Niagara Region **//** October 2021

DEI ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN REPORT

Niagara **//** Region

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Executive Summary

An environmental scan was conducted to understand the current context in Niagara and in other municipalities relating to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), as well as researching current best practices through academic and non-academic literature. This scan identified existing gaps related to DEI both internally at the Region, as a workplace and service provider, and externally, for diverse community members and the community as a whole.

The environmental scan had four main components:
1) Academic and key source research
2) Review of DEI initiatives of other municipalities
3) Review of DEI initiatives in Niagara's Largest 45 employers
4) Interviews and staff feedback

Seven key themes emerged as the major areas of importance across the different resources, as areas to improve DEI in municipalities, with the identified gaps described alongside each theme.

1) **Inclusive hiring and promotion** – Increasing the diversity of the workforce of municipal employees, particularly in leadership positions
   - Need to review recruitment language to ensure no bias is present that may be unknowingly excluding people from applying
   - Not currently practicing concealed hiring, software unable to integrate concealed hiring
   - Interview panels are not purposefully diverse
   - No system in place to collect information about the diversity of applicants
   - Collaboration with local organizations for feedback and distribution of job postings is ad hoc
   - Lower levels of diversity in People Leaders and some departments
2) **Creating an inclusive workplace culture with accountability** – Shifting organizational culture where a safe space is fostered and all individuals become champions for change by holding each other accountable.
   - Need for recognition by all leaders and employees that DEI is important
   - Need to embed DEI in the culture of Niagara Region
   - Not all staff feel comfortable and respected by all co-workers
   - Bias and discrimination exists in varying levels within the Region
   - DEI is not part of performance management or accountability
3) **Provide a range of training opportunities for staff** – Increasing awareness of the importance of diversity training for different levels of employees and improving the quality and quantity of training sessions delivered

- No mandatory DEI Training
- No DEI training plan

4) **Creation and review of policies** – Employing an equity lens to ensure the full participation of Regional employees and community members
   - Lack of a clear, easily accessible complaints process
   - Lack of communication of complaints process
   - No equal opportunity statement for job advertisements
   - Policies have not been reviewed with a DEI lens
   - No DEI specific policies, such as one to guide compensation for people with lived experience who provide input into Regional projects

5) **Communication and access to services** – Improving communication, program design and evaluation to ensure that diverse staff and community members have full access to information and services to meet their needs
   - Lack of consistent communication between the Region and community partners/members to share knowledge, resources and accomplishments
   - Need to champion DEI values to other community organizations
   - Need to consider DEI in planning and service delivery including in Regional facilities, such as gender neutral bathrooms, and prayer spaces
   - No policy on religious or cultural accommodations

6) **Data collection for planning and monitoring** – Collecting rigorous data that accurately represents the makeup, needs, and ideas of community members with lived experience in order to ensure effective planning and evaluation processes
   - Lack of consistent collection quantitative and qualitative data with a DEI lens
   - Inconsistent involvement of community partners in planning and evaluation
   - Need to consistently use disaggregated, quality data for decisions
   - Need to use a DEI lens for monitoring and evaluation

7) **Collaboration and engagement with community** – Effectively responding to the growing diversity in Niagara by partnering and empowering community members and organizations to improve social cohesion and safety
   - Need for clear communication and accessible ways to provide feedback
   - Need to partner with more diversity related organizations
   - Provide opportunities for diverse voices to be heard and incorporated into planning using a DEI lens
   - Provide safe spaces and social services for community members to access

These seven areas will form the key areas of focus and inform the next stage of work. The data from this scan provided the basis for staff to select a few Quick start projects. Additional data will be collected from a wide range of voices within Niagara to inform the development of the DEI Action Plan.

Background

Diversity in Niagara continues to increase – particularly regarding Indigenous communities, visible minorities, linguistic diversity, and individuals with disabilities. However, there has not always been the same increase in inclusivity. Discrimination, barriers, and a lack of appropriate support in organizations remain for a variety of marginalized groups. Niagara Region and the Local Area Municipalities (LAMs) have a central role to play in building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

On September 18 2020, Niagara Regional Council and Niagara's 12 Local Area Municipalities (Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet, Welland, West Lincoln) joined the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities. In doing so, they are committed to actively working towards the ten common commitments to building respectful, inclusive, and diverse societies (see Appendix 2). The three objectives of the Coalition are to improve municipal practices to promote social inclusion, establish policies to eradicate racism and discrimination, and promote human rights and diversity. A major part of honouring these commitments is critically reflecting upon the current practices of municipalities in Niagara and working towards making changes.

In order to help guide the action of Niagara Region going forward, an environmental scan was conducted. The purpose of the environmental scan was to understand the current context in Niagara and in other municipalities relating to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), as well as find out current best practices through academic and grey literature. The environmental scan provided a better understanding of some of the existing gaps related to DEI both internally at the Region, as a workplace and service provider, and externally, for diverse community members and the community as a whole.

Methodology

The environmental scan had four main components:
1) Academic and key source research
2) Review of DEI initiatives in other municipalities
3) Review of DEI initiatives in Niagara's largest 45 employers
4) Preliminary interviews and staff feedback

The academic and key source research included reviewing 20 journal articles, along with analyzing data presented at two DEI related conferences (City of Brampton Economic Empowerment and Anti-Black Racism Conference and Ontario Municipal Social Services Association Conference), in ten government reports, and in four Canadian DEI related toolkits. The toolkits were published by the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities, the Canadian Centre of Diversity and Inclusion, and the City of Ottawa among other sources.

Four key documents formed the foundational background knowledge for this work: Actions & Resources to Join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities, LGBTQ2+ Inclusiveness Toolkit for Inclusive Municipalities, Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees to Canada: The Role of Municipalities, Toolkit for Inclusive Municipalities in Canada and Beyond.

The second aspect of the environmental scan was a scan of DEI initiatives in other municipalities, in order to develop a stronger understanding of the diversity work already being implemented or planned within Niagara and neighbouring municipalities. These scans helped inform Niagara Region's direction for their own DEI work by providing insights on best practices related to structure and specific initiatives.

DEI activities of 15 municipalities across Canada were examined, see Appendix A for a full list of municipalities included. Of the municipalities, 13 were in Ontario, with particular attention being paid to municipalities with similar characteristics as Niagara including Peel, Hamilton, London, Windsor, Guelph, and Waterloo. While the majority of information was publically available, staff leading the DEI Action Plan also connected in for further conversations with many of these municipalities including London, Hamilton, and Waterloo, and Halifax. The results from the research and municipality scan are presented in the "best practices" section under each key theme.

The websites of Niagara's Largest 45 Employers[1] according to the number of employees were reviewed for DEI related content. It was found that eight of the employers (18%) had clear DEI plans available, with clear DEI related goals and specific target groups that they considered. Seventeen organizations (38%) referred to a DEI related plan on their websites, but public information lacked detail. The remaining 20 organizations (44%) did not refer to DEI on their webpages at all. See Appendix B for the list of Niagara's Largest 45 Employers and the level of DEI involvement as of December 2020.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 select organizations[2] to develop greater understanding of the current context of DEI in Niagara, including which stage organizations were in with respect to DEI in their own organization, or if they even had DEI on their radar at all. The two main goals of these conversations were 1) to learn from organizations about implementing various initiatives and 2) to create greater awareness of the importance of DEI and the Region's commitment to it. Encouragingly, many of the organizations interviewed are currently or planning to engage in one or more DEI

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[1] Regional Quick Facts: Get to Know Niagara. https://niagaracanada.com/data/regional-quick-facts/
[2] As per the agreements with the organizations the specific names of organizations will be kept confidential. The purpose of these discussions was not to identify specific organizations, but rather to get a sense of the current landscape of DEI in Niagara in order to work together in productively addressing these issues.

initiatives that aim to reduce barriers and opportunities for their own employees and those that access their services.

