing them across departments, the Institute maintains an intentional cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional learning community through the early and later stages of academic careers.

- ☐ Regular cohort learning and peer advisory sessions
- ☐ Individual coaching and EQ/CQ assessment
- ☐ Research and grant-development labs
- ☐ Tenure, promotion, leadership, and organizational-navigation sessions
- ☐ Senior scholar, funder, and institutional-leader conversations
- ☐ Annual research, leadership, and interdisciplinary network convenings

A Multi-Year Career Model

ROOTS aligns with the academic career cycle rather than the calendar year. Canadian tenure processes vary by institution and collective agreement, but tenure-track faculty typically progress through a multi-year probationary period with annual or interim reviews before formal tenure and promotion decisions. ROOTS is designed around three developmental phases.

Career Phase	Primary Goal	ROOTS Focus	Institutional Focus
Years 1–3 Establish & Build	Build the foundation	Research agenda, funding, networks, leadership identity, navigation, review readiness, team	Onboarding, workload, start-up resources, mentoring, early-review clarity
Years 4–6 Position & Advance	Prepare for tenure and promotion	Dossier readiness, major grants, visibility, sponsorship, politics, research leadership	Equitable review, recognition, retention, research-leadership pathways
Post-Tenure Influence & Lead	Expand impact	Full Professor strategy, centres/labs, institutional leadership, mentorship, stewardship	Succession, nominations, senior leadership, mentoring and sponsorship systems

This structure allows universities to begin with an initial three-year engagement and continue supporting Fellows through subsequent career stages. It also allows ROOTS to intervene before predictable career transitions become crises.

Career Infrastructure, Not Workshop Attendance

ROOTS treats faculty development as career infrastructure: a connected set of relationships, resources, practices, information, and institutional conditions that enable scholars to move from appointment to sustained contribution and leadership.

- Early interpretation of written criteria and the hidden curriculum surrounding advancement.
- Research planning that connects ideas to funding, teams, infrastructure, partnerships, and visibility. Mentorship plus sponsorship that opens doors and advocates for scholars in consequential spaces.
- Peer community that reduces isolation and supports shared problem-solving across institutions.
- Leadership preparation before faculty are expected to supervise, manage conflict, or lead complex teams.
- Sustainability practices that support long careers rather than normalizing chronic overwork.

Institutional Learning & Accountability

ROOTS recognizes that faculty development cannot solve structural problems on its own. Participating institutions therefore engage not only as sponsors of individual Fellows, but as learning partners responsible for examining the conditions influencing faculty success.

The Feedback Loop

Develop Faculty → Understand Conditions → Strengthen Systems → Improve Retention

Participating institutions can receive an annual anonymized ROOTS Institutional Conditions & Retention Brief identifying cohort-level patterns related to research support, workload, mentoring, sponsorship, promotion clarity, department culture, belonging, organizational navigation, leadership opportunities, and career sustainability. Individual Fellows retain confidentiality while institutions receive actionable information about recurring conditions.



Illustrative Institutional Practices

- Audit service, mentoring, EDI, and community-facing assignments by race, gender, rank, and employment status. Map internal research opportunities, seed funding, nominations, awards, chairs, infrastructure, and leadership pathways.
- Strengthen sponsorship by engaging deans, chairs, research leaders, and senior scholars in advocacy and opportunity creation.
- Review tenure and promotion processes for clarity, consistency, bias safeguards, and recognition of diverse scholarly contributions.
- Connect faculty mental-health strategies to workload, job design, caregiving, psychological safety, conflict, and discrimination response.
- Create safe and credible mechanisms for untenured faculty to raise concerns without carrying the full burden of institutional risk.
- Use disaggregated data to examine retention, advancement, workload, funding, leadership, and exits while protecting privacy.

A Broader Institutional Value Proposition

ROOTS should not be understood solely as a diversity initiative. It is simultaneously a faculty retention strategy, research-capacity strategy, leadership-development strategy, tenure and promotion strategy, faculty well-being strategy, and institutional-effectiveness strategy. Its Black faculty focus provides the specificity needed to address anti-Black barriers while generating lessons that can strengthen faculty systems more broadly.

