

A Practical Guide to Writing about Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Grant Proposals

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Background Information and Introduction

Application of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles is the framework for creating an environment that is fair to all participants, welcoming to all individuals, truly merit-based, and able to thrive by permitting access to the largest possible talent pool. EDI-infused proposals recognize obstacles and barriers that are experienced by members of equity deprived (also referred to as 'equity seeking') groups, and seeks to better identify talent and potential, and accommodate those with differing personal needs. Supporting EDI helps to reduce and eliminate its opposites, namely *inequality*, *homogeneity* (and thus less diverse lens, experience, point of view, and creativity), and *exclusionary* practices (both overt and inadvertent). Therefore, embedding principles of EDI leverages talent and potential, drives innovation, displaces mediocrity and creates inclusive excellence, producing better scientists and better science.

As per the Tri-Agency Statement on EDI, the stated commitment to “*Increasing equitable and inclusive participation in the research system, including on research teams*” and specific initiatives to achieve that, are a primary focus of Ryerson/X University. Individual

PIs do not always receive EDI training, and yet there is a growing expectation, especially from [NSERC, CIHR, and SSHRC](#), to show EDI competencies and the application of EDI principles in our labs, our mentoring and training, and in our grant applications.

Writing effectively about EDI in grant applications is made easier when the PI and trainees have taken concrete steps in support of EDI in the lab or SRC environment. See the document *[Supporting EDI in your SRC Lab or Group Environment](#)* and *[Five Easy-to-Take Action Items to Support EDI in Your Research Group](#)* provided previously by the Dimensions Chair. For example, each of the “five easy-to-take actions”¹ will provide context that an applicant can easily draw upon when crafting a proposal.

Granting Agency Requirements

Major grant proposals now require the applicant to write one or more sections on EDI. For example:

NSERC Discovery Grant Applications require:

- In the HQP Training Plan section, a description of “the planned approach to promoting participation from a diverse group of HQP, taking into account equity and inclusion in recruitment practices, mentorship approaches and initiatives aimed at ensuring an inclusive research and training environment and trainee growth.” See Appendix A for some sample HQP Training Plan text.
- In the Past Contributions to the Training of HQP section, a description of “specific actions implemented to support equity and inclusion in recruitment practices, mentorship approaches, and initiatives aimed at ensuring an inclusive research and training environment and trainee growth.” See Appendix A for some sample Past Contributions to the Training of HQP text.
- In the Most Significant Contributions to Research section, it is noted that “Impact can be seen as ... contributing to increased equity, diversity and inclusion in research.”
- In the Methodology section, it is noted that the “inclusion of sex (biological), gender (socio-cultural) and diversity considerations in research design makes research more ethically sound, rigorous and useful.” The applicant is instructed to describe “the rationale for including sex, gender and diversity considerations, and how these aspects will be addressed in the research design, if applicable.” If these factors are not applicable, it may be useful to point that out and explain why thereby demonstrating rigour in experimental design.
- See also [here](#) and check out what peer reviewers are recommended to be aware of with respect to EDI in NSERC DG applications [here](#). Write your applicant so a

¹ (i) implementing a Code of Conduct, (ii) offering flexibility of work location and time, (iii) encouraging undergraduates from equity-seeking groups to apply for URA and Masters positions, (iv) putting an EDI statement on your website, and (v) asking about religious or cultural observance requirements,

reviewer will find it easy to follow, specific for your location & discipline, compelling, thoughtful and substantive.

NSERC Alliance Applications require:

- an explanation of “how equity, diversity and inclusion have been considered in the academic team” and
- “how equity, diversity and inclusion are considered in the training plan.”

Early Researcher Award (ERA) applications require:

- that the “research project ... meaningfully engage members of underrepresented groups within the research team” and “[t]he institution must strive to put in place the right conditions for each individual to reach their full potential”.
- It also states that the “applicant must clearly demonstrate their commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in their research teams, including undergraduates, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, research assistants, associates, and technicians, as applicable.” ERA applicants must decide how to address EDI considerations in four sections of the application on HQP training.

