Developing a data-driven approach to equity, diversity and inclusion in a specialized research setting

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QR Code to Full BrainsCAN EDI Action Plan

Overview

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) best practices strengthen the validity and impact of scientific research and are integral to innovation and scientific excellence[1]. Developing initiatives that directly create opportunities for members of historically marginalized groups is central to BrainsCAN's strategic plan. We use a data-driven, adaptive and long-term approach to identifying and implementing best practices in EDI, at all levels of career progression, in research design and in the research environment *(Figure 1)*.

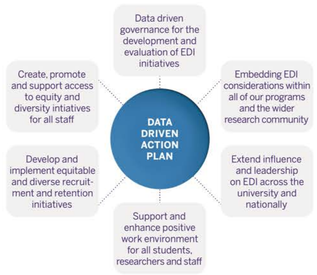


Figure 1: *Schematic representation of BrainsCAN's EDI Impact vision and objectives*

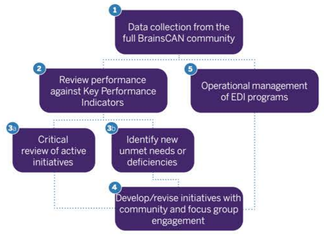


Figure 2: *Agile EDI Action Plan Framework for Accountability and Optimization*

Core Principles

- We take ownership in addressing the challenges that remain in achieving full participation from members of underrepresented groups (including women, visible minorities, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ people and people with disabilities) in our research communities.
- Comprehensive equity, diversity and inclusion practices increase access to a larger pool of qualified potential participants, strengthen research outputs, and increase overall research excellence.
- The creation of an equitable, diverse and inclusive research community is the responsibility of every member of the community, not just members of underrepresented groups.
- Diverse representation is absolutely necessary to reach our full potential as a research community and academic institution.

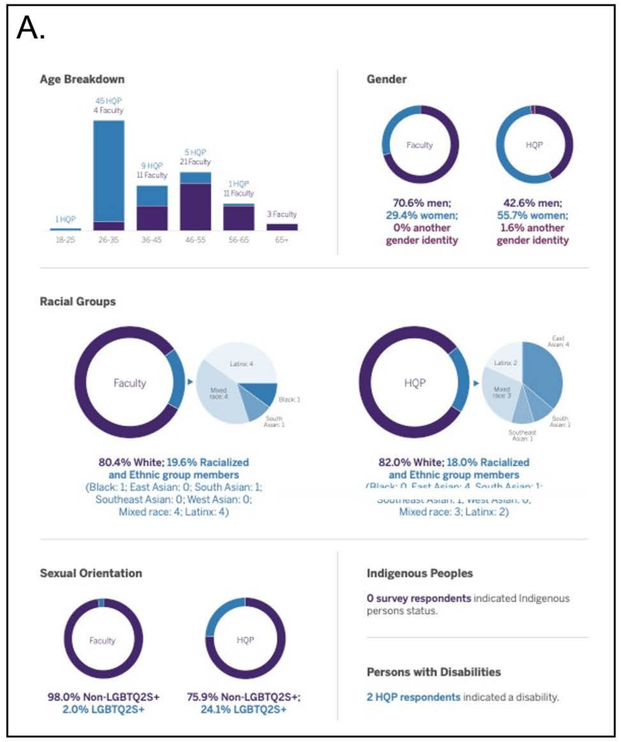
Action Plan Framework

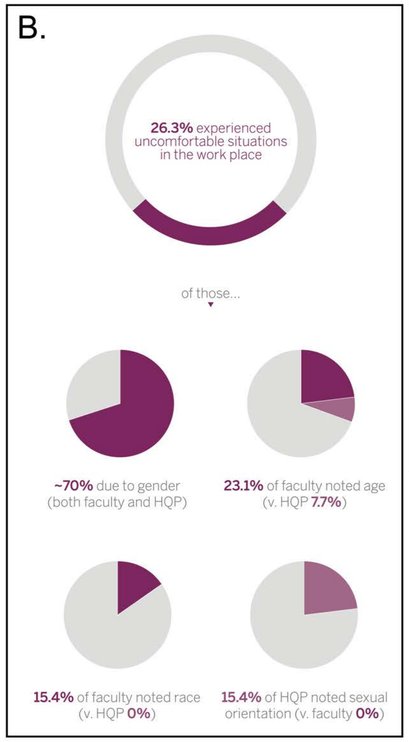
The EDI Committee is a BrainsCAN sub-committee tasked to oversee all matters related to equity, diversity and inclusion that impact service provisions, outcomes and the reputation of BrainsCAN. The EDI Committee consists of eight members which include representation from executive leadership, faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students.