The final aspect of the scan was to gain preliminary insight of local municipal employees. Interviews were conducted with representatives from all 12 Local Area Municipalities (LAMs). These feedback sessions sought information about the current diversity of municipal employees in each municipality, the resources available for each municipality to support DEI, the current level of DEI involvement, and the areas that were the most pertinent to address in their respective organizations and communities. Commissioners of Public Health, Public Works, Corporate Services, and Community Services were also interviewed to find out the current DEI work occurring in their departments, their perspective on the diversity at the Region, and expectations of DEI work in Niagara. More than 30 employees were asked to share their experiences and observations as an employee of the Niagara Region, including members of the Niagara Region DEI Working Group and the Niagara Region DEI Interest Group. The findings from the local organizations and local municipal employees are summarized in the "Local Context" sections in each theme discussion.

The data from the environmental scan of municipalities, review of DEI initiatives in Niagara's Largest 45 employers, preliminary interviews and staff feedback was analyzed using an inductive approach, and several key themes emerged. Once key themes were identified and triangulated across all the data sources, additional research and consultation was conducted related to each these themes.

Findings

The most important outcome of the environmental scan was the identification of key themes. While there were some nuances between the findings from the different scans performed, seven key themes emerged as the major areas of importance across the different resources. Collectively, they will form the key areas of focus to inform the next stage of this work.

 The key themes are:
1. Inclusive hiring and promotion
2. Creating an inclusive workplace culture with accountability
3. Provide a range of training opportunities for staff
4. Creation and review of policies
5. Communication and access to services
6. Data collection for planning and monitoring
7. Collaboration and engagement with community members

Each of the thematic areas will be explored providing summaries of best practices found within research and in the local context.

1. Inclusive Hiring and Promotion

The need for improved inclusive hiring and promotion practices, and a review of current practices was a key theme from all components of the environmental scan. Within this theme, interested parties emphasized the need to improve the diversity of the workforce of municipal employees at Niagara Region and the LAMs, especially in positions of leadership and authority.

Best Practices

Ensuring a diverse workforce at every level involves embedding inclusive strategies at every stage of the process including recruitment, hiring, and promotion. Research revealed several best practices surrounding recruitment, hiring, and promotion.

Recruiting is an integral step in ensuring a diverse workforce. Municipalities should undertake a thorough review of their job descriptions and postings to avoid language that could potentially discourage applicants on the basis of race, immigrant status, gender, or income level. Job requirements should be completely relevant and necessary to excel in the role. Municipalities should collaborate with external organizations whenever possible to attract a more diverse pool of applicants.[3]

In hiring, municipalities must pay attention to the powerful role of unconscious biases. In an effort to combat biases at the screening and shortlisting stages, "concealed" hiring and the Two in the Pool Effect can be used. Concealed hiring can help reduce inequities by making resumes anonymous so that only job-relevant characteristics become relevant.[4] The Two in the Pool Effect is a shortlisting technique wherein organizations attempt to ensure that their final candidate pool is diverse. Research has shown us that if there is at least two minority candidates in the final candidate pool such as two people of colour, or two women, the odds of one of them being hired increases drastically compared to if there was only one person of colour or one woman.[5]

To reduce biases in interviews, formal interview panels should be established. Before the interview, interviewers should collaborate to establish what kinds of questions are relevant

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[3] City of Guelph. A United Vision: Guelph's Community Plan. https://guelph.ca/plans-and-strategies/community-plan/community-plan-our-process/strategic-plan-scan/economic-benefit/

[4] Bertrand, M. and Mullainathan, S. (2004). Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labour Market Discrimination. *American Economic Review,* 94(4), pp.991-1013

[5] Johnson S.J., Hekman D.R., E.T. Chan. (2016). If There's Only One Woman in Your Candidate Pool, There's Statistically No Chance She'll Be Hired. *Harvard Business Review*

to a certain job and should develop the kinds of answers they are looking for in ideal answers. The Interview panel should be diverse and include individuals with different backgrounds, experiences, and personalities to increase fairness.[6] It is also important to consider the role of bias-laden questions. A major component of this practice is making an effort to be intentional in the kinds of questions being asked in interviews. It is important to take into account how different ethnocultural groups might receive or interpret questions. Those interviewing must make an effort to reflect on the outcomes achieved by asking particular questions and any unintentional bias that may be present.[7]

In promotion, entry of marginalized groups in positions of power and decision-making should be a priority. Development and mentorship programs should be made available so that immigrants and those with language barriers can develop the language skills needed for promotion.[8] It is important to make promotional opportunities widely known and establish clear criteria for how to achieve it, in addition to effectively communicating this criteria.[9] Promotions should be given through a formal process which includes circulating information about promotion opportunities to all eligible staff.[10]

Local Context

Ensuring that recruitment, hiring, and promotion processes were inclusive was a key theme across the largest 45 employers currently involved in DEI initiatives. These organizations used tactics such as targeted outreach, focus on foreign-trained professionals, promotion of opportunities with equity-seeking groups, and use of self-identification forms when candidates apply for positions.

Leaders from all of the LAMs recognized that their current workforce does not reflect the growing diversity in their communities and expressed the desire to recruit a more diverse work force. Even smaller municipalities where the diversity of community members is not as apparent as the larger municipalities spoke of a desire to attract more diverse staff, but were unsure of how to do so. Regional Commissioners recognized that there was room for improvement for their staff to reflect the current demographics of the region. They identified a number of opportunities for growth and increasing the diversity of staff hired at

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[6] Prewett-Livingston, A. J., Field, H.S., Veres, J. G. III, & Levis, P.M. (1996). Effects of race on interview ratings in a situational panel interview. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81(2),* 178-186.

[7] Turner, T. (2014). Bias-Free Hiring: Interview Questions Not to Ask. Charity Village. https://charityvillage.com/bias_free_hiring_interview_questions_not_to_ask/#.XBGzbhNKiRs

[8] Roth, L. 2004. "The Social Psychology of Tokenism: Status and Homophily Processes on Wall Street." *Sociology Perspectives* 47(2): 189-214.

[9] Adams, T. and Flores, J. (2020). Marginalized Inclusion: The Experiences of Visible Minority Engineers in Ontario, Canada. Manuscript Submitted for Publication.

[10] Ontario Human Rights Commission. Workplace policies, practices and decision-making processes and systemic discrimination http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-racism-and-racial-discrimination/appendix-%E2%80%93-workplace-policies-practices-and-decision-making-processes-and-systemic-discrimination

all levels of the organization, including conducting an employment services review, utilizing more diverse interview panels, and having a mentorship program for newcomers or minorities.

Some Niagara Region staff recognized that they have seen some progress made in terms of diverse staff being more visible and included. They have also noted shifts towards more women and people of colour present in positions of power or in traditionally male dominated fields. However, other staff still saw a lack of diversity in their department.

Based on research and best practices, the Region is currently engaging in some of these practices, while other practices have been identified as areas of improvement. In terms of recruitment at the Region, language in job postings has currently not been reviewed at a system-level. Some job postings are forwarded to external organizations on an ad hoc basis.

At the moment, Niagara Region does not practice concealed hiring and the current HR software is not able to integrate concealed hiring methodology. Interview panels are not purposefully diverse, though, questions and model answers are established ahead of time and the interview panel discusses the results together after the interviews. Typically, an individual from the HR team and the Hiring Manager collaborate on the hiring process.

In terms of promotion, the Region has established a formal mentorship program available to all staff. However, mentorship and development programs have not been established using an equity lens, taking into the account the critical needs of diverse staff to facilitate their progression within the Region. The Region currently does communicate available promotion opportunities widely and effectively across the Region and ensures that a fair and transparent selection process takes place.

Gaps

- Recruitment language has not been reviewed to ensure no bias is present that may be unknowingly excluding people from applying
- Not currently practicing concealed hiring, current software is unable to integrate concealed hiring
- Interview panels are not purposefully diverse
- No system in place to collect information on the diversity of job applicants
- Collaboration with local organizations for feedback and distribution of job postings is ad hoc
- Lower levels of diversity in leadership levels and in some departments

2. Creating an Inclusive Workplace with Accountability

Insights from the environmental scan revealed that interested parties want to see a shift in organizational culture where a safe space is fostered for all individuals regardless of their race, ethnicity, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical disability, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, income level, education, and/or employment status. The Region should be champions of DEI in Niagara. Over time, this will encourage other organizations in Niagara to also become champions.

