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# Strengthening equity, diversity and inclusion on campus: Best practices for Canadian university leaders



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**The Voice of Canada's Universities**

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Universities Canada held a workshop on *Strengthening equity, diversity and inclusion on campus* in Vancouver on June 3, 2019 as part of our ongoing commitment to advancing inclusive excellence. More than 60 university leaders from across the country engaged candidly on the road ahead as they continue to make campuses more equitable, diverse and inclusive.

## Session 1: Preliminary results from the 2019 EDI member survey



Wendy Therrien, director of external relations and research, began the workshop by providing preliminary insights on Universities Canada's first member survey on EDI. Launched in late February 2019, the objectives of the survey were to:

- better understand the current EDI institutional landscape;
- enable members to compare results and share promising practices; and
- inform Universities Canada's advocacy and capacity building activities.

We are pleased that ninety-two percent of member institutions participated in the survey.

Preliminary results indicate that while universities are making progress and prioritizing EDI policies and practices there is more work to be done. We learned that during the past three years, universities have prioritized advancing reconciliation on campus and that most universities are now also working on developing and/or implementing an EDI action plan that addresses teaching and learning, research, community engagement and governance. University presidents identified that their institutional policy and decision-making could better integrate EDI values and priorities. The findings highlight challenges in accessing adequate resources (financial, human, material and temporal) to address EDI on campus and to collecting and analysing EDI data. Results also indicate that racialized people are particularly underrepresented in senior leadership positions.

Further analysis and more details on the survey will be shared at Universities Canada's October membership meeting and then in a public report.

## Session 2: Presidents' panel – Creating inclusive campuses



Deborah Saucier, president of MacEwan University, moderated an armchair discussion with Gervan Fearon, president of Brock University, Andrew Petter, president of Simon Fraser University and Annette Trimbee, president of the University of Winnipeg, on creating inclusive campuses.

The university presidents discussed successes and challenges, personal accountability for progress, and navigating resistance to EDI.

### Key takeaways:

- Leadership must exemplify EDI. The role of leadership is not to control the EDI agenda but to inspire and influence others to advance it.
- Policies, structures and resources should align to address EDI. This includes ensuring the Board and Senate receive unconscious bias training and are focussed on delivering results to advance EDI.
- Gathering data and favourable EDI metrics is not enough. To meaningfully support inclusion, people need to feel heard and a sense of belonging. Culture change requires engagement at all levels of the institution. At the faculty level, deans play a crucial role in facilitating culture change. It is also important to create space for individuals across the university community to help inform and advance EDI efforts.

- Time is an important investment presidents and other senior leaders can make to advance EDI. Showing up, being present and listening to diverse voices across campus are all key to good decision-making on EDI issues and to building confidence in university leadership.
- Efforts to advance EDI on university campuses have a ripple effect in the broader community. Evidence shows communities with strong support for equity, diversity and inclusion attract investment and top talent.
- Managing and understanding people’s fears around EDI issues is as important as managing expectations and inspiration. We need to understand people’s fears to address their concerns.
- EDI work shouldn’t be a checkbox exercise. We need to examine ourselves, our biases and power dynamics to get this right.
- University strategies for advancing EDI will vary depending on an institution’s size and context. Strategies and structures evolve over time as institutions experiment with new tools and approaches to EDI work.

### Session 3: Cultivating inclusive leadership and allyship

Jenni Sidey-Gibbons, astronaut in training with the Canadian Space Agency, joined the workshop virtually to reflect on her experience as a woman in engineering and the importance of role models, mentors and allies in her education and career success.

On this theme, we were pleased to have Ritu Bhasin, president of *Bhasin Consulting Inc.* lead a training session with participants on cultivating inclusive leadership and effective allyship and how to address the three critical “must do’s” of allyship, which are to:

- interrupt your unconscious and cultural biases;
- acknowledge systems of power, privilege and supremacy; and
- leverage verbal and non-verbal communications.



## Session 4: Small group discussions – Advancing EDI at Canadian universities

Having heard preliminary results from Universities Canada's 2019 EDI member survey and participated in the morning sessions, participants were asked to discuss what format(s) Universities Canada should use to share the survey results and what they would find most helpful in a toolkit to advance EDI on campus.

### Sharing survey results

In terms of the survey results, participants said they would like to see the representation data further disaggregated and that they would appreciate survey data broken down by region.

### Toolkit for advancing EDI

For the toolkit, participants prioritized the development of the following top three tools:

1. *A resource to educate senior university leaders (deans and above) on why they should make EDI a priority and how they can address resistance on campus and beyond*

The resource should provide leaders with an understanding of what EDI looks like; data and narratives to illustrate why it is important (i.e. how EDI improves university governance, research, the student experience and our communities); and a list of frequently encountered objections to EDI initiatives and how to respond.

2. *Best practices for self-identification surveys and climate surveys*

Participants indicated that it would be useful to have a shared national approach for collecting comparable data, but collective agreements, provincial laws and regulations on data collection could make this difficult. Clarification on what can and cannot be collected would be helpful. A hub with examples of institutional surveys for collecting self-id data and climate surveys would also be beneficial. Tools to support intersectional data analysis – reflecting overlapping identities and experiences of inequity/oppression – would also be welcomed.

3. *Best practices for recruiting and retaining staff from underrepresented groups including how to address EDI in collective agreements*

For example, participants requested examples of language in job postings and interview questions that address EDI; case studies on efforts to increase racialized faculty and faculty with disabilities; and information on the benefits and challenges of cluster hires.

Other tools suggested:

- A guide on building structures to support collaboration across the institution on EDI
- EDI job performance metrics for senior leaders
- Resources for advancing reconciliation and decolonization

Workshop participants indicated that a central hub where they can access Canadian university resources and data (which are regularly updated) would be very helpful. They also see the need for regular forums/meetings to discuss and tackle EDI challenges.

Finally, participants requested that Universities Canada continue to advocate for better coordination of EDI efforts in the federal government, including consistency in EDI definitions and metrics.



## Next steps

The outcomes of the workshop, the EDI survey results and the proposed contents of the toolkit will be discussed with Universities Canada's Education Committee in September 2019.

A report on the EDI survey results will be shared with university presidents at Universities Canada's membership meetings in late October 2019. The report will also be shared with senior university administrators (including EDI leads), as well as with other stakeholders and posted on Universities Canada's website. And we will provide members with individualized reports so that they may compare their results to national and regional results.

Universities Canada will collaborate with staff involved in the [Dimensions](#) program and the [Canada Research Chairs](#) program to coordinate efforts and tools to support universities' work on EDI. A roll-out of new tools will begin in the fall of 2019. Universities Canada will also continue to maintain and regularly update an [EDI website](#) with EDI data and resources.