Starting at the Beginning – Types of EDI Considerations

Aspects of EDI in research can be divided into two main categories, i. EDI considerations **for the research team members**, and ii. EDI considerations in **research methods and application (sometimes referred to as sex and gender plus based analyses – or SGBA+)**. These two categories should be considered individually when writing a grant application. Further details are provided below.

1. EDI considerations for the research team members: **This category is relevant to all research proposals** and can be further subdivided into 1a. EDI considerations when recruiting prospective members, and 1b. EDI considerations for current members of the research group.

1a. EDI considerations when recruiting prospective members; Some topics and considerations that fall under this category may include (but not be limited to):

- Which equity seeking groups are, or have historically been underrepresented or excluded in your department, program, and research group (See Appendix B). Be honest about this. If you don't know – learn something about your field. Women were not [historically excluded in computer science](#) but are certainly under-represented now. People with disabilities are under-represented/historically excluded from laboratory sciences and members of other communities have been excluded across all science disciplines. Does the recent [Ryerson student ID survey](#) help to

inform this section of your EDI plan? Use specific data and metrics where appropriate.

- What recruitment strategies will you use to target members of those equity seeking groups (depending on your discipline). For example, will you advertise positions on an LGBTQinSTEM website or a Women-in-Chemistry newsletter, or will you seek assistance in crafting position ads with non-gendered language or perhaps use a “tap-on-the-shoulder” approach to recruit those who may not have considered themselves potential members of a research group. Multiple approaches are typically needed to ensure diverse pools of potential HQP.
- Recognize and articulate that members of one or more equity seeking groups may have experienced significant barriers to achievement or may have been denied research opportunities on the basis of characteristics that have nothing to do with ability. As a result of these barriers, talent and potential may be masked, or difficult to see on their CV in traditional categories (journal publications, volunteer experience, etc.). For example, will you make efforts to interview a diverse set of applicants and will you seek to understand their academic journey and the barriers they may have encountered in your assessment of research potential? What other approaches might you employ?

1b. EDI considerations when interacting within the research group; Some topics and considerations that fall under this category may include (but are not limited to):

- Do you require members of your research group to abide by a Code of Conduct which outlines responsibilities and expectations of each member. There are many examples of science lab codes of conduct available to use as templates.
- Will your research group members be expected or required to attend EDI training – what type? Where? Is there something you can point to locally? Wherever possible, give specific details that are appropriate for your context.
- Trainees from marginalized background (women, racialized individuals of all genders) often report being denied leadership opportunities, internships, choices of research projects, and also report being subject to other discriminatory practices within research settings. Note that research settings can be problematic with respect to unsafe contexts such as (but not limited to) late nights in labs, remote locations, restricted access infrastructure (computer labs, imaging facilities, analytical equipment rooms). There are aspects of research culture in the sciences which put some trainees at higher risk. Do you have specific training for field work, independent work outside regular working hours? Will your HQP know how to intervene, what to do and where to go with respect to issues.
- Will the research group have policies with regard to (for example):

- Equitable distribution of research projects, internships, and leadership opportunities,
- Authorship and co-authorship rights on collaborative works,
- Distribution of speaking time in meetings, interruptions
- Will accessibility and inclusion be considered when planning social events (access for persons with disabilities, accommodation for dietary restrictions, religious observances) and conference presentations. Conferences have been identified as potentially high risk environments for various demographics (e.g. poster sessions with open bars, locations in parts of the world that are explicitly racist or homophobic).
- Will the research group have a public statement (online, posted in a lab, etc.) on EDI policies. (A sample statement can be found in the [2020-2021 FEAS Dimensions Report](#)).

2. EDI considerations in research methods and application: **This category is relevant to some research proposals** and can be further subdivided into 2a. EDI considerations in research methods (**sometimes referred to as sex and gender plus based analyses – or SGBA+ for funding agencies such as CIHR**), and 2b. EDI considerations in the application and realized benefit of research results (an extension of the relevance of the research within the context of SGBA+). Not that SGBA+ is not exclusively about sex and/or gender – but about other aspects of diversity (e.g. age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, etc.) hence the plus (+). This is sometimes overlooked but reviewers are asked to assess incorporation of SGBA+ in the fullest sense.