Best Practices

Creating an inclusive workplace where all staff operate with integrity, respect, and accountability is essential for drawing and retaining a diverse work force. Workplaces by law must meet The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act requirements, which increase opportunities for people to access job listings, interviews, and provide physical spaces that are free from barriers in terms of physical impediments as well as visual or tactile improvements.

It is important for municipalities, and workplaces generally to be transparent about existing barriers for marginalized groups in their own organization and the steps that they are taking to reduce these barriers.

One way to do this is to communicate accomplishments and current/planned initiatives to all current and potential employees in job adverts, bulletin boards, emails, websites, onboarding, and interviews. Proposed changes to reduce barriers and the timeline for deliverables can also be communicated.

Municipalities should evaluate their ability to deliver on key metrics identified as key priorities, this can be done by performing a diversity audit and periodically evaluating performance to maintain, improve, or change the identified strategies. The results of any initial audits and subsequent evaluations should be transparent and made available to staff and the public.

Leaders set the tone in creating and upholding organizational culture by holding themselves and their colleagues accountable. Ensuring that diverse individuals participate in leadership and have input on organization decisions is when true change occurs and where the impacts of DEI can really be seen. Research suggests that upper management benefits from diverse leaders who are more effective at leading.[11] It is important for

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[11] Martins, L. (2020). Strategic Diversity Leadership: The Role of Senior Leaders in Delivering the Diversity Dividend. *Journal Of Management*, *46*(7), 1191-1204.

individuals in leadership to be visibly diverse, but also have diversity of thought and experiences. Leaders do not necessarily need to self-identify from a marginalized group but they do have the responsibility to be educated on issues affecting these groups and should be a fierce ally, supporting issues significant to these groups and making a concerted effort to listen, show empathy, and effectively respond to employee needs. It is important that leaders are open to making mistakes and not become defensive. Good leaders take responsibility for words and actions of themselves and their team and work to make changes. Leaders should be reflexive and think deeply about their own attitudes, biases, and shortcomings, while supporting their colleagues to do the same.

A best practice that has newly emerged is the option to use measurement of equity and inclusion for performance measurement of management level employees. In other words, ensuring that leaders and new employees are committed to diversity, equity and inclusion can be facilitated by rewarding individuals for promoting DEI and incentivizing all employees to make a stronger commitment to it. DEI competencies can be considered as part of the promotion process, wherein one aspect of promotion can be focused on evaluating a potential candidate's commitment to championing DEI initiatives through their work. As a result, leaders can help maintain an intergenerational culture of inclusion through built-in succession.[12]

Another aspect of building an inclusive organizational culture is making sure that diverse employees can access resources and participate fully in their place of employment free from discrimination or repercussions, which includes eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Often, inclusion involves making changes to workplace structures or processes that seem minimal or mundane to individuals with privilege but to those who are disadvantaged can be significant steps towards inclusion.

The scan revealed two initiatives that are important for inclusivity for both staff and community members in this respect are Quiet Rooms and All-Gender Washrooms. Quiet Rooms are rooms for Religious Accommodations to meet the spiritual and religious needs of staff and community members.[13] All-Gender washrooms are washrooms that are inclusive of those who do not fit into a gender binary. This can improve inclusion, reduce barriers, and decrease stigma for individuals who are gender transitioning.[14]

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[12] City of Guelph. (2019). City of Guelph Employee Diversity and Inclusion Plan. https://guelph.ca/plans-and-strategies/diversity-strategy/

[13] City of London. London's Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy https://unitedwayem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CDIS-Report2017.pdf

[14] Region of Waterloo. Multi-Year Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion Plan https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/resources/Region-of-Waterloo-Multi-year-Diversity-Accessibility-and-Inclusion-Plan-2018-2022.pdf

Local Context

Regional staff provided multiple examples of segregation, discrimination, and micro-aggressions experienced by co-workers and clients. Some experienced a lack of openness and rather a spirit of competition, and a lack of professionalism towards people of different cultural backgrounds, which contributed to an environment that is not very inclusive or welcoming.

Individuals should be able to work with one another with respect without stigmatization and exclusion. All levels of staff envision a workplace that encourages uncomfortable but productive discussions, where individuals use inclusive language and hold their colleagues accountable for problematic conversations and actions. All individuals should be interested in learning, growing, and encouraging their colleagues to do the same. In this shift in culture, individuals should be allowed to make mistakes but must show a willingness to be vulnerable, apologize, and grow from their mistakes. Instead of becoming defensive for being called out for problematic conversations or actions, it is important for individuals to become allies in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

Staff members spoke of a desire for a culture of safety where marginalized groups feel safe, respected, and included. Many of Niagara's Largest 45 employers discussed fostering a 2SLGBTQQIA+ inclusive and safe space, and addressing stigma relating to mental health concerns. Organization representatives also expressed the desire for a culture of curiosity where all employees have a genuine curiosity and openness to learn about their colleagues. One Commissioner mentioned having inclusive policies around holidays so that people celebrating non statutory holidays could trade dates for holidays they do celebrate (trading Eid for Christmas for instance). Creating inclusive and welcoming physical spaces is also important, this includes the images and the language used around the buildings and between colleagues, as well as physical spaces such as the creation of a prayer or meditation room. None of the current municipalities have a current space in their buildings dedicated to prayer or meditation.

Celebration of diverse events should not be limited to staff taking special days off or proving accommodation for religious practices during the work day, Commissioners and staff would like to see diversity in events discussed, on display, and celebrated in places such as the Regional International Plaza. Staff felt that some areas held events and meetings focused on diverse communities, including Dolphin Disability Mentoring Day, Get Inspired Event to inform high school students of job options at the Region, with a particular focus on marginalized youth, and the Prenatal Network of Niagara, to name a few. However there is inconsistency across the organization, with a large focus on celebrating traditional Judeo-Christian or Western holidays such as Christmas or Halloween.

The desired end result is a workplace that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive in which employees support each other's career and personal growth. This shift in culture should manifest in employees becoming champions for change at work and in their communities.

Gaps

- Need for recognition by all leaders and employees that DEI is important
- Need to embed DEI in the culture of Niagara Region
- Not all staff feel comfortable and respected by all co-workers
- Bias and discrimination exists in varying levels within the Region
- DEI is not part of performance management or accountability

3. Provide a Range of Training Opportunities for Staff

The need to provide a range of diversity training opportunities for staff was a major theme that emerged from the data. Within this theme, it was emphasized that Niagara Region as an organization should make diversity training a greater priority going forward. This includes improving awareness of the importance of diversity training for different levels of employees and increasing the quality and quantity of training sessions delivered. Training is particularly important to accommodate and effectively respond to the needs of diverse employees. All employees must become allies in addressing discrimination and exclusion.

Best Practices

Research on best practices related to diversity training revealed that effective training requires a strong structure of support that is intuitive and sensible. Research recommends that successful training delivery is a process that necessitates a strong foundation on which to build. The first step of this process is creating a common understanding and an awareness of expectations. This step involves ensuring that employees develop an understanding of the importance of DEI and acknowledge that barriers exist for their colleagues. This step is important before moving to more intermediate and advanced trainings.[15] More advanced trainings provide employees with the tools to implement changes and create an inclusive organizational culture. Systemic issues can also be addressed in advanced training sessions. See table 1 for training options that could be considered basic, intermediate, or advanced.

