Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IDEA)

Good Practices for Researchers

UNESCO
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Why this toolkit

A diversity of perspectives and lived experiences (all ways of knowing and learning) is essential to achieving research excellence. A strong commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) promotes and diversifies talents in research groups. To attract and retain a diversity of researchers, everyone needs to feel welcomed, valued, supported, and included.

This toolkit is intended to assist Canadian research groups, mainly principal investigators and/or professors, achieve an inclusive culture free of racism and discrimination and foster deeper respect and appreciation for different perspectives, merits, and skills. While this toolkit mainly focuses on providing a holistic IDEA approach for research groups, many of the considerations can be applied to other groups, institutions, and organizations.

This toolkit focuses on three IDEA areas:

- **Inside the laboratory** (admission, recruitment, curriculum, workload, mentorship);

- **Outside of the laboratory** (field work, community engagement, science communication);

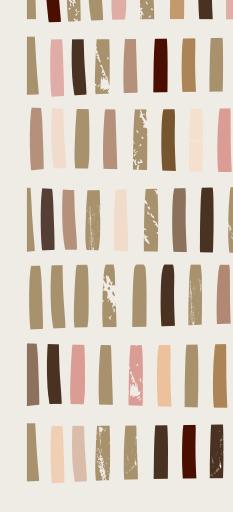- **Administration** (decision-making, evaluation, training).

Dimensions
of IDEA

One in five people in Canada's population identifies as a non-white minority group. This correlates with increasing representation of equity-seeking groups in Canadian universities.

Representation of equity-seeking groups in Canadian Universities

	Women (%)	Persons with disabilities (%)	Visible minorities/ Racialized people (%)	Indigenous Peoples (%)
Full-time faculty	41	22	21	1
Student enrollment - undergraduate	57	22	40	3
Student enrollment	55	6	45	4

Understanding
IDEA

Historically excluded groups, including women, racialized persons, LGBTQ2S+ peoples, Indigenous Peoples, and people living with disabilities, have different lived experiences at Canadian universities, and this is true for both students and faculty. Discrimination, racism, conscious (explicit) and unconscious (implicit) biases are well-documented issues they face. These issues are rooted in continued power imbalances, marginalization, stereotyping, and inadequate IDEA awareness, policies, procedures, and training. Ensuring a shared understanding of IDEA is a good first step in building a strong IDEA foundation in the research laboratory or team. The following definitions will help get you started.

Inclusion

Inclusion is ensuring all individuals are equally supported, valued, and respected. This is best achieved by creating a research environment in which all individuals (students, faculty, staff and visitors) feel welcomed, safe, respected, valued, and are supported to enable full participation and contribution.

Equity

Equity is the fair treatment and access to equal opportunity (justice) that allows the unlocking of one's potential, leading to the further advancement of all peoples. The equity pursuit is about the identification and removal of barriers to ensure the full participation of all people and groups.

Diversity

Diversity is the wide range of attributes within a person, group or community which makes them distinctive. Dimensions of diversity consider that each individual is unique and recognizes individual differences including: ethnic origins, gender (identity, expression), sexual orientation, background (socio-economic status, immigration status or class), religion or belief, civil or marital status, family obligations (i.e., pregnancy), age, and disability.

Accessibility

Accessibility is the provision of flexibility to accommodate needs and preferences, and refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities. It can also be understood as "a set of solutions that empower the greatest number of people to participate in the activities in question in the most effective ways possible".

Good Practices
Approach to IDEA

Building a research group that promotes IDEA principles, grounded in action, is different from simply adhering to institutional IDEA policies. As a minimum requirement, this approach can leave faculty, especially principal investigators, unsure how to turn IDEA into practice in the different aspects of their work. The following IDEA good practices have been developed to provide guidance to principle investigators and help facilitate changes to create an environment where all can thrive.

Good Practice #1: Improve team awareness about the roles that biases, discrimination, stereotypes, and racism play in day-to-day conduct and decision-making.

The existence of biases, discrimination, stereotypes, and racism in research laboratories or teams is significantly underestimated. The effects of biases, discrimination, stereotypes, and racism when left unchecked become widely shared, culturally ingrained assumptions about the nature of people from historically excluded groups and contribute to both intentional and unintentional inequity. A full understanding of IDEA barriers (see page 5) must be acknowledged and can be addressed by performing an environmental scan to identify the specific obstacles that could be preventing all voices from being heard. This process should include robust principal investigator-led conversations to help team members uncover their personal biases, while establishing a laboratory or team culture of non-complacency.

The environmental scan should involve the following steps:

a. All team members (including the principal investigator) complete IDEA training, including evaluation, to ensure understanding;

b. Identify who is not being included, what barriers could be causing this exclusion, and what can be done differently to ensure everyone's full participation;

c. Ensure that all team members feel comfortable approaching the principal investigator about any issue;

d. Repeat this process annually or when significant staffing (leadership) or program changes occur.

