



## **Dimensions**

Equity, diversity and  
inclusion Canada

# **LOI Process Report**

This report summarizes the Dimensions: equity, diversity and inclusion Canada (Dimensions) letter of intent (LOI) process, which resulted in the selection of post-secondary institutions to participate in the pilot phase of the program.

## **Dimensions program overview**

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The Dimensions program is intended to publicly recognize post-secondary institutions seeking to increase equity, diversity and inclusion in their environments. Its objective is to foster transformational change within the research community at Canadian post-secondary institutions by identifying and eliminating obstacles and inequities in the research ecosystem. This will increase equitable and inclusive participation, support equitable access to funding opportunities, and embed EDI-related considerations in research design and practices. It aims to address obstacles faced by but not limited to women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of visible minority/racialized groups, and members of LGBTQ2+ communities.

The Tri-agency (Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)) has initiated a pilot that began with the development of the [Dimensions charter](#), which is foundational to the program and aims to foster increased research excellence, innovation and creativity within the post-secondary sector across all disciplines.

During the next phase of the pilot, selected institutions will be expected to help further develop the program's design and delivery by providing relevant feedback to the Tri-agency Dimensions team. These institutions will also have a unique opportunity to be the first in Canada to submit an application to be recognized for their efforts and progress.

## **Selection committee members**

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The selection committee was responsible for reviewing LOIs and selecting institutions to participate in the Dimensions pilot program. The committee was composed of 11 members: 7 were recruited as EDI experts and 4 were involved in the EDI activities of the departments and agencies responsible for the Dimensions pilot. Additionally, members were from different regions of the country and some identify as belonging to underrepresented groups. As such, the committee was made up of members with diverse experience and expertise related to equity, diversity and inclusion.

## LOI review

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By the deadline of July 8, 2019, a total of 40 letters of intent were received; this included 32 from universities, 7 from colleges and 1 from another type of institution out of 240 eligible institutions. LOIs were evaluated in a two-stage process. During the first stage, each LOI was assigned to three selection committee members, who each evaluated approximately 11 LOIs. Members of the committee based their scores on the following criteria: institutional commitment (40% of total score) and evidence of probability of success (60% of total score).

The institutional commitment score was based on the first two sections of the LOI application (institutional overview and institutional commitment), while the evidence of probability of success score was based on the remaining three sections (self-assessment team, overview of data collection, and use and description of EDI-related measures).

When scoring the LOIs for each selection criterion, committee members assigned a score from 1 to 3 as follows: 1 = weak fit for pilot, 2 = moderate fit for pilot and 3 = strong fit for pilot. Hence, the overall selection was based on “fit for the pilot” as opposed to merit or quality in the traditional sense. By July 21, 2019, the reviewers each provided their scores and summary notes. The total score was calculated by taking into account the weightings for each criterion, and a final overall adjusted integer score (total score between 2.34 and 3.00 = integer score 3, total score between 1.67 and 2.33 = integer score 2, total score between 1.00 and 1.66 = integer score 1) was determined and used as a basis for discussion during the second stage of the selection process.

The second stage of the selection process consisted of the committee members meeting for a full day on July 24, 2019 to determine the institutions that, taken together, were the best fit for the pilot. This decision meeting allowed the committee members to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each LOI according to the selection criteria (committee members were not present during discussions regarding their own institutions). Additionally, committee members considered a balance of institutions across institution types, sizes and geographic locations. Committee members also recognized that there would be additional value in selecting institutions that were at different stages of progress in terms of EDI and that faced different realities due to location, size and type. Institutions were also assessed as part of a “community of practice,” collaborating with other selected institutions. Thus, the LOIs were not ranked relative to each other.

The selection committee identified 17 out of 40 LOIs to recommend for the Dimensions pilot. This list was presented for approval to NSERC’s Vice President of Communications, Corporate and International Affairs on behalf of the Tri-agency (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC) and was approved as recommended.

## **LOI strengths and weaknesses**

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Overall, LOIs were submitted from a variety of institutions (large universities, small/medium universities and colleges, polytechnics and other) and were generally well distributed across the main regions (Western, Ontario, Quebec and Eastern). However, with regards to both Quebec and the East, only one LOI was submitted from large universities in either of those regions. Furthermore, no LOI was received from any CÉGEP. Based on the descriptions of institutional environments, realities and resources, the LOIs illustrated that EDI implementation is varied among the different institutions.

The following summarizes some of the key elements that were discussed by the selection committee.

### **Robustness of institutions' commitment and readiness**

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Regardless of whether an institution had achieved significant or limited EDI success, it was reviewed favorably by committee members when the LOI clearly showed a high degree of commitment and readiness to address obstacles faced by the five underrepresented groups. Selected LOIs clearly expressed a strong desire to participate in the pilot program. As well, the committee held institutions that recognized the need to collect diverse data and the importance of intersectionality in high regard. Finally, institutions that described interesting or innovative EDI initiatives with good plans in place for success were identified by committee members as strong fits for the pilot.

### **Institutions' ability to "share inward and outward"**

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The willingness and ability to share findings and experiences with other institutions in the pilot was a critical element in the selection of institutions. Given that the Dimensions pilot aims to create a "community of practice" for institutions to share practices and ideas, reviewers took into account whether institutions showed that they had the internal capacity to foster the sharing of knowledge and teach other institutions. Only a small number of institutions clearly expressed such willingness and capacity.

### **Honesty and self-reflection**

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The committee also appreciated LOIs that displayed evidence of thoughtful reflection and institutional humility, beyond accountability exercises. Institutions that identified their weaknesses in relation to EDI and discussed the necessity for them to improve were highly regarded. The committee also appreciated LOIs that admitted external help from other institutions or the network of pilot institutions would be beneficial to them in achieving their EDI goals.

## **Impact on community**

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Selection committee members discussed institutions' impact on their local community. For example, they expected institutions to be aware of local factors such as race issues or the presence of nearby Indigenous communities and to describe how these factors would be taken into account in their EDI activities. It was noted that colleges, in particular, have the potential to have a significant impact on their communities.

## **Main takeaways**

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As described above, the selection committee carefully considered the variety of institutions being selected for the pilot. This included a balance not only across institution types, sizes and geographic locations, but also in terms of "readiness." As Dimensions is currently in its pilot stage, the selection committee noted it was an ideal opportunity to test the program at all stages of readiness in order to effectively develop the program guidelines.

Additionally, the selection committee proposed that there be some form of support for institutions that were not selected. This would ensure that they still learn throughout the pilot phase, and their efforts could be supported through some forms of engagement with the pilot institutions. The committee considered this could be of particular assistance to colleges, where research activities are less significant than they generally are within universities. The committee widely acknowledged that the pilot could not be "one size fits all" regarding universities and colleges.