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[15] Guyton, Glen. 2020. Diversity & Inclusion Training Workplace Diversity & Inclusion https://www.glenguyton.com/2020/09/25/what-types-of-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-training-are-right-for-your-workplace/

Table 1: Training options

Focus of Training	Key Topics	Level
Awareness and Knowledge	• Introduction to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion • Cultural Sensitivity • Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) • Human Rights	Basic
Knowledge and Skills	• Human Resource Compliance Training • Unconscious/Implicit Bias • Micro-aggressions and Belonging • Inclusive Management and Allyship • Intercultural Communication • Customer-service Training	Intermediate
Action and Advocacy	• Anti-Oppression Training • Leading Diverse Teams • Community and Industry Engagement • Addressing Systemic Bias or Discrimination	Advanced

Ensuring that training is delivered in ways that are accessible and appealing to employees is also equally important. Diversity training sessions must be informative but should not be overwhelming.[16] Training can be structured in a variety of ways, including a mix of half or full-day interactive training sessions, webinars, online modules, lunch and learn opportunities, or micro-learning sessions, which is breaking down training into small sessions to slowly introduce concepts. Multiple options can be available, which can then be accessed by employees when and how they choose.[17]

A major reason that diversity training can be ineffective is when implied threats or negative consequences are used as ways for employees to engage in training. Training should never be used as punishment and scolding should not occur in training sessions.[18]

Local Context

Training was often one of the first things mentioned from all contributing participants. The Largest 45 employers engaging in DEI work provide trainings for employees in areas including accommodations for employees, and how to address discrimination. The majority

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[16] Bleich, C. How to Develop Diversity Training That is Actually Effective https://www.edgepointlearning.com/blog/types-of-diversity-training/
[17] Fernandes, P. 2020. Creating a Diversity and Inclusion Training Program. https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9782-diversity-training.html
[18] Dobbin, F. and Kalev, A. 2016. Why Diversity Programs Fail. https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail

of LAM representatives sited providing training to staff as a main area of change for their organizations. Four of the LAMs have provided some training to the staff relating to DEI, while the rest have only provided training required by law, such as mandatory AODA training.

An interview with a Niagara organization echoed the sentiment above that training should not be used as punishment or include scolding. This organization brought two individuals to lead diversity training which they felt "*did more harm than good.*" They added that it felt like scolding and in some ways created more polarization among employees. The organization recalls the training being about "*you, you, you*" and pointing out why things were bad rather than making the focus about how the organization can work together to address these barriers. It is important that training sessions feel natural and everyone has a chance to share and reflect. Employees should never feel the need to become defensive and should be able to engage in candid conversations and open discussions.

Multiple organizations interviewed highlighted that "*informal sessions can sometimes be more effective*" as these sessions can effectively allow individuals to let their guard down and be open with each other. Training does not always need to be formal and does not always necessitate hiring someone external to be considered a successful training session. The scan of other municipalities highlighted that training can also be productive conversations through intra-staff dialogue, one on one meetings with management, open door policies, lunch and learns, or book clubs which are all initiatives that neighbouring municipalities are engaged in.

Currently at the Region, multiple levels of voluntary training are available. As of September 2020, there were 3030 Regional Staff, approximately 1100 staff (not all unique) had participated in DEI related trainings. These trainings include:
- Unconscious Bias Training –19 staff
- Indigenous Cultural Safety Training – 99 staff
- 2SLGBTQQIA+ Training – 281 staff
- Accessibility – All staff, mandatory part of onboarding of new staff
- Introductory Diversity Training – 410 staff
- Health Equity or Social Determinants of Health – 384 staff

Considering the above list of trainings, combined with feedback from staff, it is clear that there is no existing structure at the Region supporting DEI training. This has led to a series of disconnected training opportunities for staff, and usually the same staff attending most sessions, while many staff have not attended any DEI related trainings. Uptake is inconsistent between departments with departments engaging in diversity training with varying frequency. Staff from Public Health and Community Services are the most frequent participants in the above trainings.

Commissioners and Regional staff provided some ideas for future training topics that they would like to see. These included learning about unconscious bias, recognizing and addressing systemic racism, customer service training, how to deal with difficult people/situations, 2SLGBTQQIA+, and Indigenous specific trainings. They recommended using a variety of formats for the training and including people with lived experience as trainers.

Gaps

- No mandatory DEI Training
- No DEI training plan

4. Creation and Review of Policy

The need to create and review internal policies was one of the major themes that emerged in the scan, especially prevalent in the scan of municipalities and in conversations with the Local Area Municipalities.

Best Practices

Research on policy revealed key areas worth consideration such as a formal complaints process, anti-harassment policies, equal opportunity statements, and conducting a policy audit. With any policy, it is important for those involved in the development of policy to create a structure for applying an equity lens to new or existing policies.

Formal complaints process: A formal complaints process is put in place to provide staff with an avenue to formally document complaints and escalate issues to internal authorities that can mediate issues. This role is often taken up by Human Resources.[19]

Anti-harassment policies: An anti-harassment policy is a proactive policy that is applicable to all staff to protect persons against any form of physical, sexual, or culturally insensitive transgressions. More specific policies can identify specific sub-groups of focus, such as an anti-racism policy, which is a proactive policy applicable to all racialized staff to protect against any form of physical, sexual, or culturally insensitive transgressions or micro-aggressions, and forms of discrimination or exclusion based on race.[20]

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[19] Ontario Human Rights Commission. Procedures for Resolving Complaints
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-primer-guide-developing-human-rights-policies-and-procedures/6-procedures-resolving-complaints
[20] Ontario Human Rights Commission. Anti-Harassment and Discrimination Policy
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-primer-guide-developing-human-rights-policies-and-procedures/5-anti-harassment-and-anti-discrimination-policies

Equal opportunity statement: Equal opportunity statements are found in job postings that communicate to potential employees that their diversity is not a barrier but rather celebrated as something that the organization values.[21]

Policy or internal audit: Policy or Internal Audits are a review of the existing policies in place that either work toward enhancing, diversity, equity and inclusion within an organization or pose obstacles. It is important to consistently revisit policies and ensure that they are incorporating best practices. Under this area, workplace censuses and performance reviews can also occur.[22]

Regardless of the nature and implementation of the policy, the following recommendations emerged in research and consultations with interested parties revealed that policies should:

- Depend on context[23]
- Be reviewed periodically, and changed accordingly[24]
- Be clearly communicated – employees and community members should be aware that certain policies exist, why those policies are important to them, and how they can engage with those policies when required[25]
- Be a simple process
- Be created and/or reviewed by those who will be impacted by it[26]

Some key questions that should be considered when creating or reviewing policy are:

- What issues are we trying to address with a particular policy?
- What policy can we create to ensure that this issue is best addressed?
- Who will the policy be targeted towards?[27]
- Who may be affected negatively by the policy, or may be excluded?
- What is the context of the policy?[28]

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[21] Betterteam. Equal Opportunity Employer Statement https://www.betterteam.com/equal-opportunity-employer-statement

[22] Crescendo. Inclusion Audit: Processes, Structures & Policies. https://crescendowork.com/guide-start-diversity-inclusion-strategy/2019/2/26/diversity-inclusion-audit-processes-structures-policies

[23] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

[24] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

[25] Resourcing Edge. The Importance of Reviewing Policies and Procedures https://resourcingedge.com/hr-services/the-importance-of-reviewing-policies-and-procedures/

[26] Gross, M. Applying an Equity Lens to Policy Development https://www.ucop.edu/ethics-compliance-audit-services/_files/2019_symposium_presentations/bk1-2-policy.pdf

[27] Gross, M. Applying an Equity Lens to Policy Development https://www.ucop.edu/ethics-compliance-audit-services/_files/2019_symposium_presentations/bk1-2-policy.pdf

[28] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

- Is the policy appropriate based on the current context (resources, scope, past history, past failures, past success etc.)[29]
- Will/has the policy be reviewed, how frequently will/has it be reviewed?[30]
- How do we define the policy's success? Is this the appropriate definition?
  - E.g. A rise in formal complaints may look like an organization not making progress on DEI but it could actually be the opposite, but it might mean more people are aware of the complaints process, and/or more people feel comfortable making a complaint as they feel supported by the organization[31]
- Has the policy been effective? Identify the reasons it has or has not been effective?[32]
- Should we start, stop, change, or discontinue the implementation of the policy based on evidence?[33]
- Are employees and/or community members aware that the policy exists?
- Do employees and/or community members know how to engage with the policy when they need to do so? How can it be better communicated?
- Is language simple, straightforward and easy to understand?[34]
- Are those impacted by the policy involved in its creation and/or review?[35]

Policies should be reviewed using Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+). GBA+ is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and diverse people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives. GBA+ considers many other identity factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability and how the interaction between these factors influences the way we might experience government policies and initiatives.[36]

[29] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

[30] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

[31] IDERD Conference. Deepening Anti-Racism Action through Systemic and Intersectional Change. *University of Toronto Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office*

[32] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

[33] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

[34] Gross, M. Applying an Equity Lens to Policy Development https://www.ucop.edu/ethics-compliance-audit-services/_files/2019_symposium_presentations/bk1-2-policy.pdf

[35] PowerDMS. Why it is important to review policies and procedures https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/why-it-is-important-to-review-policies-and-procedures

[36] Government of Canada. Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus.html

Local Context

One point that was clear from the municipal scan was that there is an indefinite number of policies in every organization. The effectiveness of and need for policies is very much context-dependent – being influenced by factors such as time, place, and space. In other words, organizations do and should differ in the nature of their policies and in their implementation. Policies cannot be universally applied.