Common Barriers

RACE

The division (classification) of humans into groups based on physical traits (i.e., skin colour) regarded as common among people of shared cultural origin.

RACISM

The "belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race, including the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another".

STEREOTYPING

A generalized belief (to be true) about the characteristics, abilities, or qualities of certain groups (categories) of people.

DISCRIMINATION

The practice (causing harm) of being treated unfairly, unequal, or differently based on a personal characteristic or trait such as gender or ethnicity.

CONSCIOUS (EXPLICIT) BIAS

The intentional (made with awareness) assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs about a person or group.

UNCONSCIOUS (IMPLICIT) BIAS

The automatic (without thinking) assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs made about a person or group which can affect actions and outcomes. Unconscious biases are problematic, as they occur under the surface of conscious awareness, with little self-awareness of occurrence and consequence.

AFFINITY BIAS

The tendency for people to seek out those who are like themselves, as well as the preference for favouring people, credentials and experiences that more closely resemble oneself (likeness, sameness).

GROUPTHINK

The failure to consider alternatives to the dominant view when making decisions. Groupthink inhibits individual thinking because decisions-making becomes a group exercise focused on conformity and consensus as opposed to independent critical thinking. Groupthink discourages the creativity and innovation that come along with individual thinking, it also decreases critical reasoning and evaluation because it takes away individual responsibility.

Good Practice #2: Advocate for better <u>academic outreach processes</u> to ensure that people from historically excluded groups feel included.

Undervaluing academic credentials, experience, and contributions because they look different than the status quo is an important area of discrimination to acknowledge in the research laboratory or team. The response rate for white male students who reach out to professors as part of academic reconnaissance is 87% while for all other demographics (including white women) the response rate is 62% or below. Résumés containing racial cues such as international credentials or minority associated names lead to 30-50% fewer career opportunity responses. For many students (especially international), credential bias becomes further aggravated when name bias, accent bias and experience bias are layered in. White men receive more networking and engagement opportunities and are more likely than other gender or race to be sought out for early university admission, scholarships, and fellowships. Principal investigators need to be aware of these disparities, check their own biases (introspection), and ensure equitable outreach and recruitment practices.

Good Practice #3: Create fair and <u>equitable processes</u> by removing <u>gendered language</u> from job announcements, applications, nominations, letters of recommendations, and evaluation processes.

Gendered language is language that is characteristic or associated with a particular sex or social gender. Gendered language, although subtle, can have negative consequences for people from historically excluded groups, especially within competitive landscapes. Communal and interpersonally oriented language ("kind", "caring") is more commonly used to describe women. Men are more likely to be characterized with masculine descriptive language ("risk-taker", "strong", "outstanding") that is associated with leadership and agency. The use of gendered language has been found to advantage men in letters of recommendations, and discourage women from applying for jobs, grants, prizes, or scholarships. The Canada Research Chairs <u>guidelines and best practices for reference letter writing</u> and <u>limiting unconscious bias</u> and gendered language in academic processes are excellent resources for guidance.

Good Practice #4: Diversify <u>mentorship programs</u> to better match the growing diversity of university community populations.

It can be challenging to find faculty who are available to teach with authority about the issues and concerns faced by historically excluded groups, and this raises issues about who is available to provide mentoring. Representation matters: "you can't be what you can't see" and "seeing is believing" are common everyday expressions rooted in this belief. The lack of diversity within the Canadian professorship requires <u>creative programming solutions</u> such as expanding mentorship programs beyond faculty to the broader research community including alumni, government, and private sector networks.

Good Practice #5: Acknowledge tokenism, service work, and <u>workload</u> as placing additional burdens on already historically excluded students and faculty.

Historically excluded faculty and students are often targeted to participate in service work (including mentoring, and committee and panel membership), placing additional burdens on historically excluded students and faculty. In some cases, the involvement of people from historically excluded groups is motivated by tokenism, i.e., the desire to create an appearance of inclusion and diversity. Principal investigators need to understand the relationship between workload, gender, culture, and race. The implications of increased workload can distract from research production, negatively impacting academic achievement and career opportunities. Research group members should be encouraged to share service work, and participation should be monitored by the principal investigator to help create <u>fair and balanced workload</u>.

Good Practice #6: Extend IDEA adherence through training and discussions beyond the laboratory during field work, outreach, and engagement forums.