2a. EDI considerations in research methods; Some topics and considerations that fall under this category include:

- In research that involves human subjects, how will the diversity of the subject pool be taken into account (e.g. databases, genomics, populations, etc.)
- In research that involves Indigenous communities, how will Indigenous modes of knowledge and communication be taken into account and how will the research be led by, or done in conjunction with Indigenous community members and scholars.

2b. EDI considerations in the application and realized benefit of research results. Some topics and considerations that fall under this category include:

- Has the application of the research topic typically benefitted the majority population of Canada (predominantly white, European ancestry, middle-class, upper-middle-class Canadians), and how might it's application extend beyond these groups. For example, many databases used in genomics analysis and machine learning are skewed to the extent they do not represent the population or reflect humanity. Multiple examples can be

found [here](#) as well as approaches to improve experimental design and application of results for maximum impact.

Dos and Don'ts of Writing about EDI in Grant Proposals

Do: Be candid about the diversity shortcomings in your department/program/research group. There is no expectation that EDI performance has been perfect, but rather it is seen as beneficial to acknowledge shortcomings, and discuss methods to address them. For example, use phrases like, “It is well known that Indigenous students have experienced significant barriers to inclusion in our field” or “To address the historic underrepresentation of researchers who identify as women and/or BIPOC in the group...”

Don't: Don't claim that EDI issues don't exist in your department/program/research group. Similarly, don't spend too much effort touting your recruitment and team diversity achievements, unless you can explicitly demonstrate a link between your EDI initiatives to diversity statistics that exceed the norms in your field.

Do: Be specific about representation and diversity by citing statistics for race and gender breakdowns in your department/program/research (see appendix B). Quote statistics from self-identity surveys to justify the need for inclusivity initiatives. Make sure that the actions you plan to take will specifically address the shortcomings in the cited data. Be specific to your location and discipline. Make note that Ryerson is in the process of changing its name to reflect intentionality and awareness of colonial and exclusionary histories and practices. This is the context in which your research is taking place, suggesting, by extension, there is awareness, support, expertise and advice for your EDI HQP actions plans. Then be specific about those actions.

Don't: Don't make generic statements about being committed to supporting EDI, or believing in the equality among researchers. Don't make statements about believing that members of equity-seeking groups are just as talented as researchers as others. Instead, make statements about actions that you will take in support of EDI, and be sure that they have been shown to be effective. Reviewers are looking for specific recognition of the realities in your field and your specific actions. Do not make generic statement that suggest a deficit model in individuals or groups. Equity-deserving groups are almost always interested in <science discipline> and want to participate but the culture and context is not welcoming and they do not see themselves reflected in that science. What are you going to do to change that and make your research program welcoming and supportive.

Do: Recognize and acknowledge your own privilege along your academic journey, and the advantages you have had. Each individual has had a different lived experience, and has had advantages, and possibly faced barriers. Each tenure-stream faculty member has had at least some opportunities. This statement in no way diminishes the struggles that many researchers have endured, especially those who identify as in one or more equity-seeking groups. However, by clearly articulating a recognition of our own privilege,

we open our minds to understanding the barriers that others face (and *vice versa*), which is an asset when it comes to breaking down barriers of others. From subjective experience can come objective insights. Be thoughtful and honest about your own privilege. Demonstrate a level of self-awareness that has informed your proposal

Don't: Don't spend too much effort discussing the barriers that you encountered along your academic journey, especially if it is done as a means of prefacing your ability to identify with and recognize the struggles of others. There is an enormous spectrum of identities and lived experiences in the research world, and having faced specific barriers associated with one identity does not necessarily qualify someone to truly understand the barriers and obstacles faced by others. Furthermore, having faced specific barriers does not excuse someone from self-educating on EDI issues, or mindfulness of others.

Do: Understand (and discuss) the linkage between equitable and inclusive group culture, and recruitment of diverse groups of applicants. When trainees feel valued, free to speak their mind, appreciated, included, and comfortable in their environment, a research lab can develop a reputation as equitable and inclusive, which can aid in recruitment. Prospective trainees often connect with current trainees (both directly, and on social networks) to discuss group culture. When it becomes known that a research group is deliberately and highly inclusive of all identities, it becomes easier to recruit trainees from a diverse applicant pool. It is important to remember, however, that reputation building alone is not enough to ensure diverse recruitment; other initiatives that are recruitment-equity-specific should be undertaken as well.