Some policies are very much specific to an organization and the nature of their work. For example, in one organization interviewed – overall appearance is a vital part of their work. Because of this, the organization is in the process of creating a policy that stops problematic conversations and micro-aggressions targeted towards racialized people regarding skin, body type, and hair. This organization has acknowledged that in the past, when individuals reported problematic comments and micro-aggressions, those who submitted the report often faced detrimental outcomes rather than the perpetrators. There was a recommendation to create a policy focused on racialized people to ensure that people are supported for bringing up race or gender-related issues.

Other organizations that Niagara Region interviewed were focused on creating a whistleblower policy because in the past they had identified that this was a major problem. Previously, individuals that made a complaint and wanted to remain anonymous were still identified, which had negative social and economic implications for them. Another organization chose to focus their policy creation on marketing materials, as their staff had identified that a lack of diversity in marketing materials was a major issue to their organization.

Currently, at the Niagara Region, there is a formal complaints process, although it is not well known. There is an anti-harassment policy, which includes anti-racism. An equal opportunity statement is not used in job postings, and a policy audit focused on DEI has not been conducted. Policies have not been created or reviewed using an equity lens. Reviewing, changing and creating policy is a rigorous process that can be time, cost and labour intensive. Moreover, as highlighted earlier in this section, effective policies cannot be universally applied. Instead, they must be tailored to the specific organization's context – including the organization's goals, history, and major barriers.

Despite the challenges with reviewing or creating policies, it was a common theme across participants. Some of the LAM representatives cited the need to review or create internal policies relating to DEI. Notably, policies did not come up in any of the suggestions from the Commissioners. They were discussed among staff who suggested reviewing the formal complaints process, and ensuring there are anti-harassment and anti-racism

policies, equal opportunity statements, and that the Region conducts a policy audit and incorporates a DEI lens into all policies.

Gaps

- Lack of a clear, easily accessible complaints process
- Lack of communication of complaints process
- No equal opportunity statement for job advertisements
- Policies have not been reviewed with a DEI lens
- No DEI specific policies, such as one to guide compensation for people with lived experience who provide input into Regional projects

5. Communication and Access to Services

Accessible customer service means ensuring that the services a municipality provides can be used by everyone regardless of their race, ethnicity, ancestry, places of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical disability, mental disability, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, income level, education, and/or socio-economic situations.

In order for diverse people to access the services, they need to know about them, which means ensuring that communication about the services is accessible in multiple languages, for various literacy levels, and in modes that reach the intended audiences.

Communication is also important in relation to DEI specific work in order to 1) ensure buy-in and participation among staff and community members, 2) reinforce values of diversity, equity and inclusion, 3) share priorities, milestones and celebrate successes, and 4) ensure successful collaboration of those involved in DEI work.

In order for Niagara Region to be an organization that champions DEI through words and actions, it is imperative that the Region provide services, engage in practices, spearhead initiatives, and create spaces that accommodate and celebrate the growing diversity of Niagara employees and residents.

Best Practices

The municipality scan revealed improving access to services for staff and community members should consider factors such as accessible customer service[37], transportation[38], Accessibility Design standards[39], gender neutral bathrooms[40], and religious and cultural accommodations[41].

Current or future services provided by the Region should be accessible by everyone, however there are often unintended barriers that are part of program design or service delivery. Utilizing GBA+,[42] Health Equity Impact Assessments,[43] Health Impact Assessments,[44] or other DEI related tools can help identify potential barriers, or negative impacts to diverse community members. These tools ask questions such as:

- Are there any existing barriers for certain racialized groups, religious groups, immigrants, individuals with disabilities, individuals from a particular sex, gender or sexual orientation?
- Are the services reaching younger folks, older folks, those with various income levels or employment status?
- Are services accessible for people who do not speak English?
- Are facilities accessible for people that use mobility devices?
- Who might be negatively impacted by the services you are providing, and how?

As highlighted earlier in this document, the scan also revealed two specific initiatives that are important for inclusivity for staff and community members are Quiet Rooms and All-Gender Washrooms. Quiet Rooms are rooms for Religious Accommodations to meet the spiritual and religious needs of staff and community members.[45] All-Gender washrooms

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[37] Region of Waterloo. Multi-Year Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion Plan https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/resources/Region-of-Waterloo-Multi-year-Diversity-Accessibility-and-Inclusion-Plan-2018-2022.pdf
[38] City of London. London's Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy https://unitedwayem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CDIS-Report2017.pdf
[39] City of London. London's Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy https://unitedwayem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CDIS-Report2017.pdf
[40] Region of Waterloo. Multi-Year Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion Plan https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/resources/Region-of-Waterloo-Multi-year-Diversity-Accessibility-and-Inclusion-Plan-2018-2022.pdf
[41] City of London. London's Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy https://unitedwayem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CDIS-Report2017.pdf
[42] Government of Canada. Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus.html
[43] Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Health Equity Impact Assessments. https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/heia/
[44] National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. Health Impact Assessments. https://ncceh.ca/environmental-health-in-canada/health-agency-projects/health-impact-assessments
[45] City of London. London's Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy https://unitedwayem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CDIS-Report2017.pdf

are washrooms that are inclusive of those who do not fit into a gender binary.[46] This can improve inclusion, reduce barriers, and decrease stigma for individuals who are gender transitioning. These practices help ensure that community members have positive experiences when accessing Regional facilities so they are likely to return and continue to access services. Municipalities as organizations play an integral role in setting the tone for diversity, equity, and inclusion through leading by example and encouraging other workplaces to adopt similar practices.

Local Context

The diversity in Niagara creates inequities relating to access to services, partially due to the large swaths of rural areas with lower population density, but also due to a range in socio-economic status, and language barriers between groups of people. Because of these variances four of the LAM representatives mentioned the need to include DEI considerations in planning and service delivery.

Transportation is a key theme that is often raised in relation to accessing services in Niagara. To ensure equitable access, staff discussed multiple aspects that need to be considered. What barriers might exist in getting to the location of the program or service? Can any changes be made to improve access for diverse Niagara residents in different geographical areas? The Transportation Master Plan aims to addresses some of these issues.

A number of Regional programs have taken DEI into consideration, these include using 911 Translator services, which provides real time over the phone translation services in over 200 languages and can be accessed by any staff across the organization. This service has been used extensively by Public Health and Community Services in particular, common languages used are French, Urdu, Arabic, and Spanish.

Niagara Emergency Medical Services has been modifying some of their programs to make sure that the residents of Niagara are receiving the right care, at right time and place. This has led to the creation of Mobile Integrated Health Teams, which provide dedicated paramedics and other allied health care professionals regarding Mental Health and Addictions, Falls Intervention, Palliative Care, and Community Paramedics.

Other programs that are working towards increasing accessibility include the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, the Built for Zero community, which is working to reduce chronic homelessness, and grants provided by the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. Public

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[46] Region of Waterloo. Multi-Year Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion Plan https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/resources/Region-of-Waterloo-Multi-year-Diversity-Accessibility-and-Inclusion-Plan-2018-2022.pdf

Health incorporates the concept of Health Equity as a foundation throughout their work, and have multiple activities that focus specifically on increasing access to diverse or hard to reach populations as part of their Health Equity Strategy. This includes activities with migrant agricultural workers, provision of Mental Health supports, Sexual Health outreach, prenatal, breastfeeding, and parenting supports, work in NR Regional Housing communities, and many more. The corporate strategic priority project Health Equity Informed Planning is using Health Impact Assessments to review capital projects to ensure that the potential positive impacts are enhanced and potential negative impacts are mitigated.

