

## QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY IRC

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# Developing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Program

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The issue of racism and ongoing oppression of minority groups is well documented. Leadership must recognize their unconscious and implicit biases to begin to help organizations become inclusive.

Leaders who are engaged will recognize inequities and will also recognize bias as well as disrespect and incivility. By addressing these issues through education and formal programs, leaders will help foster the development of others in overcoming historic barriers to both employment and customer service.

There are also limited dedicated resources or programs that assist with equity, diversity and inclusion programs. Often programs are completed off the corner of one's desk to obtain the check mark. Strategies are required for dedicated resources, education, as well as an acknowledgement that we must foster an environment of equity and inclusivity and become committed to listening, learning and understanding to ensure every person can work and receive their goods or service safely, openly and honestly.

In Ontario (and across Canada), the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been disproportionately felt by vulnerable populations and individuals from marginalized communities, including seniors, individuals from racialized communities, and those with lower incomes or experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Racism is a root cause underlying widespread disparity in social, economic, and health outcomes, including the increased morbidity and mortality.<sup>2</sup> Leaders impact outcomes by directing the operations of their businesses and determine methods and standards used within the organization. For these reasons, addressing racism in all its forms — interpersonal, institutional, and structural — by leaders is very important to creating an inclusive business.

## **Anti-Racism and Inclusive Strategy Framework**

The model below represents the framework developed to visually assist with building a fulsome anti-racism and inclusion program. The framework itself identifies four cornerstones with a goal of providing an inclusive work environment. The cornerstones

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). (2020). COVID-19 – What we know so far about... social determinants of health, Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, D. R., Lawrence, J. A., & Davis B. A. (2019). Racism and health: evidence and needed research. *Annual Review of Public Health*. 40 (1), 105–125.

include an Appreciation of Differences, Psychological Safety, Education and Measuring Success.

To enable program success, the following enablers are also required: Culture, Leadership, Collaboration and Sustainability. The framework is described below in greater detail.



Figure 1: Anti-Racism and Inclusive Strategy Framework. (Developed by Elizabeth Vosburgh.)

1. **Appreciation of Differences** is the ability to understand others and respect historical treatment of individuals. Better understanding and celebrating differences assists in bringing people closer together.
2. **Psychological Safety** is the state of well-being where every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively,

and is able to make a positive contribution to their community.<sup>3</sup> In addition, cultural safety is also protected.

3. **Measuring Success** will entail collecting and then utilizing data to understand prejudicial attitudes, to identify unconscious bias in policies, procedures, and hiring practices, and then using the data collected to plan and initiate change.
4. **Education** is required to understand what systemic racism is, how it works and how to identify it. It is often difficult to see.<sup>4</sup>

## The Cornerstones of the Anti-Racism and Inclusive Strategy Framework

To enable the four cornerstones of the anti-racism framework, the following must also be in place to support the changes:

- 1) **Organizational culture** or patterns of organizational behaviour involving communication, informal social relations, decision-making behaviour, norms, and the organization's response to concerns about discrimination and/or harassment must be in place and fully supported by the organization.<sup>5</sup>
- 2) **Leadership** will enable an anti-racism agenda by creating an open dialogue to understand how discrimination appears in a workplace. Challenge current processes and look for innovative ways to change. In addition, leaders will model inclusive behaviour and inspire others to improve diversity and relationships within the organization, by enabling others to act by removing barriers to participation and encouraging a spirit of shared community success.
- 3) **Collaboration** with partners to educate and understand the broad context of racism will assist in appreciating differences and will facilitate the working together for a greater understanding of one another.

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<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). (2017). World Mental Health Day 2017. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/world-mental-health-day/2017/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/world-mental-health-day/2017/en/).

<sup>4</sup> Henry, F., James, C. E., Li, P. S., Kobayashi, A. L., Smith, M., Ramos, H., & Enakshi, D. (2017). *The equity myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian universities*. UBC Press.

<sup>5</sup> Agocs, C. (2004). Surfacing racism in the workplace: Qualitative and quantitative evidence of systemic discrimination. Retrieved January 26, 2021, from <http://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/race-policy-dialogue-papers/surfacing-racism-workplace-qualitative-and-quantitative-evidence-systemic-discrimination#:~:text=Identifying%20Systemic%20Racism%20in%20Organizational%20Culture%3A%20Qualitative%20Approaches.,held%20and%20largely%20unconscious%20values%2C%20assumptions%20and%20norms.>

- 4) **Sustainability** will ensure that the work and education completed today will be monitored to ensure that the programs are imbedded into the organizational culture for future generations.

## **Designing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Program**

It can be overwhelming to start a project like this. Begin with setting a goal, developing a realistic timeline, and determining how you will measure your progress. Then work through the objectives and how you will achieve them.

### **What is the goal?**

Your goal may look something like this:

To implement a program to ensure inclusivity, and to recognize, appreciate and celebrate the differences that each person brings to the organization.