Don't: Don't focus your discussion entirely on recruitment. While it is valuable to discuss efforts that will be made to recruit from a diverse and larger pool of applicants for open positions, it is also important to discuss specific efforts that will be employed to support equitable treatment of group members (by the faculty and other group members), and inclusive behaviour. We know from numerous surveys that some of the biggest barriers to inclusion in the sciences is the trainee experience over an extended period time – in terms of both mentorship and research program culture.

Do: Understand and discuss the relationships between recruiting from a more diverse applicant pool and between increased diversity in the research group, and a stronger research environment.

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Appendix A – Sample Text from an NSERC Discovery Application

Adapted from the “HQP Training Plan” Section:

My approach will focus on creating an environment that is inclusive to all backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. I, along with all HQP, will attend an annual Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Workshop, organized by XXXXX², focusing on awareness and issues related to EDI in my field. Our group also has a Code of Conduct³ that each new HQP is given, which outlines procedures and expectations related to harassment, expressing views and opinions, civility in discourse, critiques of colleagues work, creating an environment of physical safety (monitoring that the lab is locked, etc.), and what resources can be utilized should issues arise.

A variety of initiatives are underway to alleviate the underrepresentation of <XXX> in the group. They include building our reputation as highly inclusive and welcoming environment; ensuring that each member gets the floor in group meetings equally, and that <XXXX> members engage in leadership activities with appropriate supports. Other members of the group (e.g. from the dominant demographic) will be encouraged to receive training about microaggressions, allyship and bystander interventions as part of creating a culture of inclusion and respect. I actively seek diverse collaborators (e.g. Prof. XXXXX at XXXXX University) to provide more diverse mentorship to HQP. I work to identify promising XXXX students in our graduating class, and strongly encourage them to apply to our graduate programs.⁴

Adapted from the “Past Contributions to HQP Training” section:

I maintain a collegial and inclusive training environment. Since [year], I've had the pleasure of supervising X PDFs, X PhDs, X Masters, and X URAs. These HQP are a diverse group coming from all over the globe; North and South America, Europe, Africa, The Middle East, and Asia. They include HQP who are the first in their family to attend University, and HQP who identify as LGBTQ2S. A plan to address this underrepresentation is included in my Training Philosophy.

NB: Be very careful about quantifying numbers of individuals (X women, Y individuals from BIPOC backgrounds) or providing any other information that may lead to identification of HQP. Having a research group with 5 men and 5 women does not constitute or provide evidence of an EDI plan and may breach privacy rules.

² Discuss available workshops and training with your Dimensions Chair, your department chair and/or Associate Dean – Research and External Partnerships

³ Consider implementing a group Code of Conduct if you have not done so already.

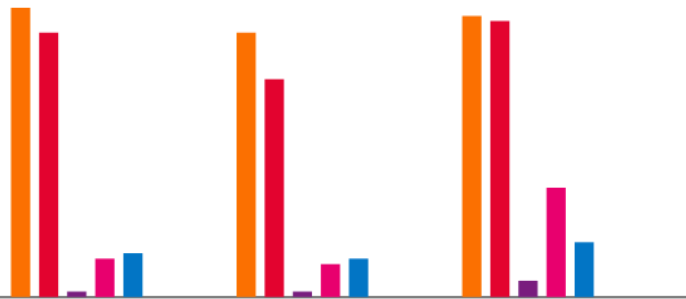
⁴ There are many faculty for whom this paragraph may not apply, however, it's form and structure may be useful for discussing any identified shortcomings and possible modes to address them.

Appendix B – 2019 Ryerson Student Diversity Self-ID Data (taken from the report that can be found [here](#))

Ryerson University overall relative to representation in the GTA or Ontario

Undergraduate and graduate student representation

The graphic compares the representation of student equity groups at Ryerson with data from the GTA or Ontario.



