Dimensions
Equity, diversity and
inclusion Canada

Summary report: draft charter consultations
February 19, 2019 to April 8, 2019

Background

On behalf of the Tri-agency (the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)), and as announced in the [2018 federal budget](#), NSERC is leading the implementation of an initiative on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) inspired by the [Athena SWAN](#) program.

The early design and development of the made-in-Canada version, now known as Dimensions: Equity, diversity and inclusion Canada, was informed by in-person consultation sessions held in September and October 2018 at several post-secondary institutions, as well as through online sessions. The [summary report](#) from this first round of consultations is available online.

Report on draft charter consultations

Following the first round of consultations, a draft charter (see annex 1) was developed. A second round of consultations was initiated to gather feedback on the proposed draft charter principles. This summary report highlights the issues that were raised during these sessions.

For this round of consultations, invitations were sent to more than 1000 individuals from key stakeholder entities, including non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups working with underrepresented or disadvantaged people, academic associations, as well as university presidents, college and CÉGEP directors, vice-presidents of research, deans, and participants of the first round of consultations.

Workshops were held in 18 locations across Canada (see annex 2) in universities and colleges of different sizes. More than 450 individuals affiliated with different post-secondary institutions and other stakeholder entities participated in this exercise. Each session included a brief presentation of the program, followed by breakout sessions to discuss the draft charter and related overarching questions (see annex 3). Individuals had the opportunity to ask questions about Dimensions and to share what they wish the program would cover in terms of scope, as well as in the documentation and tools provided. The timeline to finalize the charter was short (see annex 4), but the team was able to properly consult and engage diverse groups.

This summary report is not a complete record of the vast amount and richness of comments that were provided, but rather a document highlighting key themes that emerged from this

second round of consultations. Input provided during the two rounds of consultations is being used to inform the development of the Dimensions program.

Key themes from workshops

1. Charter needs to be inclusive and accessible

A majority of participants were supportive of the draft charter, while also seeking improvements to the text, particularly to ensure that the language would be accessible, inclusive and easier to understand by people less familiar with EDI concepts or terminology. In particular, it was recommended that definitions be embedded in the charter itself or be included in a preamble.

While some participants believed the charter should be prescriptive, others preferred that it be flexible, allowing institutions to interpret the principles according to their own individual realities.

Many participants recommended that the text should cover the broad range of research disciplines beyond sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)[1], and it should explicitly refer to students. They also recommended that specific groups that are underrepresented or disadvantaged in the research enterprise should be listed. Moreover, many participants highlighted the importance of recognizing and embedding the concept of intersectionality whereby attention is paid to individuals' multiple identities, which in some cases results in multiple, complex and interlocking sources of discrimination.

2. Considerations related to Indigenous Peoples

Efforts were made to engage with Indigenous scholars and stakeholder groups, as well as Indigenous student support groups.

At the time of consultations, SSHRC was carrying out a parallel engagement process with Indigenous partners and communities to help identify new directions to support Indigenous research and training (details can be found [here](#)). Some information collected through this process helped inform the development of the charter.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants recommended that, given their unique historical circumstances, Indigenous Peoples should be recognized as distinct from other underrepresented groups and that a separate principle should speak to reconciliation efforts.

Indigenous participants indicated that the draft charter should better reflect Indigenous perspectives, for example, including an explicit recognition of the value of traditional

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[1] While encompassing all academic disciplines has been part of the design of Dimensions from its initial conception, it is possible that participants were not aware of this due to the fact that Athena SWAN (which focusses on the natural sciences and engineering) has been named as the inspiration for Dimensions. NSERC taking the lead on the implementation of Dimensions may have led to further confusion on the part of participants.

knowledge, referencing the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) report, and a consideration of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) as a frame of reference.

Closer collaboration with SSHRC to embed an Indigenous perspective in the program was also strongly encouraged.

3. Engage the whole community

Participants expressed the need to engage individuals and organizations whose interests and mandates may fall outside the narrow scope of the charter, but who nevertheless share a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. Such "allies" could help disseminate relevant EDI knowledge beyond the post-secondary sector, as well as adopt practices from other sectors.

Some participants further explained how individual or institutional allies representing majority groups (i.e., those that are not underrepresented or disadvantaged), could play an important role in promoting EDI efforts within institutions.

Since no self-identification questions were asked before the workshops, it was impossible to know which underrepresented or disadvantaged groups were present, therefore they may have not been well represented at the workshops. Participants who were in attendance emphasized the importance of directly involving such groups in matters that affect them. Overall, the role of institutions in broader societal matters related to social justice and human rights was viewed as closely related to their commitment to EDI.