### **What is a realistic timeframe?**

You will likely need an extended time frame to accomplish your goals. Start with a 1-year plan focused on creating incremental and sustainable change. The plan should also be reviewed on an annual basis to reflect regional, national and international learnings.

### **How is success measured?**

Success can be measured by the following:

- Overall increase in staff satisfaction scores to minimally reach the same level as other benchmarked organizations; and
- Transparency with demographics when compared to the community.

## **Objectives for the First Year of an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Program**

A cultural shift will take many years to implement, and a concerted effort is required on a regular basis to ensure the ongoing success and sustainability. The objectives will need to be updated on an annual basis. The goal for year one should include sustaining the work that was previously developed and begin to broaden the understanding of unconscious bias and to understand the organization's employee demographics when compared to the community.

Year 1 objectives are outlined below:

### **Objective 1**

Implement an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DIAC) of individuals who are living or who have lived experience as a member of an identified group such as BIPOC or 2LGBTQ+, who will provide recommendations, advice and information to the Senior Team on the following:

- Remove barriers to inclusion for staff, and customers;
- Achieve a greater understanding of the diversity in our catchment area; and
- Facilitate discussions and education within the organization to promote broader understanding of diversity including unconscious bias.

### **Objective 2**

Provide the leadership team and Board of Directors, if applicable, with training and resources to begin to address unconscious bias, systemic discrimination, and racism. Education would be delivered by external facilitators and actions include:

- Provide online training and resources for pre-learning for the leadership team and the board;
- Deliver an in-person virtual training for the leadership team and the Board; and
- Provide additional supports and resources to encourage post-learning for the leadership team and the Board.

### **Objective 3**

1. Examine organizational structures, policies (e.g. recruitment and selection) and practises and barriers that impact and/or limit access and opportunities for members; and
2. Develop a program to capture current demographics of employee demographics. Actions include:

- Identify a resource to identify the current demographics of employees;
- Determine the demographics within the community that the organization serves including barriers, structures and policies for barriers that impact and/or limit access or opportunities for employees;

- Review the need to set targets to ensure that the organization represents the community it serves;
- Recruit, support and advance careers that reflect a diverse workforce; and
- Review policies and procedures to ensure they are barrier free.

#### **Objective 4**

Continue to plan and educate staff re: Indigenous population and 2LGBTQ+ population. Activities include:

1. Plan an Indigenous Peoples Day program in partnership with First Nations to celebrate National Indigenous Day. Special events can be planned around the new National Day for Truth and reconciliation, September 30. This program and associated activities will provide organizational education and celebration of the Indigenous population.
2. Plan an education strategy with the DIAC, to demonstrate to staff, physicians and volunteers and the surrounding community that the organization is a safe organization for 2LGBTQ+ where people are free to be themselves. This program will include flying a rainbow flag during June of each year.

#### **Future Annual Objectives - Year 2 and Beyond**

Continue to sustain the previous year's objectives and focus on implementing and broadening the change and the cultural shift. Some suggested activities include:

1. Engage groups within the organization such as the Governance Committee, senior leaders or leaders to read, and discuss books such as White Fragility, Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism, Robin DiAngelo, 2018, Beacon Press, or Me and White Supremacy ; Combat Racism, Change the World and Become a Good Ancestor, Layla F. Saad, 2020, Sourcebooks. The goal of this exercise is to spark exploratory thinking. At the end of the session, additional objectives can be developed.
2. Engage senior leaders and Governance to develop statements and policies that support EDI initiatives and ensure that the policies are being sustained by implementing formal measurement protocols.

3. Explore and engage external resources within your region and develop collaborative partnerships to enhance internal education and program sustainability.
4. Create a budget line for EDI and ensure ongoing activities and resources are applied to the project.

## Conclusion

Implementing an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) program is not easy! You are trying to change historical biases and, in some cases, the biases are centuries old.

The Anti-racism Framework is a tool that can help guide your thinking and processes when building your objectives. When you find yourself meeting barriers, reflect on the enablers to see how you can engage others to help support the initiatives that you are planning on making. Also reflect on the four cornerstones to help build your objectives.

Shifting an organizational culture to be more equitable, diverse and inclusive is very rewarding. As leaders, we know that the development of an EDI program is morally and ethically the right thing to do to support our employees and our customers. You not only gain personal insights, you also foster others to be more innovative, it improves the work culture and attracts better and different talent and supports improved customer service. I encourage all leaders in the current business environment to reflect, educate and monitor their personal understanding and continue to help make more supportive and engaging places to work by appreciating differences, creating a psychologically safe environment, educate and measure your results!

## About the Author



Elizabeth Vosburgh, CHRE, is a human resources executive, who has served as Senior Vice President, with more than 30 years experience. Through her efforts, she has steered the planning and execution of numerous and varied projects. She has a proven track record and is passionate about promoting and inspiring a workplace culture that supports positive staff engagement. She has recently initiated a consultancy company to help support human resources and change management functions in organizations, including workplace investigations.

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