

A toolkit for creating equitable + inclusive policies

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Acknowledgment

We want to extend our respect to the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, upon which Vancouver is situated on.

We acknowledge and honour the diverse Indigenous peoples' histories, traditions, stories and ongoing contributions to the land.

This guide was collaboratively created by Inclusivity, drawing insights from diverse tools and resources centered around equity lenses applied to policies. Specifically created for the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, the development of this document was guided by a commitment to fostering inclusivity and equitable policy practices within the institution.

Introduction to the guide

What is Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)?¹

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are three interwoven concepts that promote social justice, equality and fairness in our society while addressing and dismantling systemic barriers for equity-denied communities.

Equity

is ensuring individuals have fair access to opportunities and power. This means that instead of receiving the same resources as every other person, each circumstance is being recognized to remove barriers people might face in accessing opportunities.

Diversity

is recognizing and appreciating both individual and social differences, including the varying perspectives, backgrounds, cultures, ideas, identities, affiliations, experiences and abilities an individual can have.

Inclusion

is the intentional and actionable effort to create an environment that is free of systemic and oppressive barriers. This leads to a culture where individuals feel welcomed, valued and respected.

¹ <https://www.jibc.ca/teaching-learning/equity-diversity-inclusion-edi>

Why is it important for EDI considerations to inform policies and policy development processes?

Incorporating EDI principles into policy-making processes is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment within organizations, institutions, or public spheres. This integration not only addresses systemic barriers but also promotes increasing accountability and transparency for all.

Integrating and welcoming diverse perspectives makes policy development more thoughtful and well-informed, reflecting the perspectives and experiences of most groups within a community.

This approach ensures that each individual's experiences and contributions are valued, fostering a greater sense of community and encouraging active participation in the collective well-being of those affected by policies.

In spaces where diversity is inherent, embracing EDI principles within policies and policy-making processes creates an environment where students, staff and faculty feel appreciated and respected. This, in turn, enhances the overall learning and working environment, promoting a culture of inclusivity and mutual support.

Who should be considered when referring to equity-denied communities?

Indigenous peoples

Racialized communities

Women

People with **disabilities** + people requiring **accessibility support**

2SLGBTQI+ communities (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and additional people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities)

Religious communities that are not part of the dominant culture

People experiencing **economic instability/precarity**

Guiding principles for policy assessment and development

While there are a variety of considerations to keep in mind when creating policies, procedures and other documents within an institution, these are guiding principles that will help support equitable and inclusive policies and policy development processes.

These include positionality and self, foundations in data, inclusive language, policy benefit and impact, evaluation, review and consultations by community members and finally, supplying the resources.

Navigating the complex landscape of policy development requires a perceptive understanding of one's own positionality, inherent biases and values.

This section was created in collaboration with the questions from the Emily Carr Policies + Procedures Development Checklist. It serves as a reflecting lens through which policy developers and decision-makers can critically and equitably assess their role in the process.

Within this section, we aim to illustrate the interconnectedness of individual perspectives, cultural context and community nuances that contribute to the development of policies.

Each guiding principle emphasized in this section is approached with the ultimate goal of fostering inclusion, transparency and equity.

From understanding the importance of informed policymaking through diverse data sets to the nuanced considerations of inclusive language where clarity and respect are crucial to scrutinizing intended outcomes and potential disparities, this framework encourages you to view policy development as a dynamic process.

It includes actions and practical steps to ensure the implementation of the policy in question. To ensure that the implementation of a policy is truly based on equity, the creation of the policy must also be based on equity, which is demonstrated more clearly below.

Principle 1

Benefit + impact

This section focuses on the intended outcomes of the policy, examining potential disparities and systemic barriers that may arise.

Questions to consider

Why is this policy needed? Who will be impacted by this policy?

How will this policy disproportionately affect various groups negatively or positively?

What is the intended impact and outcome of the policy?

Who was this policy designed for, by, with and without and how does this affect the policy?

Were equity-denied groups included in your decision-making and development of this policy?

How does this policy work to remove institutionalized systemic barriers, or does it contribute to these barriers?

Have you considered if this policy would improve or worsen existing situations for equity-denied community members?

Are generalizations being made within this policy that could lead to certain groups being forgotten or overlooked during policy implementation?

How has this policy considered the impacts on members of historically and systematically equity-denied groups?

Actions and practical steps

Assess the policy's impact on various equity-denied groups.

Analyze whether the policy contributes to or alleviates systemic barriers.

Think about your priorities associated with the policy.