Some of the key communication campaigns the Region has been involved in include the Global Attractiveness strategic marketing work to bring people to Niagara from across the world. The Niagara Local Immigration Partnership has also worked with colleagues across the region and province to produce anti-racism and anti-stigma campaigns with a focus on supporting and welcoming newcomers and immigrants.

As the Region continues to make progress on their own DEI initiatives, it will play a critical role in also promoting Accessibility Design standards and DEI initiatives in other businesses and organizations. Some ideas that came from staff or were found in other municipalities include:

1. Education program - collaborating with local organizations and businesses to educate them on a particular DEI topic or initiative.
2. External communication – improving communication between the Region and individuals, groups and organizations in Niagara. Sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices and supporting in DEI work through mutual encouragement.
3. Certificate program - creating a certificate program to encourage training programs or other initiatives related to DEI. This can be beneficial by creating a formal and standardized program which will help ensure that all organizations have a high level of knowledge related to a topic. It can also benefit organizations by distinguishing them from other employers and highlighting them as an inclusive organization.
4. Recognition – recognizing and celebrating DEI accomplishments of individuals, groups, and organizations in the community in traditional media and/or social media
5. Monetary Awards – providing monetary awards for organizations that are spearheading DEI initiatives in the community. Perhaps, these awards, can eventually expand to highlight different categories (e.g. training, policy etc.) The municipality scan highlighted that awards of this nature can extend to architects that design innovative and accessible buildings. This practice incentivizes innovation and encourages a greater commitment to DEI in Niagara.

There are many benefits of improving access to services and other related initiatives for all parties. The aim is that community members that access Niagara Region services will be provided exceptional services with quality interaction with Regional employees which will lead to improved outcomes. Employees can benefit as they have found an organization that is inclusive and accommodating, where they can grow in their careers and be their authentic selves. Organizations can benefit by attracting top talent that value Niagara Region as an employer which leads to more motivated employees willing to perform exceptional work. Employee satisfaction remains high which leads to less turnover and higher loyalty to the organization.

Gaps

- Lack of consistent communication between the Region and community partners/members to share knowledge, resources and accomplishments
- Need to champion DEI values to other community organizations
- Need to consider DEI in planning and service delivery including in Regional facilities, such as gender neutral bathrooms, and prayer spaces
- No policy on religious or cultural accommodations

6. Data Collection for Planning and Monitoring

Effective data collection for planning and monitoring is essential for inclusive program and community design and service delivery, as well as for assessing the success of DEI initiatives. There is no "right" way or "one size-fits all approach" to data collection that will work universally for all municipalities. Municipalities may differ in resources, size, scope, or timelines which influence the kind of data that can and should be collected.

Best Practices

Research and conversations from the environmental scan revealed that although the methods may change, there are some best practices for data collection related to DEI. Data collection should:

- Be a rigorous process[47]
- Continually involve a variety of necessary partners and community members[48]
- Ensure confidentiality of those who participate[49]

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[47] RTS Labs. 8 Best Practices for Collecting Data Responsibly. https://rtslabs.com/8-best-practices-for-collecting-data-responsibly/
[48] Kaplowitz, R. and Laroche, J., 5 Best Practices for Equitable and Inclusive Data Collection https://www.schusterman.org/blogs/jasmine-laroche/5-best-practices-for-equitable-and-inclusive-data-collection
[49] Kaplowitz, R. and Laroche, J., 5 Best Practices for Equitable and Inclusive Data Collection https://www.schusterman.org/blogs/jasmine-laroche/5-best-practices-for-equitable-and-inclusive-data-collection

- Be purposeful in questions asked (surveys, focus groups, interviews etc.)
- Consider equity at every step of the process[50]
- Consider intersectionality of participants[51]
- Allow for data to be disaggregated for analysis and reporting

Collecting program, service, or project specific data is essential for effective planning and evaluation processes and ensuring identified deliverables are achieved. By collecting data and consulting interested parties, staff can use data to determine whether to begin new initiatives, continue and build upon previously existing initiatives, and perhaps discontinue other initiatives. This process is critical because it allows staff to reflect on past work to inform future work which will lead to better outcomes through an evidence-based approach. The data allows municipalities to ask the following questions.

- Did we reach our goals?
- Who is included?
- Who is not included?
- What barriers exist to accessing the opportunity?
- Which strategies worked and why?
- Which strategies did not work and why?
- How can we improve the strategies so that they can work?[52]

These questions are useful to inform action plans and annual evaluations of deliverables related to the plans. An important component of data collection is communicating important findings to key partners and community members. Results of data collected, analyzed, and evaluated should be made available to all staff and the public. Findings should be communicated using transparent, accessible, and straightforward methods. [53]

Local Context

There are various sources of data related to DEI or markers of identity in the Niagara Region, including the Living in Niagara reports, the Village of 100 analysis, and 2016 Census data, among others. However, most staff and community organizations felt that

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[50] Kaplowitz, R. and Laroche, J., 5 Best Practices for Equitable and Inclusive Data Collection https://www.schusterman.org/blogs/jasmine-laroche/5-best-practices-for-equitable-and-inclusive-data-collection
[51] Kaplowitz, R. and Larorhce, J., 5 Best Practices for Equitable and Inclusive Data Collection https://www.schusterman.org/blogs/jasmine-laroche/5-best-practices-for-equitable-and-inclusive-data-collection
[52] Cukier, W., & Smarz, S. (2013). Diversity Assessment Tools: A Comparison. *The International Journal Of Knowledge, Culture, And Change Management: Annual Review*, *11*(6), 49-64
[53] RTS Labs. 8 Best Practices for Collecting Data Responsibly. https://rtslabs.com/8-best-practices-for-collecting-data-responsibly/

there was a lack of relevant, disaggregated data that was up to date and reflective of the current demographics in Niagara.

In addition to the lack of data on current demographics, there has also been a lack of data collection beyond basic demographics. Particularly, there has not previously been Regional and systems-level data collection focused primarily on diversity, equity, and inclusion. While past employee engagement surveys and exit interviews have asked questions and drawn out responses pertaining to aspects of DEI, this has not always been intentional nor has it been the primary focus of prior data collection. In the community, neighbouring municipalities have engaged in data collection related to DEI to varying degrees. Some have already engaged in data collection, other municipalities are currently doing so, while others are planning to do so in the future. Commonly, data collection from neighbouring municipalities has come in the form of a staff census or community survey. Many local area municipalities have expressed the desire for data collection focused on matters pertaining to DEI at a Regional level in order to guide sound action in their respective municipalities.

One key challenge noted by some of the other municipalities was the lack of community-related data that municipalities had access to. Collecting rigorous data is time and resource intensive requiring specialized knowledge and capacity, but it is necessary to ensure that sound decisions can be made that accurately represent feelings and desires of staff and community members.

Many municipalities expressed that a consequence of not collecting rigorous data could be an unrealistic expectations from interested parties. With a lack of data and the inability to prioritize areas of importance, municipalities can risk over-promising but failing to deliver. A common solution to the lack of data was the desire to collect community level data through surveys or partnering with educational institutions for specialized research. Commissioners suggested collecting data through a staff survey, including self-reflection and bias surveys. They also value the use of data for baseline measures and having clear metrics to track over time in order to measure progress and evaluate success.

Using data to make evidence informed decisions is a common practice in numerous areas of the Region. The Public Health and Emergency Services Health Equity Strategic Plan has data and program planning as one of its four streams of focus. The corporate priority project Health Equity Informed Planning incorporates considerations of health equity and social determinants of health into planning for capital projects across the corporation. Multiple online intake forms, including those in Family Health and Community Services are collecting socio-demographic data of program participants so they can gain a greater understanding of who is and is not attending their programs. The Point in Time Count

takes place annually to track people experiencing homelessness and understand some of the complexities involving this community.