Importantly, it was noted that provincial or territorial laws related to the application of EDI in post-secondary institutions needed to be recognized and prevail. As such, due to the separate jurisdictional responsibilities, it is understood that some issues may fall outside the scope of the Dimensions program.

In further developing the program, the inclusion of institutions from all provinces and territories was considered a valuable element to ensure that the complexity and richness of the Canadian post-secondary research landscape would be better understood.

4. Address the need for safe environments and a culture of belonging

Often, participants emphasized the importance of including the concepts of "safe environment" and "belonging" in the charter, which was viewed as a means for institutions to reflect on the need to create safe working and learning spaces for their entire community.

It was also deemed important to include language related to harassment and other types of violence, which tend to be disproportionately experienced by individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups within post-secondary institutions.

5. Importance of data (how to collect it and why)

In most workshops, participants noted it would be important for data requirements under the Dimensions program to be closely aligned with, or complementary to those of other programs, such as the [Canada Research Chairs](#) program and the [Federal Contractors Program.](#) This was viewed as an opportunity to lessen the overall data collection and reporting burden, which in turn could increase buy-in from post-secondary institutions towards the Dimensions program.

They also recommended that data collection on EDI metrics should be consistent across the Tri-agency and with Statistics Canada. However, some participants cautioned that, in some cases, current data requirements set by federal programs may not be adequate for Dimensions.

Participants welcomed the expectation that institutions would be required to collect qualitative data, which would complement and enrich the quantitative data. Such information would provide a greater understanding of the experiences of individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups and provide richer insights into required changes.

Participants were eager to obtain more information and clear directions on various data considerations, such as the appropriate methodology to collect baseline data, the use of common terminology and whether institutional data should be referenced or benchmarked at a regional or national level.

It was recognized that smaller institutions may need to collect, analyze and report on data differently in order to prevent the disclosure of sensitive information on underrepresented or disadvantaged groups given their size. The protection of privacy and confidentiality were viewed as paramount to ensure no individual could be identified through data collection and analysis.

Clear explanations regarding the purpose and importance of self-identification data collection, as well as the demonstration that self-identification data collection benefits underrepresented or disadvantaged groups, were viewed as essential considerations. There was widespread support for ongoing communication with the research community on these aspects of data collection.

6. Embed program requirements that support accountability and impact

The charter should inspire institutions to achieve greater equity, diversity and inclusion by focusing not only on the development of plans, but also on their implementation and the measure of their impact. Many discussions touched on how institutions would measure, analyze and validate their progress and the expectation that they would be honest, transparent and accountable in the implementation of their action plans and their adherence to the charter principles.

Many workshop participants believed that reporting on diversity data to other federal programs would prepare their institutions to carry out data collection and reporting for the purposes of the Dimensions program. Others, however, expressed concerns that data reporting under other federal programs had not resulted in meaningful changes with regards to diversity in post-secondary institutions. Therefore, some workshop participants suggested that external validation of the data reported by institutions could help ensure that related EDI efforts would yield real impact.

Site visits were seen as a potential mechanism for enabling tri-agency staff to assess whether an institution fostered inclusive research and learning environments, as well as to help confirm whether data reports and narrative accounts were consistent with what staff observed during a visit.

7. Leveraging funding to promote EDI actions at institutions

A common view expressed during the workshops was that Dimensions should be aligned with, or supported by other sources of operational funding. While most participants agreed that during the early years (or pilot phase) of the Dimensions program, research and training funding should not be tied to whether institutions' applications were successful in meeting the review criteria, some believed that in the long term, a more coercive approach may be required. Yet, many expressed concerns that strict mandates could have negative repercussions, for example on smaller institutions. Others believed that a combination of incentives and penalties would likely be the most effective way to achieve systemic change.

Many participants were supportive of the EDI Institutional Capacity Building Grant as a mechanism to help institutions design and implement initiatives to promote EDI, and also to help them participate in the pilot phase of the Dimensions program. Overall, it was made clear that many institutions are only starting to build their capacity to increase EDI.

8. Definition of research excellence

In most workshops, discussions about the need to broaden the definition of research excellence took place, as the current review criteria used by some tri-agency programs were perceived as failing to support diverse or inclusive research approaches. As this particular aspect of research falls within the purview of the funding agencies, many participants believed that the Dimensions program should be accompanied by changes to tri-agency funding opportunities.

Many workshop participants believed that assessing the social impact of funded research would also contribute to making tri-agency programs more inclusive. Participants called for more holistic peer review evaluations, focusing on community-based research, partnerships with non-government organizations and the mobilization or translation of research to affect policies and practices. Some also expressed the need to integrate diversity in the research itself (e.g., the composition of teams, including collaborators, in research design, the selection of research participants, etc.).