Create benchmarks and/or key indicators to assess the policy outcomes.

Example: A university policy prohibits lecture recordings in an effort to protect intellectual property and instill academic integrity. However, this policy may contribute to the disadvantage of students with disabilities or varied learning styles who may require recordings for effective learning. This could be analyzed to consider the diverse learning needs and accessibility requirements for equitable access to educational resources.

Principle 2

Positionality + self

Understanding your positionality is foundational for effective policy development. It involves acknowledging your assumptions, biases and privileges, which can significantly influence policy creation. Positionality refers to the interplay of an individual's social, personal and political identities in relation to those of others, shaping their unique experiences and perspectives.

This concept allows individuals to discern how their identity influences and is influenced by social and cultural factors, fostering an increased awareness of their own biases in relation to others.

Questions to consider

What is my positionality in this project?

What is my responsibility in this project?

What skills can I contribute to this work?

What privilege and power do I bring to this policy creation? Do my biases affect the creation and direction of this policy?

Who will develop the policy? Who is on the committee to develop the policy, if there is one? Who else we might need to include to the committee? Who might we have missed?

What assumptions of mine have influenced this policy or the way I am writing the policy?

What biases are informing the assumptions we have while creating this policy?

One of the most essential steps in ensuring that the implementation of a policy is equitable is to ensure that diverse community members and individuals are involved early in the creation and development of a policy. Not only does this account for various identities, but it also allows for a vast and diverse range of perspectives to be heard and considered.

By doing this, more of a community's needs and concerns are addressed, making sure the issues that need to be looked at are actually being thought about.

Actions and practical steps

Address the assumptions you are making. This can include assumptions about the community's needs, the effectiveness of certain measures, or the impact of the policy.

Reflect on your positionality. Think about your identity(ies), which groups you belong to, your beliefs and what you value as an individual

As part of the development planning stage, contact community members to request their participation in the consultation stage.

Principle 3

Consultations + review

This section outlines the plan for policy review, emphasizing the involvement of diverse community members and the allocation of necessary resources. Moreover, an institution should identify a list per policy of who should be consulted, addressed, or checked in with.

Questions to consider

Who are the key community members that should be involved in the creation of this policy?

What is your plan for policy review, including timeline, reviewers and consultations? How often is the policy review process? Is it being reviewed by the same individuals or by various individuals with diverse specialties?

Which community members should be included in the revision process? Consider students, staff, community leaders, etc.

Who is the approval body for the policy?

Who needs to review the policy?

Who should be consulted upon the creation of this policy before its implementation?

Did you consult those who will be directly affected by this policy?

How does this policy reduce barriers for equity-denied individuals and advance equity?

How will you assess the intended and unintended impacts of the policy?

It is important that policymakers are open to revisiting and editing existing policies based on ongoing feedback and evaluations. Equity-related values are always changing, EDI is continuously evolving and so are communities and societies. Thus, this dynamic nature should also be reflected in monitoring these policies.

The focus should be on ensuring a continuous improvement cycle to account for evolving equity considerations. As community engagement is one of the most important factors of equitable policy implementation, opportunities for feedback, particularly from employees, students, or the overall organization's community, are also significant. This concept provides an opportunity to use the feedback to address any unintended consequences that may be brought forward.

During the consultation stage, to ensure that a policy is adequately implemented with equity in mind, policy-makers and reviewers must engage with the communities that will most likely be affected by the policy in question regardless of identity. This will allow decision-makers to gather insights and feedback regarding the policy they are making to ensure a variety of perspectives and individual circumstances are considered.

An important aspect of policy implementation is collaboration and communication between larger community bodies. This focuses particularly on creating and maintaining a collaborative approach in policy-making that includes a community's input in decision-making processes.

Much of this leans toward opportunities for feedback and revision, which will be touched on further in this section.

Actions and practical steps

Identify key community members for consultation.

Although not exhaustive, here is a list of potential communities:

Students, faculty members, staff members, Indigenous individuals, racialized individuals, international students, 2SLGBTQI+ communities, gender-diverse individuals, individuals requiring accessibility support, those from varying socioeconomic backgrounds, those belonging to professional and academic communities, religious communities, alums and many more. This will also be specific to your overall community.

Use established feedback mechanisms for individuals and communities to report concerns or any issues related to the policy or its implementation.

Establish a clear timeline and process for policy review.