The EDI Action Plan framework uses a data-driven approach to address challenges related to EDI within BrainsCAN, and within the overall academic community. Central to our approach is accessing our community for input and guidance. Relying on data collected from all BrainsCAN participants enables us to target specific needs within our community, while also assessing the impact of initiatives to allow iterative improvement *(Figure 2)*.

[1]*Science, Technology and Innovation Council (STIC). State of the Nation 2014—Canada's Science, Technology and Innovation System: Canada's Innovation Challenges and Opportunities. Ottawa (ON), 2015. p. 5.*

Selected Key Findings





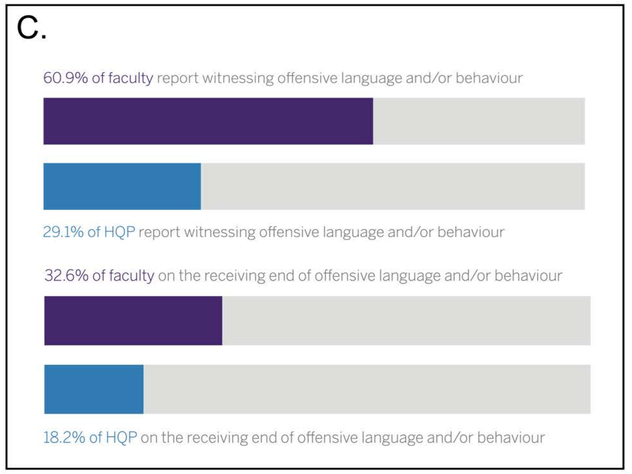


Figure 3. Selected findings from BrainsCAN's 2021 EDI assessment tool. **(A)** Demographic representation, **(B)** Occurrence of uncomfortable experiences by identify factors, **(C)** Occurrence of offensive behaviour by role.

- A lack of specific data within the academy makes it difficult to unravel the barriers and inequities that exist.
- Leading academic equity programs such as Athena SWAN and Dimensions have demonstrated how effective data-driven action plans can be.
- We perform an annual environmental scan to assess the culture and climate, to identify areas of progress and those that need improvement, and to inform our program design and delivery.
- A full survey analysis can be found on BrainsCAN EDI resource webpage. (See QR code above)

Data-driven Action Plan Items

Objective	Key Actions	Impact Areas
Data-driven governance for the development and evaluation of EDI initiatives	The EDI Committee was established to oversee BrainsCAN EDI initiatives. The EDI Committee consists of eight members which include representation from executive leadership, faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students.	FOUNDATIONAL TO ALL AREAS
	Expanded EDI survey for all BrainsCAN participants (faculty, HQP, administrative etc.) This has led to the baseline reporting on BrainsCAN metrics on EDI, and is providing the rationale for many of the BrainsCAN EDI Initiatives. Where possible, comparison to other Canadian institutions will be made. A Key Performance Indicator Scorecard will be used for tracking of this baseline reporting.	FOUNDATIONAL TO ALL AREAS
	Continuous EDI monitoring and evaluation of BrainsCAN programs, including diversity in HQP applicants and awardees, gender balance for internal funding applicants and awardees, and gender balance among appointed committees. Should opportunities arise to improve our program performance, the design of such programs will be revisited.	EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, PERCEIVED REPRESENTATION
Extend influence and leadership on EDI across the university and nationally	The EDI Committee is working with the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology to develop core principles and a shared philosophy.	FOUNDATIONAL TO ALL AREAS
	The Government of Canada held made-in-Canada Athena SWAN consultations with select groups from across Canada. BrainsCAN Co-Scientific Director, Dr. Lisa Saksida, and Executive Director, Fay Harrison, were involved in these consultations, resulting in the national Dimensions program launched on May 9, 2019 by Minister of Science and Sport, the Honourable Kirsty Duncan.	FOUNDATIONAL TO ALL AREAS
	We provide annual funding to a variety of programs which are linked to equity, diversity and inclusion, while advancing neuroscience research. Examples include: Inspiring Diversity in STEM (IDSTEM); London Brain Bee; and Neuroscience Research Day.	VARIOUS IMPACT AREAS