	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	GTA/Ontario population
Women	55%	54%	52%
Racialized people	48%	39%	51%
Aboriginal Peoples	1%	1%	3%
Persons with disabilities	7%	6%	20%
2SLGBTQ+ people	8%	7%	10%

Diversity scores for undergraduate programs in the Faculty of Science

Program name	Women students	Racialized students	Aboriginal students	Students with disabilities	2SLGBTQ+ students	South Asian students	Black students	Chinese students	Diversity Score
Faculty of Science									64.9%
Biology	A+	A+	B+	C-	A-	A	B	B-	77.9%
Biomedical Sciences	A+	A+	C-	D-	B+	A+	B	C-	67.3%
Chemistry	B+	B	D-	D+	B	C+	A+	A	63.5%
Computer Science	D	A+	C-	C	A-	A+	D-	A	62.6%
Financial Mathematics	C-	A+	D-	D-	C	A+	A	A	62.6%
Math & Its Applications	C-	B-	C+	C-	B-	B+	D-	C+	50.1%
Medical Physics	B+	A+	C	B-	B-	A	A+	B	70.2%

How to use this information:

For example, note that the biology program has a high score for women reflecting a proportionate representation on women in the program but much lower score for students with disabilities, a demographic that is well known to be under-represented in sciences (and employment in general in Canada). Barriers to inclusion can be physical (like infrastructure) and attitudinal. What actions might be possible to unlock talent and potential in this demographic (keeping in mind that 20% of Canadians identify as having a disability).

Diversity scores for graduate programs in the Faculty of Science

Program name	Women students	Racialized students	Aboriginal students	Students with disabilities	2SLGBTQ+ students	South Asian students	Black students	Chinese students	Diversity Score
Faculty of Science									48.4%
Biomedical Physics (MSc)	A+	C-	D-	C	D-	A+	B	D-	50.1%
Biomedical Physics (PhD)	C	A-	D-	D-	D-	C+	D-	A-	41.4%
Computer Science (MSc)	C+	D	D-	B-	C-	C	D-	D+	35.6%
Computer Science (PhD)	B-	B-	D-	D-	D-	C+	D-	D-	31.8%
Mathematics (Applied Mathematics) (MSc)	A+	C+	D-	D-	D-	A+	D-	A+	52.0%
Mathematics (Math Modelling & Methods) (PhD)	A+	D-	D-	D-	A+	B+	D-	D-	44.3%
Molecular Science (MSc)	A+	A	D-	B-	A+	A+	A-	C+	76.0%
Molecular Science (PhD)	A+	D-	D-	C-	A	A	C+	C-	55.8%

Appendix C – EDI Application Requirements for other Programs

A variety of other grant programs, that are commonly subscribed to in FOS have instituted EDI application requirements. A brief (non-exhaustive) summary of some of those programs and their requirements is included below.

NSERC Alliance and NFRF

- These research proposals, require the applicant to “explain how sex, gender and diversity and/or EDI have been considered in the research design”.
- EDI must also be addressed in the proposed training plan portion of the application.
- In the ‘Team’ section of the application the applicant must explain how equity, diversity and inclusion have been considered in the academic team composition.

SSHRC Insight

- In the ‘Knowledge Mobilization Plan’ section: the applicant must “include a plan to increase knowledge uptake by target audiences, and anticipated outputs, outcomes and/or impacts of social sciences and humanities knowledge among various appropriate audiences or participants (academic and/or non-academic), including:
 - methodologies and approaches to engage appropriate target audiences or participants, including, as applicable, diverse groups of researchers, policy-makers, business leaders, community groups, educators, media, international audiences, practitioners, decision-makers and the general public”

CIHR Project Grant

- In the ‘Proposal Information – Details’ section: If the project involves research involving Indigenous peoples, the applicant must explain their engagement with the community in relation to the research proposal.
- If biological sex and or gender as a socio-cultural factor are to be taken into account in the project, the applicant must explain its/their role in the research design, methods, analysis and interpretation, and/or dissemination of findings.
- If biological sex and or gender as a socio-cultural factor are not to be taken into account in the project, the applicant must explain why they are not applicable.