Data collection (and analysis) may consist of the collection and analysis of quantitative data, qualitative data or both. Commonly, the collection of quantitative data at the Region has taken the form of surveys. Surveys allow those seeking to collect data to ask a series of questions to the largest possible number of people in order to identify trends, patterns and feelings that are ideally generalizable to a larger population. Qualitative data collection often takes the form of focus groups or interviews. Interviews and/or focus groups allow those seeking to collect data to explore a topic in greater depth by asking a set of questions to a limited amount of people. This approach is ideal for understanding the motivations and processes behind actions and outcomes. A mixed-methods approach, wherein both quantitative and qualitative data, is ideal as it allows quantitative results to be better explained with qualitative data. The strength of the mixed-methods design lies in its complementarity nature – as focus groups can compensate for the inherent weaknesses of the survey and vice versa.[54]

Quality data collection creates greater transparency, accountability, and buy-in. It allows recommendations, and any changes to recommendations to be evidence-based leading to more effective results by highlighting progress over time.

Gaps

- Lack of consistent collection quantitative and qualitative data with a DEI lens
- Inconsistent involvement of community partners in planning and evaluation
- Need to consistently use disaggregated, quality data for decisions
- Need to use a DEI lens for monitoring and evaluation

7. Collaboration and Engagement with Community Members

The need to identify opportunities to collaborate and engage with community members was one of the major themes that emerged. This includes enhancing and coordinating collaboration with community organizations, as well as engaging more effectively with the people who live, work, study, or visit in Niagara. When community members are involved in all aspects of service planning and evaluation, the services that are provided are more inclusive, relevant, and will have greater positive impacts.

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[54] Small, M. 2011. "How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature." Annual Review of Sociology 37: 57-86

Best Practices

Community engagement is about involving people with lived experience to contribute to planning, monitoring, and evaluation; providing input at all levels and stages of planning and policy development. This includes Advisory Committees, community feedback opportunities such as through surveys, focus groups, or correspondence with staff and Councillors. It also involves partnerships with diverse community organizations and empowering communities to lead initiatives that impact them.

The International Association for Public Participation Spectrum created a resource that identifies five levels of public participation on a continuum ranging from informing to empowering, based on their level of impact on the final decision.[55]
1) **Informing** has the least impact on eventual decisions, as it does not include community members in decision-making processes but ensures that community members remained updated.
2) **Consulting** involves obtaining public feedback and ensuring that it is acknowledged.
3) **Involving** takes consulting a step further and makes sure that the concerns of community members are understood and considered. At this level, the ideas and recommendations of community members are reflected in eventual outcomes.
4) **Collaborating** ensures that community members are intimately involved at every state of the process and community members also have the opportunity to identify their preferred recommendation(s).
5) **Empowering** has the most impact on decisions by building on collaboration and allowing community members to make the final decision.

There is no one-size fits all approach in the level of public participation that is appropriate. However, it is best practice to seek ways to increase community member impact on a decision whenever possible, especially in cases where a decision will directly or indirectly affect community members in considerable ways.[56]

Engaging with people that have various lived experiences is important when looking to improve DEI in an organization. The Tamarack Institute provides ten really good ideas for engaging with people with lived or living experience.[57]
1) Commit to engaging people with lived or living experience by building mutual respect and support open dialogue

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[55] International Association for Public Participation. Spectrum for Public Participation https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf
[56] International Association for Public Participation. Spectrum for Public Participation https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf
[57] Tamarack Institute. Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience. BOOK | 10 – Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience (tamarackcommunity.ca)

2) Create a culture of inclusion by involving diverse individuals
3) Host accessible meetings, including co-developing agendas, meet in physically accessible places, and use a land acknowledgement
4) Create opportunities for engagement within advisory or leadership groups, as well as resourcing autonomous and self-determined spaces and groups
5) Eliminate financial barriers to participation, including reimbursing transportation, childcare, interpretation, or other accommodations
6) Consider paying people for their time, which demonstrates respect and supports diverse voices being heard
7) Take the time to build trust, particularly with people who have had negative or trauma-based experiences
8) Share power by opening up decision-making processes, for instance decision-makers could go to community groups instead of community groups presenting in power-laden spaces such as Municipal Council Chambers
9) Provide training and mentoring opportunities, which builds capacity, improves participation, teamwork, and trust
10) Diversify representation to reflect the community in participants and leadership positions and deepen engagement in ways identified by diverse group members

Improving community engagement involves connecting community members to each other, which allows diverse community members to find communities that they identify with and make communities more welcoming overall. This component is also focused on increasing education, tolerance, understanding, and respect for increasing diversity – ensuring that diversity is celebrated. Connecting community members successfully will involve promoting DEI through celebrating and/or initiating community initiatives,[58] listening to diverse voices and responding to their concerns, investing in safe spaces and social services,[59] and collaborating with local organizations (e.g. community centers) to use art, culture, and education to connect with different age groups and audiences.[60]

A key way to empower community members is through establishing Regional or Municipal Advisory Committees composed of individuals with diversity expertise who do not work for the organization. Committee members advise municipal council, staff, and senior leaders on overall direction. Members contribute to the creation or development of initiatives and policies that affect diverse staff and community members at large. Advisory Committees should represent and effectively uphold the best interests of diverse community residents.

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[58] City of London. London's Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy https://unitedwayem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CDIS-Report2017.pdf
[59] City of Hamilton. Hate Prevention & Mitigation Initiative https://engage.hamilton.ca/hateprevention
[60] Region of Peel. Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism Committee Agenda. https://pub-peelregion.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=3557

It is important for community members to be able to fully and meaningfully participate. Beyond creating opportunities for engagement, it is important to improve access by hosting accessible meetings and eliminating financial barriers to participation. These practices demonstrate respect, support diverse voices to be heard, disrupt power imbalances, and challenge some of the inequities that lie at the root of marginalization.[61] Regardless of the initiative implemented, the scan and additional research all highlighted the importance of involving individuals that will be participating in a particular initiative or accessing a particular service. These individuals should be actively involved at every stage of the process – from brainstorming, creation, implementation, monitoring, and development, and any necessary changes. This will help ensure that initiatives and services are delivered in a way that is equitable, culturally appropriate, and appeals to diverse Niagara residents. For example, if the Region seeks to create Quiet Rooms for Religious Accommodations, consultations should include those that will use the rooms.

Local Context

While diversity is increasing, the environmental scan highlighted that not all diverse community members feel included or treated with respect. Overt and covert forms of racism continue to exist in the community – discussions highlighted that staff members have heard of residents that are not pleased with the increasing diversity.

There are multiple client or community related Advisory Committees across Public Health and Community Services. The Lived Experience Advisory Network (LEAN) provides insight from people with lived experience of poverty and low income. The Public Health Youth Advisory Committee meets during the school year to offer the perspective of high school and university aged community members. The Mental Health Client Advisory Committee provide first-hand knowledge of mental health services and feedback for the Mental Health service providers. In Community Services, the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) Lived Experience Advisory meets monthly to provide insight into the HHAP planning and implementation. In Seniors Services, a Seniors Family Council meets quarterly to provide the family perspective and support the implementation of services in Long Term Care Homes across the Region. Niagara Region Housing has a Tenant Advisory Committee (TAC) that meets with NRH staff to provide feedback and ideas on how to improve services and raise issues impacting the tenants.

Niagara Region has two existing Advisory Committees related to diversity: The Women's Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The Women's Advisory Committee was established by Regional Council to consider ways to address the underrepresentation of women in public office, on corporate boards, and in leadership

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[61] Tamarack Institute. Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience. BOOK | 10 – Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience (tamarackcommunity.ca)

positions. The committee considers the unique economic, social, and cultural experiences of women that are directly impacted by public policy decisions. The Accessibility Advisory Committee was established by Regional Council on municipal requirements as contained in the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, including the preparation of a five-year accessibility plan.