However, not all participants were supportive of such changes, particularly since social impact metrics may be difficult to apply across all natural sciences and engineering disciplines. Nevertheless, there was a broad consensus that the Tri-agency should work towards a common understanding of research excellence, particularly in light of expectations for greater diversity and inclusivity in the research enterprise, along with increasing opportunities to engage in multi- and inter-disciplinary research in many different fields.

The assumption that increasing diversity could result in lowering research excellence standards was widely recognized as a manifestation of systemic bias. However, many participants also warned that fast tracking EDI initiatives might help achieve diversity targets but not cultural change, and that such efforts could even result in a backlash against underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. Further, marginalizing or overburdening underrepresented groups unintentionally was viewed as a real risk and concern that should be explicitly addressed in the charter. Conversely, participants warned that a concern of overburdening such groups should not be used as a pretext for excluding them from such work.

9. Program needs to emphasize inclusion, in addition to increasing representation

Another key point was that the charter must specify that underrepresented or disadvantaged groups and individuals have to be meaningfully engaged when institutions participate in the Dimensions program. Merely focusing on representation (i.e., increasing the numbers) without proper engagement and inclusion was viewed as falling short of truly reflecting diversity and embarking on inclusion.

Many participants cautioned that quota systems can create resistance and hoped increased diversity could be achieved through flexible approaches. Individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups clearly expressed that they did not want to be selected or seen as having been selected based on identity, but rather based on merit. Furthermore, concerns with hiring based on quotas, rather than hiring on the basis of merit, could discourage individuals from self-identifying. In turn, this could have repercussions on the ability of institutions to collect accurate baseline data. As mentioned above, participants often reiterated the need for clear communication on the importance of accurate self-identification data, and expected funders to further educate the research community on the value of such data to inform future decisions, practices, or policies.

Moreover, even when the number of individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups increases, it was noted that discrimination or lack of inclusion can impact retention and career progression, and can lead to different working conditions. Participants indicated that those issues would need to be identified and addressed by institutions.

10. Best practices

There was a strong desire to recognize, celebrate and promote the successes that have already been achieved by post-secondary institutions.

Furthermore, participants acknowledged that collaboration between institutions and opportunities to share best practices would be critical to the long-term success of the Dimensions program. Many suggested that positioning EDI as a competitive advantage may enhance the support for the Dimensions charter, and the overall program.

Workshop participants believed the Tri-agency should play a role in building and sustaining a network of institutions and individuals committed to advancing EDI, irrespective of an institution's status in relation to the Dimensions program. Such a "community of practice" would provide opportunities for institutions to support each other during the pilot phase of the program while the Tri-agency could advise institutions on the requirements of the program. The overall benefit of this network would be to contribute to greater EDI in the research enterprise.

Next steps

The Tri-agency has finalized the Dimensions charter and posted it online on May 9, 2019. Many institutions have already endorsed the charter. The list of institutions that have endorsed the Dimensions charter is publicly available, and institutions that have not yet endorsed the charter are invited to do so by filling out this form.

The Tri-agency continues to engage with individuals and groups interested in the development of program materials, such as the handbook and workshop presentations. To receive more information, please email us at: DimensionsEDI@nserc-crsng.gc.ca.

Annexes

Annex 1 - Draft charter

Preamble

The made-in-Canada Athena SWAN pilot program is being launched to encourage and recognize commitments made by post-secondary institutions towards advancing equity, diversity and inclusion in the research community.

Post-secondary institutions are invited to sign on to the made-in-Canada Athena SWAN charter and to commit to adopting the following principles focused on promoting and supporting equity, diversity and inclusion.

In response to the Calls for Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a guiding principle of the charter is to engage in meaningful, respectful and continuous dialogue and collaboration with Indigenous peoples at all stages of the made-in-Canada Athena SWAN program.

Recognizing that understanding lived experiences is fundamental to cultural change, we encourage institutions to undertake meaningful engagement as an integral part of drafting and implementing actions to increase equity, diversity and inclusion in their institution.

Principles

Participating in the made-in-Canada Athena SWAN program is voluntary. By choosing to sign on to the charter, institutions are indicating their commitment to striving to adopt and embed these principles within their policies, practices, action plans and culture.

1. We recognize that academia and research cannot reach their full potential unless individuals from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences can participate and benefit equitably.

2. We commit to embracing equity, diversity and inclusion as integral to excellence across the entire research ecosystem and culture, and across all disciplines and fields of study.

3. We commit to advancing equity, diversity and inclusion in our institution and across the research ecosystem by recognizing and addressing the underrepresentation, specific circumstances, and inequalities experienced by underrepresented groups.

