EDI in Research, Teaching, and Knowledge Mobilization at the Interface of Science, Society, and Policy
Workshop 1: What We Heard

Date and Time: March 29, 2022/ 1:00-2:30pm

Workshop Question: What does EDI mean in the context of your research, education, and KMb activities at the interface of science, society and policy?

Discussion Prompts:
1. What do you understand by EDI? How do you conceptualize it in your work?
2. How do EDI considerations factor into your everyday work? Can you name concrete examples?
3. In your experience, do existing organizational implementations of EDI align with your approaches? Why or why not?

Opening remarks: Dr. Josephine Etowa, Full Professor at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Nursing

Facilitators: Marisa Beck, Research Director, ISSP; Jordan Barrett-Choy, Graduate Research Assistant, ISSP; Sandy Chung, Communications and Administrative Assistant, ISSP; Geneviève Dunn, Communications Specialist, ISSP; Sarah Laframboise, Ottawa Science Policy Network

Participants: 18 participants, including 9 scholars, 5 trainees (including undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral fellows), 4 practitioners

Workshop Format: The event was conducted virtually via Zoom, and participants were encouraged to collaborate using the Mural app to document ideas and share notes.

What We Heard:

This document summarizes the range of comments and observations from the workshop presentation, panel discussions, breakout sessions, as well as input received through a bilingual survey that was shared with workshop invitees. We received a total of 6 survey responses, 4 in English and 2 in French.

Since the workshop proceeded under Chatham House rules, this report does not disclose the identity and affiliation of the workshop participants who shared the information included here. Importantly, we do not necessarily endorse the views expressed by participants that are documented in this report, but we present them here to document the full range of opinions expressed at the event.

We also do not mean to imply that the beliefs and opinions included in this document represent a consensus view among all workshop participants. To represent a diversity of views in this document we use the phrase 'one participant said,' when the belief or opinion was primarily expressed by one person; and we use the phrase 'some/many participants said,' when the same point was made by multiple people.

1. **What do you understand by EDI? How do you conceptualize it in your work?**

EDI is a complex, poorly defined concept that may mean different things to different people:
- One participant shared their definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion:
    - **Equity** is the removal of systemic barriers and biases enabling all individuals to have equal opportunity to access and benefit from the program.
    - **Diversity** is the differences in race, color, place of origin, religion, immigrant and newcomer status, ethnic origin, ability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and age.
    - **Inclusion** is the practice of ensuring that all individuals are valued and respected for their contributions and are equally supported.
- One participant indicated that ideas about equity may vary across underrepresented groups, and defining what equity means to each group is extremely important for taking effective actions on EDI.
- Participants pointed out that diversity on its own does not necessarily lead to inclusion. In particular, when actions to increase diversity are focused more on creating an image of diversity and representation, rather than asking whether diverse people actually feel included. Additionally, belonging and inclusion are important elements of feeling safe, which makes EDI a workplace safety issue.
- Participants agreed that EDI is a complex concept that one needs to consider at multiple levels. In discussions, participants identified three broad perspectives on EDI in research, teaching, and KMb at the interface of science, society and policy: (1) EDI is about being a team leader and making the workspace more inclusive; (2) EDI is a research object, examining how scholarly communication and research evaluation can be more inclusive; (3) EDI is about undertaking research in a way that 'lives' equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- One participant pointed out that advancing EDI always involves recognition of ones' own privilege. It requires listening to and learning from others.

Canadian SSP organizations have made progress on EDI – but a lot of work remains:
- Participants agreed that organizations need to assess EDI implications in all aspects of their work. Advancing EDI is an all-encompassing challenge that requires on-going actions and conversations.
- Several participants noted that implementing EDI principles in the SSP community requires a true change in culture, which is running across all activities in research, teaching, and KMb.
- One participant identified 3 levels of EDI activities in organizations:
    - *Individual level.* Inclusion is a human right.
    - *Organizational level.* Organizations establish diversity in staff and teams to create an inclusive work environment.
    - *Societal level.* Organizations consider EDI in their external engagement, trying to be a role model for others.
- Multiple participants noted that EDI is now at the center of the mainstream discourse in the SSP community. But it was not like that even 5 years ago; things have slowly changed. For instance, there is now recognition that diversity (e.g., on panels) has merit in and of itself and that including a variety

of perspectives contributes to the quality of the discussion. Also, so-called 'manels' are not socially acceptable anymore; they attract both public and social media backlash.

● Despite some progress made on EDI issues in the SSP community over the past 5 years, several participants emphasized that unconscious bias still exists. Unconscious bias is very difficult to combat. One participant pointed out that there is still uncertainty about how to respond to situations when we encounter / observe unconscious bias. Canadian SSP organizations and government agencies still have work to do on EDI.

<u>Taking EDI seriously transforms all steps in the research process, from the underlying research paradigm to data collection to the dissemination of findings.</u>

● Multiple participants indicated that EDI is now often considered a core commitment of academic work.

● Some participants highlighted ways in which researchers may consider EDI principles at all stages of the research process. For instance, EDI means incorporating a variety of perspectives in the research process, considering diverse research questions, enabling participation in the research in academic or non-academic settings, and creating equal access to research outcomes.