Niagara Region recently established a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC) with the first meeting in June 2021. A special focus was placed on ensuring representation from as many diverse populations as possible throughout the recruitment and selection process. The DEIAC will play an important role in carrying out Regional Council's commitment to making Niagara a more diverse and welcoming community.

In addition to the DEIAC, Niagara Region is planning to establish two other committees related to diversity. They are the 2SLGBTQQIA+ Advisory Committee and the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee. The DEIAC will play a central role in establishing these two subsequent committees and will work closely with them to address matters related to DEI.

The LAM representatives recognize the importance of engaging with community members and increasing collaboration to better serve the community in culturally responsive ways. Within the LAMs, there are a number of DEI related advisory committees.
1) St. Catharines: Accessibility Advisory Committee, Advisory Committee on Older Adults, Anti-Racism Advisory Committee, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, 2SLGBTQQIA+ Advisory Committee
2) Niagara Falls: Accessibility Advisory Committee, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Anti-racism Committee
3) Niagara-on-the-Lake: Inclusivity Committee
4) Fort Erie: Accessibility Advisory Committee, Mayors Youth Advisory Committee, Senior Citizen Advisory Committee, Diversity & Inclusion Coalition
5) Lincoln: Age-Friendly Advisory Committee
6) Welland: Accessibility Advisory Committee, Senior Citizens Advisory Committee
7) Thorold, Pelham, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Lincoln, West Lincoln, Grimsby: Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee
8) Pelham: Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee, Seniors Advisory Committee

Departments within Niagara Region have extensive networks, partnerships, and are currently collaborating with many different types of organizations. Through feedback from staff, LAM representatives, and using some existing lists of organizational partners, a list of over 500 community partners was collated. This list includes more than 134 organizations that provide services to at least one category of diverse residents; cultural and diversity related organizations, including over 60 Ethnocultural organizations, 17

2SLGBTQQIA+ groups, and over 350 faith-based organizations; and a list of organizations associated with 17 networks in Niagara.

Conducting community consultations is a standard piece of most planning processes across Niagara Region departments, ranging from Planning and Development, to Community Services, Corporate priority projects, and Public Works Environmental Assessments. These consultations however do not always take DEI into consideration, to make sure that they are hearing from diverse voices in the community. It is rare that demographic questions are asked during surveys or community engagement sessions, so most departments are not aware of which demographic groups may not be providing their voices, which may bias the results and the ensuing recommendations, with potential negative impacts for marginalized populations.

Gaps

- Need for clear communication and accessible ways to provide feedback
- Need to partner with more diversity related organizations
- Provide opportunities for diverse voices to be heard and incorporated into planning using a DEI lens
- Providing safe spaces and social services for community members to access

Conclusion and Next Steps

An environmental scan is critical because it provides key information about the current context and helps to identify where additional data needs to be collected. The environmental scan allowed Niagara Region to develop a shared and sound foundational understanding of DEI best practices from multiple sources in a variety of contexts.

The data from this scan provide the basis for staff to select four of the theme areas for quick start projects, which were initiated in 2021. The projects selected were: create an HR Hiring and Promotion Best Practices Guidebook; development of a training options menu and selecting introductory training for staff; collecting employee demographic data through staff survey; establishing the DEI Advisory Committee, supporting the organization of Indigenous COVID-19 Immunization Clinics, and updating the Regional Land Acknowledgement. As of the end of 2021, all of the projects have been completed.

The seven thematic areas will form the key areas of focus and inform the next stage of work. Additional data will be collected from a wide range of voices through staff and community focus groups and surveys, which will contribute to the development of the DEI Action Plan.

Appendix A: Municipality Review

List of municipalities included in the Environmental Scan, in alphabetical order.

1. Burlington
2. Durham
3. Guelph
4. Halifax
5. Hamilton
6. Kitchener-Waterloo
7. London
8. Ottawa
9. Peel Region
10. St. Catharines
11. Toronto
12. Vancouver
13. Vaughan
14. Windsor
15. York

Appendix B: Niagara's Largest 45 Employers DEI Review

List of the 45 largest employers in Niagara (by number of employees) and their current activities relating to DEI as of December 2020.

Organization	Staff	Municipality	Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	Level of DEI involvement
District School Board of Niagara	6,160	All Niagara	DSBN Employment Equity Action Plan Recommendations	Clear DEI Plan
Brock University	5,965	St. Catharines	Brock DEI Action Plan	Clear DEI Plan
Niagara Health System	4,914	All Niagara	Niagara Health DEI Plan	Clear DEI Plan
Niagara Region	3,644	HQ Thorold	Strategic Plan 2019-2022 Health Equity Strategic Plan	Mention DEI but lack details
Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort	3,630	Niagara Falls	OLG Annual Report	Mention DEI but lack details
Niagara College	2,658	Welland	Niagara College Strategic Plan	Mention DEI but lack details
Niagara Catholic District School Board	2,011	Welland	NCSDB DEI Equity & Inclusive Education Policy	Clear DEI Plan
Four Points by Sheraton Niagara Falls Fallsview	2,000	Niagara Falls	Diversity & Inclusion - Corporate	Clear DEI Plan
Hilton Hotels and Suits	2,000	Niagara Falls	DEI Hilton	Clear DEI Plan
Outlet Collection Niagara	1,500	Niagara-on-the-Lake	Women in Governance	Mention DEI but lack details
General Motors of Canada	1,445	St. Catharines	DEI Report DEI Report	Clear DEI Plan
Canadian Tire Financial Services	1,284	Niagara Falls	President & CEO - DEI	Mention DEI but lack details

Organization	Staff	Municipality	Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	Level of DEI involvement
Lais Hotel Properties Limited (Vintage Hotels)	1,184	Niagara-on-the-Lake		No mention of DEI
City of St. Catharines	975	St. Catharines	Culture Plan 2020	Mention DEI but lack details
City of Niagara Falls	837	Niagara Falls	Strategic Priorities 2019-2022	Mention DEI but lack details
Canada Border Service Agency	773	Niagara Falls	CBSA Departmental Plan	Mention DEI but lack details
Great Wolf Lodge	716	Niagara Falls	2019 Annual Report	Mention DEI but lack details
Sitel	641	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Rankin Construction Inc.	580	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
White Oaks Resort	523	Niagara-on-the-Lake		No mention of DEI
Concentrix	460	Niagara Falls	Diversity Profile	Mention DEI but lack details
Casino Niagara	456	Niagara Falls	D&I Niagara Casinos	Mention DEI but lack details
Care Partners	455	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Stanpac Inc.	450	Niagara		No mention of DEI
Family and Children's Services Niagara	450	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Shaw Festival Theatre	445	Niagara-on-the-Lake	Annual report	Mention DEI but lack details
Royal LePage Real Estate	415	Niagara Falls		No mention of DEI
Andrew Peller Ltd.	397	Niagara-on-the-Lake	Management Proxy Circular	Mention DEI but lack details
Meridian Credit Union (Corporate Office)	348	St. Catharines	Annual report	Mention DEI but lack details
Fort Erie Live Racing Consortium	340	Fort Erie		No mention of DEI
Costco	315	Niagara Falls	Multi-Year Accessibility Plan	Mention DEI but lack details
BVGlazing Systems	304	Niagara Falls		No mention of DEI

Organization	Staff	Municipality	Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	Level of DEI involvement
Cabico	291	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Welded Tube of Canada Corp.	284	Welland		No mention of DEI
Livingston International Corp.	280	Niagara-on-the-Lake		No mention of DEI
PVS Contractors	280	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Rich Products of Canada Ltd.	270	Fort Erie	<u>Diversity & Inclusion Info</u>	Mention DEI but lack details
Cantec Security Services	245	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Airbus Helicopters Ltd.	235	Fort Erie	<u>Inclusion & Diversity</u>	Mention DEI but lack details
St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation	225	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Tabor Manor	220	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI
Henry Schein Canada	219	Niagara-on-the-Lake	<u>Diversity & Inclusion Strategy</u>	Clear DEI plan
Walker Industries Inc.	218	Niagara Falls		No mention of DEI
Convergys Limited	200	Welland		No mention of DEI
OneTouch Direct	176	St. Catharines		No mention of DEI