Principle 4

Foundations in data

Data collection plays an integral role in ensuring that policymaking considers and reflects the experiences of those potentially impacted and that policies are in alignment with community needs/experiences and the institution's broader EDI goals. It enables organizations and institutions to gather information about individuals, including, for example, students and their experiences within the community. However, it is important to acknowledge that data won't always be readily available.

In such cases, organizations should include as much data as possible to the extent it is available. Alternatively, consultation processes open opportunities for data collection and provide an essential service in capturing diverse perspectives and ensuring that policies accurately address the needs and experiences of all stakeholders.

Questions to consider

What research, data and other information did you consider while developing this policy?

Did we consider all/most identifying demographic groups within our organization or community?

What information and data are this policy based on and grounded in?

Are there similar or related policies that have been implemented by similar institutions? Does the policy consider existing data about the impacts of similar policies?

Is there any missing or unavailable data that would supplement this policy?

Actions and practical steps

Outline the information that informs this policy.

Think about how the data you have gathered informs this policy.

Establish a framework for data collection that prioritizes identifying the disparities among various demographic groups. This could include focus groups, consultations, interviews, open-ended surveys, or leveraging available data sources. It is important to note that if you recognize a need for further data collection for the policy review or creation process, establish a framework through consulting with community members to ensure comprehensive data gathering.

Principle 5

Inclusive language

It is important to emphasize the significance of using language that is not only clear and precise but also respectful and inclusive.

This section highlights the importance of inclusive and respectful language, providing guidance on words to use and alternatives to enhance communication.

Questions to consider

Is the language in this policy inclusive of diverse identities?

Is the language used in this policy consistent and accessible when compared to other policies within our organization?

Do you use jargon and terminology that might not be accessible by people who are not subject matter experts?

Are you incorporating considerations for accessible language in this policy? Accessible language includes communication and language that is available to and inclusive of all individuals.

Have you addressed or considered potential cultural biases in this policy's language?

How can the language in this policy increase transparency?

As stated previously, it is crucial to communicate the policy's goals, objectives and information transparently.

This demonstrates good intentions and holds the organization, the policymakers and the implementing officials accountable for acting as equitably as possible in creating and implementing the policy.

Actions and practical steps

Be up to date with inclusive language. If you are unsure, ask for feedback from community members on how best to address them.

Be specific, be respectful and be inclusive.

Consider the inclusion of local context and the exclusion of regional slang and complex terminology.

Here are some starting points:

Indigenous Peoples instead of Aboriginal or Native

Accessible washroom instead of handicapped washroom

GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE:

Partner instead of wife or husband

People with disabilities/disabled people instead of handicapped or differently abled

A person with a substance use disorder instead of a drug addict or substance abuser

PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE EXAMPLES:

A person who uses a wheelchair instead of a wheelchair-bound person

Note that some people prefer people-first language and some people prefer identity-first language, such as “disabled people” while defining themselves. Especially while working with equity-denied community representatives who uses identity-first language to define their experiences, follow their lead.

Principle 6

Supplying the resources

When creating a policy, consider what or who this policy is for. Prioritizing certain considerations or groups identifying as equity-denied may require additional support to achieve equitable outcomes.

Equity will be achieved if resources are distributed in a way that addresses existing disparities. This encompasses the concept of equity, as each individual or community receives what they need and deserve.

Questions to consider

Are you providing students and staff with the appropriate resources to understand the purpose of these policies?

Are you offering resources in multiple formats (written, visual, interactive)?

Are there community leaders or organizations that can support the dissemination of information to ensure it reaches all community members?

What measures are in place to update and adapt these resources over time?

What resources are needed to implement the policy?

Actions and practical steps

A needs assessment may be helpful to examine the diverse requirements and priorities of different groups, such as accessibility impact, ensuring fair distribution and addressing potential disparities.

Ensure the accessibility of resources.

Communicate the purpose of policies through various channels.

Provide education tools such as infographics, FAQs, video presentations, etc.

Conducting a consultation

Tips + tricks

Conducting a consultation – tips + tricks

At what point should you start the consultation process?

Start as early as you can, ideally within the first few months of developing the policy. Engaging the appropriate community members at the beginning of the process ensures a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of various diverse perspectives.

At what point should you start the consultation process?

Identify the key community members who will most likely be impacted by your created policy. Consider faculty, staff, students, community members, club leaders, student body representatives, or anyone else who may be impacted.

When considering who to include in the consultation process, ensure a diverse representation of perspectives. Hear from individuals with different lived experiences, backgrounds, perspectives and opinions to create the most well-rounded, equitable and inclusive policy.

