

Small Business Spotlight:

Cicely Belle Blain (they/them) | CEO

Bakau Consulting, Est. 2018

Bakau Consulting is a full-service equity, inclusion, and anti-racism consulting firm located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. The firm has grown from one to 21 team members in four years.

Life story

Cicely grew up in London, U.K. and is of Jamaican, Gambian, and English ancestry. When they were 16, Cicely attended United World College of Maasricht in the Netherlands which focused on inspiring young leaders to make change and uniting people from different cultures through education. After graduating from UBC, Cicely worked at QMUNITY, an 2SLGBTQIA+ organization in Vancouver and founded Black Lives Matter Vancouver. These experiences inspired Cicely to build a business dedicated to fostering inclusivity and creating environments for people to be seen for their full selves.

On the rewards of running a small business

Cicely thrives in flexible and non-conventional working environments and was driven to start their own business to come up with non-traditional ways of doing work. They have found it rewarding to share and collaborate with team members to continue to develop and adopt alternative ways of work. Small businesses get to make the rules and do the things that matter to them. For instance, with September 30 being Orange Shirt Day, it is a day employers can choose to give the day off for staff to attend community events and to reflect, something Bakau Consulting does.

Cicely is also interested in exploring and unpacking things that are rooted in business tradition. This has offered Bakau Consulting the opportunity to provide both a living wage and a four-day work week to their staff.

The importance of community and diverse business ownership

Community has played a key role in the growth of Bakau Consulting and due to Cicely's role as a community activist and writer, they were able to utilize these connections to attract clients when they were just starting out. Grateful to those who

saw their potential, Cicely has committed to building a network of those doing similar work,

contributing to the same knowledge pools, and who care about the same issues. Whether it's physical or virtual, bringing people together and creating collaborations that are cohesive and relevant is important.

Diverse business ownership is crucial because it contributes to representation and understanding in the community. This helps create a diversified economy, which in turn gets more people out and engaging with their community. Bakau Consulting aims to bring together small businesses owned by other people of colour and equity seeking groups, through collaborations, helping them to thrive and enrich the local community.

Overcoming challenges as a small business owner

Getting the word out about the importance of anti-oppression and anti-racism work and what Bakau Consulting does was challenging when first starting out. However recently there has been a shift in these conversations, and anti-racism and anti-oppression work is becoming more culturally understood, though challenges still exist on spreading the word.

Finding educational services and funding around running a small business was also challenging at the start. Lots of networking events were geared towards a more traditional business community and making connections was proving difficult. To overcome this, Cicely sought more specific supports from their communities. This experience was helpful to connect with other leaders who are trying to do similar things, or a community who understands different ways of doing business.

The final statement

"I am very grateful to be able to do what I get to do and am very lucky to have an amazing team that leads with their hearts. It is hard work to be constantly talking about these challenging issues. I am grateful to continue learning and always excited to learn about people who are doing similar work."