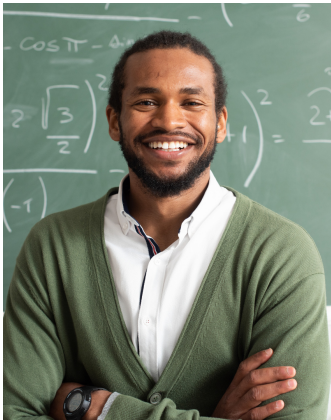
Benefits and Measures of Success

Benefits for Fellows



- Build competitive and sustainable research programs.
- Navigate tenure and promotion early and strategically.
- Gain mentors, sponsors, collaborators, and cross-institutional networks.
- Lead students, staff, teams, and research cultures more effectively.
- Understand institutional power, politics, resource pathways, and decision systems.
- Expand scholarly visibility, influence, and pathways toward Full Professor and leadership.
- Develop boundaries, relationships, and practices that support flourishing rather than survival alone.

Benefits for Universities



- Stronger faculty retention and tenure/promotion readiness.
- More competitive grant activity and stronger research enterprises.
- Earlier identification of institutional barriers affecting faculty success.
- Stronger mentoring and sponsorship networks.
- Greater faculty leadership capacity and succession pipelines.
- More sustainable faculty Black faculty communities and cross-institutional networks.
- Better alignment between recruitment investments and long-term career outcomes.
- Increased student retention, revenue and graduation rates

Measuring What Matters

Because academic careers develop over years, ROOTS evaluation is longitudinal. Participation and satisfaction matter, but they are leading indicators rather than the ultimate outcomes.

- **Research Capacity:** Grants and awards; publications; research partnerships; labs/teams; protected research time; course releases
- **Retention & Advancement:** Retention; interim reviews; tenure; promotion; time to promotion; Full Professor progression
- **Opportunity & Sponsorship:** Mentors and sponsors; nominations; invited opportunities; collaborations; leadership opportunities
- **Leadership Capacity:** Supervisory effectiveness; EQ/CQ growth; mentoring; conflict navigation; organizational navigation; institutional influence
- **Faculty Experience:** Belonging; trust; role clarity; psychological safety; workload sustainability; navigation confidence
- **Institutional Equity:** Service and workload equity; barriers removed; policy/practice changes; equitable research supports; discrimination response
- **Career Sustainability:** Work-life integration; recovery; healthy boundaries; career satisfaction and retention intention; sustainable navigation of high-demand periods

Partnership, Co-Leadership & Long-Term Vision

Senomi Solutions Inc.

Senomi Solutions brings expertise in research environments, research strategy, grant and research support, organizational equity, evaluation, people and culture, institutional assessment, retention, and sustainable organizational change. Its contribution is especially important in helping scholars build the practical infrastructure surrounding research while helping universities understand the organizational conditions affecting faculty success.

Coaching Imperative LLC

Coaching Imperative brings expertise in higher education, faculty and leadership development, executive coaching, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, teaching and learning, curriculum and pedagogy, organizational development, conflict navigation, strategic planning, and institutional culture. Coaching Imperative's engagement model includes assessment, education, training and coaching. Their approach recognizes that leadership exists within environments shaped by culture, identity, relationships, power, emotion, and organizational culture.

Co-Leadership

Nicole Kaniki, PhD, brings extensive experience as a researcher, research methodologist, equity practitioner, organizational advisor, and consultant within the Canadian research and higher education context. Through Senomi Solutions, she offers a wide range of tailored diversity consulting services, in support of people and culture, and institutional change including: strategic planning, evaluation and assessment, and education, training, tools to support and sustain EDI in the workplace.



Issac M. Carter, PhD, has worked for over two decades of experience in higher education, academic administration, leadership development, and executive coaching, including serving as an academic program chair and holding the rank of tenured Associate Professor. He is the founder of Coaching Imperative and is the creator of Black Emotional Intelligence, BLKEQ an afrocentric, wellness leadership model supported by soul, science and sound.

The Long-Term Vision

ROOTS is not simply intended to increase the number of faculty from designated groups working within Canadian universities. The goal is to help create a sustainable academic ecosystem in which women, indigenous, Black scholars can conduct consequential research, secure resources, build research enterprises, earn tenure and promotion, lead people effectively, navigate institutional complexity, influence their disciplines, move into positions of academic leadership, and create opportunities for the scholars who follow.