<u>Research beyond the walls of academic institutions</u> comes with additional complexities and risk for managing and maintaining IDEA practices and codes of conduct. Principal investigators need to be aware of the high incidence of IDEA breaches, including harassment, violence, and failure to accommodate, that can occur during field work. Field work risk assessments, mitigation strategies, and training should encompass IDEA practices by considering the cultures of the communities in which the research takes place. Researchers should be equipped with cultural intelligence and sensitivity training and clear procedures for reporting threats and breaches.

Good Practice #7: Improved awareness of biases, discrimination, stereotypes, and racism in spaces of <u>research knowledge translation, mobilization</u>, and dissemination.

The opportunities for knowledge mobilization are important for peer review, collaboration, fellowship opportunities, and networking. However, too often historically excluded groups face obstacles in taking advantage of such opportunities. Research shows white men are more likely than any other race and gender to be invited to speak at conferences, especially as presenters, keynote speakers, and as moderators. Women, especially non-white women, become further disadvantaged given that during a typical conversation, men interrupt women over 33% of the time. In the research enterprise, women are interrupted, talked over or completely ignored by men with great frequency. Men dominate as much as 75% of networking conversations and speaking opportunities including question and answer periods at conferences and other spaces of knowledge mobilization. Principal investigators need to be aware of such male dominated behaviours, and monitor/modify practices accordingly, and students should be made aware of how gender, race, ability, ways of knowing, and differing cultures can influence communications and knowledge sharing.

Good Practice #8: Increase awareness of how <u>curriculum is dominated by and caters to the Western colonialist way of knowing</u>.
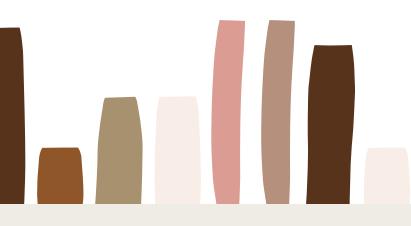
Curriculum transformation can lead to a more inclusive way of thinking, collaborating, and knowing. Canadian universities' curricula are dominated by white, Eurocentric, and colonial scholarship, and other cultural ways of knowing tend to remain invisible. In addition, most textbooks and teaching materials tend to only use white men as examples. This lack of representation and diversity within curricula further perpetuates biases against historically excluded groups. To elicit meaningful IDEA change, principal investigators should revisit program core teachings and their teaching materials.

Good Practice #9: <u>Include a diversity of collaborators in grant applications</u> to ensure all team members are able to fully participate equitably in research undertakings.

Academic evaluation processes tend to employ antiquated criteria to assess excellence, including the amount of work published, cited, and the potential impact of the proposed research. This traditional way of assessing achievement heavily favours men, giving them a verified advantage over people from historically excluded groups. Principal investigators need to provide more opportunities for collaboration that will provide people from historically excluded groups more opportunities for research impact, including publishing. It is not only a question of including more women; this is not enough to achieve diversity and inclusivity. Rather, it will include how the principal investigator and the team minimize barriers to promote IDEA, how they will guard against bias (conscious and unconscious), and how commitments to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission <u>Calls to Action</u> will be incorporated into the laboratory or team culture.

Good Practice #10: Improve decision-making processes by <u>increasing diversity and representation</u> on committees, incorporating specific and measurable evaluation criteria
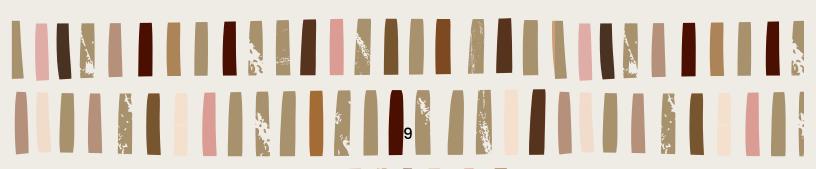
White men tend to dominate selection committees, especial those responsible for hiring, scholarships, and grant selection. Affinity bias (preference for sameness) is overwhelmingly responsible for white men receiving higher scores. The principal investigator should strive to improve decision-making by increasing diversity with at least 30% of all committee's represented by a range of people (age, race, skill set, experience) with a goal of gender parity for men and women. Evaluation processes should be based on merit that is not solely based on high impact factor publications, but also considers social or other impacts, such as contributions to the discipline, and in accordance with the capacity of the person (i.e., a woman who has had children during her tenure process, or someone who works part-time as a result of a disability). Evaluation criteria should be clearly defined, specific, and measurable, looking at actual achievements. The principal investigator should accurately assess talent by combining an evaluation of academic achievements with service to community (including volunteer work).

Summary

The IDEA good practices discussed in this toolkit can help change the established ways of doing things, while positioning principal investigators as bold equity leaders in their research laboratories. By making changes even in the small spaces such as in individual research laboratories, this bottom-up approach can eventually transform departments and institutions as a whole.

For more information and further reading, download the Reflection Paper.