Conducting a consultation – tips + tricks cont'd

What kinds of questions should you ask?

When thinking about questions, consider your audience's various identities and create questions specific to your audience of consultants. However, ensure that you are using inclusive, accessible, and appropriate questions to create a more welcoming environment.

Emphasize using open-ended questions, which can enable you to learn about the consultants' thought processes and enable the consultants to be as detailed and specific as they wish. This attributes meaning and context to questions that quantitative data may not always be able to capture.

Example questions

How would you like to be addressed?

Can you share your background and experiences that are relevant to our discussion? (only if you are comfortable)

Are there any specific terms or language preferences you have?

How can I ensure that our conversation uses inclusive and respectful language?

How can I ensure that you feel comfortable providing feedback during our consultation?

Are there specific ways you prefer to give input or share your thoughts?

How can I ensure that our discussion is sensitive to diverse viewpoints?

How can we ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are considered in decision-making?

Are there specific steps we should take to make the process more inclusive?

How can we ensure ongoing inclusivity in our communication and collaboration?

Conducting a consultation – tips + tricks cont'd

What should a consultation look and feel like?

When contacting others for a consultation, you invite others to be honest and transparent about potentially difficult and vulnerable topics. Ensuring that the participants of the consultation feel as though they are in a safe space is paramount for them to discuss sensitive issues that inform larger policies. Offer participants the option to have an anonymous consultation process if needed.

As we are hoping participants are transparent and honest with us, we want to be honest and transparent with the participants to foster a safe environment. Emphasize your desire for constructive criticism that will help shape and inform the policy you are developing for future generations. Honest feedback should be welcomed, not dismissed.

With the recent changes we have been experiencing throughout the years, meeting and communicating with others has become increasingly flexible.

Offer the participants various channels for providing consultations and feedback, whether through surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, or online platforms. This not only increases accessibility but also encourages a more well-rounded process of data collection.

What should we do after the consultation process?

While you are developing your policy, encourage regular check-ins with the consultation participants to ensure that the policy aligns with their evolving needs and experiences.

Ensure you maintain transparency with the participants by informing them about the policy's development. This allows you to create long-lasting relationships with participants and community members for future policies if needed.

Conducting a consultation – tips + tricks cont'd

Why are consultations important for developing policies?

Consultations offer a wide range of diverse perspectives, mitigating the risk of bias and increasing the likelihood of accurate representation.

With a variety of community members involved in the policy development process, the policy is more likely to be adopted and accepted within the community as it is representative of their many voices.

Consultations encourage the identification of potential policy consequences that had not been anticipated and promote the creation of more ethical and equitable policies.

Examples of an equity lens within policies

Without an Equity Lens

Using binary assumptive language:

"his/her," "Ladies and Gentlemen"

Policy objective:

"To maintain a safe and respectful campus environment."

As part of the Code of Conduct:

"All members should communicate respectfully with each other."

Faculty Recruitment:

"The university's faculty recruitment policy prioritizes merit-based selection, emphasizing individual qualifications and professional development opportunities for all faculty members."

Policy Enforcement:

"The university's policy enforcement is designed to address violations through objective and consistent procedures. Sanctions will be applied based on established guidelines, focusing on maintaining a safe and secure environment."

Student Accessibility + Accommodations:

"Students with documented disabilities may request accommodations for their courses. Testing accommodations, such as extended time, will be provided to eligible students."

With an Equity Lens

Using gender-inclusive language:

"Their," "Everyone"

Policy objective:

"To foster an inclusive, diverse, safer and respectful campus community."

As part of the Code of Conduct:

"We communicate respectfully, acknowledge and value diverse perspectives. We are aware of power dynamics and privilege and actively work to ensure that all voices are heard."

Faculty Recruitment:

"Our faculty recruitment policy underscores our commitment to diversity through inclusive practices, proactive outreach and support for equity-denied groups, fostering an academic environment reflective of societal diversity."

Policy Enforcement:

"Our commitment to equity is central to our policy enforcement approach. Violations will be addressed with an emphasis on fair and unbiased procedures, considering the diverse backgrounds and experiences of individuals involved. Restorative practices and education will be prioritized to promote understanding and inclusivity."

Student Accessibility + Accommodations:

"Our commitment to accessibility includes a proactive approach to accommodating students with diverse needs. Students are encouraged to engage with accessibility services and accommodations will be tailored to individual requirements. Testing accommodations, personalized to each student's needs, will be provided. We strive to create an inclusive testing environment that allows every student an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities."

References + additional resources Appendix A

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