4. We commit to implementing specific, measurable initiatives using research and evidence-informed practices that address systemic and other roots of inequity in our society.

5. We recognize that the barriers, inequities and lived experiences of individuals are not the same and as such commit to identifying and dismantling barriers, addressing biases (including unconscious biases) and making and embedding effective and sustainable systemic changes to increase equity, diversity and inclusion at our institution, using an intersectional lens as a best practice.

6. We commit to removing the systemic and structural barriers and obstacles faced by underrepresented groups including obstacles and inequities faced in admissions, recruitment, career development, retention and progression.

7. In developing solutions, we commit to implementing meaningful actions that will achieve institutional and cultural changes. We acknowledge that institutional change requires measurable actions aimed at embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in institutional governance and accountability structures.

8. We commit to evaluate, monitor and publicly report on specific changes and progress towards equity, diversity, and inclusion made over time that demonstrate the implementation of these principles and guide our future actions.

9. Advancing equity, diversity and inclusion requires dedication, commitment, resources and action from all levels of an organization and in particular engagement from those in senior leadership roles. We commit to demonstrate active leadership and engagement in our institution's made-in-Canada Athena SWAN action plan and to take action to inspire and foster commitment of others across the institution.

Annex 2 - Location and dates for draft charter consultations

Date	City	Province	Location
February 18, 2019	St. Johns	Newfoundland	Memorial University of Newfoundland
February 20, 2019	Sydney	Nova Scotia	Cape Breton University
February 21, 2019	Halifax	Nova Scotia	Mount Saint Vincent University
February 25, 2019	Quebec City	Québec	Université Laval
February 26, 2019	Rimouski	Québec	Université du Québec à Rimouski (cancelled due to bad weather)
February 28, 2019	Trois-Rivières	Québec	Cégep de Trois-Rivières
March 4, 2019	Prince George	British Columbia	University of Northern British Columbia
March 5, 2019	Whitehorse	Yukon	Yukon College
March 7, 2019	Kamloops	British Columbia	Thompson Rivers University
March 11, 2019	Lethbridge	Alberta	Lethbridge College
March 13, 2019	Regina	Saskatchewan	University of Regina
March 14, 2019	Brandon	Manitoba	Brandon University
March 18, 2019	Moncton	New Brunswick	Université de Moncton
March 19, 2019	Charlottetown	Prince Edward Island	University of Prince Edward Island
March 19, 2019	Sudbury	Ontario	Laurentian University
March 21, 2019	Church Point	Nova Scotia	Université Sainte-Anne
March 26, 2019	Waterloo	Ontario	Wilfrid Laurier University
March 27, 2019	Toronto	Ontario	George Brown College
April 8, 2019	Ottawa	Ontario	Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada

Annex 3 – Overarching questions

1. The principles are the foundation of the Athena SWAN charter, and they must be ambitious but implementable.
   - Looking at the draft principles, are there any additional commitments that would help make the charter a more effective guide for post-secondary institutions as they work to implement and monitor changes to increase EDI in their institutions?
   - Are there any changes or nuances to the draft principles that would help make the charter a more effective guide for post-secondary institutions?

2. Data requirements and data collection are a significant part of the Athena SWAN process, but they bring several challenges, such as administrative workload, privacy concerns and the reluctance of some people or groups to self-identify.
   - How can these issues be mitigated when designing the made-in-Canada Athena SWAN data reporting requirements and the application form?
   - Are the draft charter principles sufficient in recognizing the role of data and evidence in the Athena SWAN process?

3. What inequalities and systemic barriers or other specific measures will need to be addressed or implemented to achieve greater equity, diversity and inclusion in post-secondary institutions?

4. What are some of the challenges and benefits of implementing a program like Athena SWAN for Canada at the institutional or departmental level? Aspects to consider include, but are not limited to (a) commitment from senior leaders, (b) data gathering, (c) analysis and understanding of issues, (d) resourcing of actions, and (e) discipline, department, institution size, location and population-specific factors.
   - What mechanisms, approaches, strategies or considerations could be implemented to address these different challenges? Please illustrate with examples from your institutions and take into account specific realities of different (and your) stakeholder groups.
   - Does the draft charter effectively convey the institutional commitments needed to address the challenges you have identified?

Annex 4 - Timeline for the development of the Dimensions charter

ACTIVITY	DATE /PERIOD
1. **Development of draft charter**	December 2018 to January 2019
2. **Draft charter consultations**	February 2019 to April 2019
3. **Revisions to draft charter to incorporate public and internal comments**	April 2019
4. **Ministerial launch of the charter**	May 09, 2019