

Bridging Divides EDI Action Plan Executive Summary

Introduction

The Bridging Divides (BD) EDI Action Plan for research design and practice was created through a consultative co-creation process with researchers, staff, Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP), academic partners (Concordia University, University of Alberta, and University of British Columbia) and non-academic partners. The process to develop the plan was led by the Executive Director with input and guidance from the EDI Working Group and support from the Interim EDI Specialist and the BD staff team. Input was also sought from BD researchers at the four institutions and staff at the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation (OVPRI), Office of the Vice-President, Equity and Community Inclusion (OVPECI), and the library.

Informed Approach

The plan was informed by data gathered through an extensive literature review, a baseline survey that was administered to BD researchers, staff and HQP and follow-up in-depth interviews with researchers, staff, HQP and representatives from non-academic partner organizations. The baseline data revealed the challenges and systemic barriers faced by underrepresented researchers, staff, and HQP in flourishing and advancing their academic careers and the hurdles faced by non-academic partners in serving their immigrant clientele.

Bold and Innovative EDI Initiatives and Activities

This section is a synopsis of some of the bold and innovative initiatives and activities that BD will implement. BD collaborated with the TMU Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration on a digital storytelling project aimed at **research co-creation and knowledge mobilization** called [WhereWeStand](#). The project paired 14 undergraduate and graduate students of **Indigenous and immigrant backgrounds to co-create projects exploring their sense of belonging in Canada**. The resulting creative works explored themes such as: the relationship to the land, connection to home, the experience of truth and reconciliation for newcomers, resiliency through grief and the unseen struggles faced by racialized individuals in Canada. During the premiere of the digital storytelling event in Halifax and Brantford-Six Nations, BD staff had conversations with the Indigenous and immigrant students which helped to shape the plan and will continue to guide its implementation.

BD will build a **nursery of new academic talent that will be representative of our community** – within the four Universities, in our cities and in Canada as a whole. For instance, we recently launched the Undergraduate Underrepresented Internship. The program is designed to provide **training, mentorship**, and paid employment to undergraduate students who self-identify as belonging to underrepresented groups. Given that the program provides a robust training and mentorship opportunity for the students, it will be instrumental to inspiring undergraduate students to pursue academic careers.

Additional examples of our other planned mentorship and training programs aimed at recruiting diverse researchers to BD research projects are the 1) **Global Exchange Fellowship program** which will promote international collaboration and knowledge exchange among Canadian and international academic institutions by providing an opportunity for advanced PhD students (3rd year or later), postdoctoral fellows and ECRs based at TMU and partner institutions to participate in a one-month research exchange; 2) **Scholars of Excellence program** which will invite up to four globally recognized scholars each year to join the BD program for one to

three months. While at TMU the scholars will deliver lectures, and seminars, mentor graduate students, and contribute to conferences, workshops and new research proposals; 3) **Civil Society Fellows program** will invite practitioners from civil society organizations or government bodies with international experience in migration or immigrant integration and inclusion to apply for a one-month residency at TMU.

BD will work with the Manager, Collaboration Programs and Initiatives at the OVPRI and the Zones at TMU to launch a **migration and ADT hackathon** in the Fall of 2024. The hackathon will bring together teams of students from all the BD disciplines at the four academic institutions and from TMU's Responsible AI NSERC CREATE student cohort. Students will be required to identify a problem that immigrants face in their integration journey and a possible solution to the problem. Problem generation will be guided by the outcome of discussions we had with IRCC where they shared the immigrant integration and settlement gaps they are observing. This initiative will ensure that we prioritize the development and dissemination of EDI focused evidence-based immigrant integration interventions. We will share the hackathon results with Canada Border Services and IRCC. They will potentially adopt and implement some of the innovative solutions.

Inclusive knowledge mobilization and translation efforts will be prioritized by BD from the conception of the research program. The Training Working Group and the Stakeholder Relations and Knowledge Mobilization Working Group will work closely with the Stakeholder Relations Specialist and the Implementation and Knowledge Mobilization Manager to roll out knowledge mobilization activities. This includes offering workshops, resources, and support on topics such as cultural competency, inclusive communication, and ethical considerations in knowledge mobilization to promote awareness, understanding, and action on EDI issues in research. To measure progress on incorporating EDI in knowledge mobilization, BD will establish mechanisms for **monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its efforts by collecting feedback from stakeholders and participants to identify strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement**. BD will **conduct regular assessments of the diversity and inclusivity of knowledge mobilization and translation activities, tracking participation rates and engagement levels among diverse audiences, and using data to inform decision-making and strategic planning**.

Budget

The total EDI budget for BD for the 7-year duration of the research program is \$13,129,838. This amount is for expenses related to internal EDI personnel (\$898,635), external EDI personnel (\$82,248), other staff with EDI expertise (\$678,826), training activities (\$126,947), data collection (\$60,153), communications (\$526,507), project implementation (\$1,080,000) and other EDI expenses (\$9,676,493). The planned expenses for the development and implementation of the EDI Action Plan will support key EDI initiatives for BD. From personnel salaries to training activities and communications, each budget item is important to advance our EDI goals, promote a culture of change, and drive sustainable impact for the duration of the research program.

Conclusion

Guided by this evidence-based EDI Action Plan, BD will cultivate an immigrant integration research ecosystem which can demonstrate increased inclusion of underrepresented researchers and students; improved retention rates of HQP; enhanced engagement and work satisfaction for all BD researchers and staff; and an innovative research program with outputs that have EDI at their core.