Objective	Key Actions	Impact Areas
Support and enhance positive work environment for all students, researchers and staff	Core Hours policy: Core hours (9:30am to 3:30pm) are to be utilized for all meetings, seminars and events scheduled for BrainsCAN.	WORK-LIFE BALANCE
	EDI Multi-Use Room: May be used for multi-faith prayer, breastfeeding, smudging ceremonies, or as a quiet space to enhance mental health.	SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT
	EDI Resource webpage: Provides our community with a repository of links to education, training and support. Resources ranging from EDI education in allyship, Indigenous considerations, as well as anti-racism are featured on this webpage.	SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT, EDI POLICIES AND PRACTICES COMPETENCY
Develop and implement equitable and diverse recruitment and retention initiatives	EDI Mentorship Network: The BrainsCAN research community is vast, spanning eight faculties and 35 departments. This network aims to magnify the connections between researchers who are committed to personal growth and professional development.	PERCEIVED REPRESENTATION, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
	Postdoctoral Fellowship Special Call: Up to 10 BrainsCAN postdoctoral fellowships from this call will be awarded during the Winter 2021 term to early-career neuroscientists who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, people with a disability, and women.	COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
	Open and transparent hiring practices: Our hiring strategy includes intentional advertising that is inclusive and far reaching through multiple networks, especially targeted toward underrepresented groups. We also implement a 30-day posting requirement for all of our job postings; we set our intention to regularly review our hiring practices to ensure fairness for all.	COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
	Diversity in Neuroscience Summer Studentship Program: An undergraduate summer program designed for students from underrepresented groups to participate in a 10-week paid internship in the lab of a BrainsCAN research supervisor.	COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, PERCEIVED REPRESENTATION

Objective	Key Actions	Impact Areas
Embedding EDI considerations within all of our programs and the wider research community	Accelerator Program: We revised this program for Fall 2020 to require an EDI Action Plan upon submission of an application.	RESEARCH QUALITY, POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT
	OurBrainsCAN Participant Registry: OurBrainsCAN is a tool that contributes to making research more inclusive for all people from the London community.	RESEARCH QUALITY
	We delivered a COVID-19 survey to assess the climate for those we support in our programs. The survey found that there is increased stress, anxiety and depression being experienced by respondents since the pandemic began. Through this survey, necessary programmatic changes were made including funding extensions for both internal grant holders and our postdoctoral fellows. Importantly, the survey enabled us to address the increased mental health strains in our community by expanding our EDI Resources page to include more mental health resources.	EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
Create, promote and support access to equity and diversity initiatives for all staff	EDI in Research Webinars: Webinars catered to the unique environments within laboratories, with real-life examples of how EDI can be implemented by our researchers.	ALL EDI IMPACT AREAS
	Laboratory Manual: We have developed a laboratory manual which includes suggestions and recommendations for ways in which researchers may include EDI considerations.	ALL EDI IMPACT AREAS
	Accessibility at BrainsCAN: We are committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for persons with disabilities studying, visiting and working within BrainsCAN's physical spaces, as well as when accessing digital resources and content. BrainsCAN representatives were involved during the planning and layout of the 6th floor of WIRB with accessibility at the forefront. Furthermore, BrainsCAN's website has been Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA compliant since 2017, four years earlier than the deadline legislated by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Moving forward, BrainsCAN seeks out and encourages the use of any resource that increases accessibility to its spaces, facilities and content.	SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Key performance Indicators (KPI)

Work/life Balance

Subsequent surveys will ask respondents questions on the expectation to work outside of core hours, in addition to ability to attend meetings and events outside of core hours. We strive to **minimize expectation to be available for work outside of core hours** for all.

Safe & Inclusive Environment

Full agreement that it has been made clear that unsupportive language and behaviour as well as inappropriate imagery are not acceptable in the workplace.

Subsequent surveys will ask respondents if there were recent (last 12 months) incidences of experiencing, or witnessing offensive language and/or behaviour within their work environment, as well as if they felt uncomfortable because of gender, race, Indigenous identity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, etc. We strive for year over year reduction to **zero incidences**.

Community demographics

Increase BrainsCAN engagement with underrepresented groups noting the limitation on demographic change within relatively static population of Western researchers (NB: HQP are less static than faculty).

EDI Policies and Practises Competency

Full agreement on awareness of policies and confidence in supervisors to properly address situations.

Perceived Representation

Increase agreement to "visible role model" among underrepresented groups.

Equal Opportunities

Increased agreement across all Equal Opportunities statement, with particular interest addressing **"fair allocation of work" among faculty respondents**, and **opportunities for external representation, networking and mentorship for HQP**.

The ultimate goal of our EDI Action Plan is a research community where all experiences and identities are adequately represented and equally valued. Progress toward the long-term goals will require regular evaluation of representation among faculty and HQP, as well as tracking career progression within the university (i.e. promotions) and for those leaving Western.