● Taking EDI seriously in research at the SSP interface implies a shift in research paradigm:
    ○ Some participants indicated that EDI considerations remind researchers to be humble in their knowledge and thereby prevent over-confidence in their own expertise. One participant explained that researchers function merely as learning guides – as opposed to holders of truth.
    ○ An EDI-centered research paradigm understands 'inclusion' as pluralism: there is no ONE truth. For instance, as one participant pointed out, it is not about the 'inclusion' of Indigenous knowledge but the recognition that Indigenous knowledge is 'its own thing', a parallel knowledge system equal to Western science.
    ○ Change also requires identifying structural and epistemic racism when the knowledge of BIPOC people is systematically de-valued.

● EDI-centered research design:
    ○ Multiple participants emphasized that EDI considerations need to shape the conception and design of a research project right from the start.

● EDI-centered research conduct:
    ○ Multiple participants noted that interviews and/or focus groups need to include as many perspectives as possible.
    ○ EDI-centered research conduct requires researchers to be sensitive to differences in research participants – whether on the basis of their race, class, gender, or ability.

● Participants acknowledged that it can be challenging to implement these EDI-centered research approaches and practices within the existing structure of universities and funding agencies. To address such institutional constraints, participants highlighted the need for expanding common definitions of research excellence to better account for EDI For instance, by equally valuing new research angles, inter-disciplinary research, and different types of knowledge.

● Community based participatory research (CBPR) is one example of a research paradigm that incorporates EDI principles: the ultimate purpose of CBPR is to mobilize social action and change.

Community partners and community members are involved in the research process and beyond to ensure that they are involved in decision-making at every step and that outcomes benefit the community.

Opportunities to learn about EDI have grown exponentially, but implementing EDI in the classroom is still challenging:
- Participants noted that teachers should have an obligation towards students to educate themselves about EDI-centered practices within the educational environment.
- Participants mentioned that various new types of training are now available, including discussion and reading groups about racism, workshops on decolonization in the classroom, and SSHRC EDI training.
- One participant highlighted that EDI-centered teaching includes realizing that different students have unique needs. A major challenge is implementing equity into the classroom as rubrics require teachers to assess all students equally rather than equitably.

2. **How do EDI considerations factor into your everyday work? Can you name concrete examples?**

EDI considerations in research at the SSP interface:
- One participant explained that EDI considerations factor into hiring decisions, equal treatment of students / employees, creating an inclusive work environment that enables everyone to contribute to decision-making, and supporting under-privileged groups to enable them to succeed and participate fully.
- One participant said that EDI considerations increase their sensitivity to differences among research participants and students, e.g., in terms of gender, class, race, ability, etc.
- One participant indicated that the number and variety of new trainings on EDI has notably impacted their everyday work.
- One participant said that EDI considerations remind them to always be aware of their own privilege and focus on listening to the experiences of others.
- Multiple participants noted that EDI considerations have made exclusionary academic publishing practices more visible. Participants discussed the need to increase inclusiveness by diversifying outlets for scientific knowledge and adjusting common ideas and expectations about 'research experience' to include experience with other sources of knowledge. Diversifying outlets for scientific knowledge may mean for scientific outlets to accept more creative research pieces and to feature research studies that give voice to authors from the global South.
- Multiple participants pointed out that EDI is now an important consideration in applications for research funding. Many funding applications now require an EDI statement. But some participants said these statements often feel like lip service: How do these statements of support become actual policies? When there are time or research restrictions, commitments to EDI are often the first things to be cut.
- Multiple participants said that they are frequently facing bias and discrimination in their work.

EDI considerations in teaching at the SSP interface:

- Multiple participants mentioned that training in EDI, decolonization, and anti-racism are becoming more common for both educators and trainees. Multiple participants agreed that training in EDI is incredibly important, but it requires a willingness and openness to learning. Also, one participant pointed out that streamlined academic programs often do not cover EDI issues.
- Participants highlighted the need for disciplinary diversity in educational programs. The lack of such diversity has led to missed opportunities for better preparing the next generation of researchers and decision-makers.
- In academic education, accommodations are frequently offered for individuals with disability and cognitive diversity. One participant noted that cognitively diverse students bring a new, valuable perspective to research.

3. **In your experience, do existing organizational implementations of EDI align with your approaches? Why or why not?**

- Multiple participants stated that their organizations (including uOttawa) have adopted approaches to EDI that do not align with their own approaches to EDI.
- Specifically, some participants indicated that the organizations' common focus on race and gender in EDI definitions is too narrow. For instance, disabled people are excluded from these definitions. Additionally, one participant pointed out that the framing of disability as a medical rather than a social issue often constitutes a blind spot in the EDI discourse. One participant argued that the growing use of AIs and algorithms will further reinforce such existing biases in decision-making and lead to outputs that reflect the underlying, biased assumptions.
- For example, uOttawa identifies four distinct target groups for EDI actions: women, Indigenous people, BIPOC people, and people with disabilities. Some participants wondered how these groups were chosen and why social class and language are not considered. For example, people enter academics with different levels of symbolic, social, and economic capital, as well as different degrees of access to resources. One participant mentioned that cognitive diversity should be explicitly recognized too.
- Another participant shared that they are working with an Indigenous person, and that some of the EDI-focused measures (e.g., land acknowledgement) are not beneficial for them. Rather, there are nuances to what is helpful and acceptable, and neglecting these nuances may lead to useless, even harmful initiatives. Therefore, one must always ask: who do EDI actions actually serve? What are their goals and purposes?
- Participants also emphasized how important it is for organizations to turn 'lip service' to EDI principles to tangible actions. For example, one participant indicated that some institutional structures in uOttawa's graduate program prevent students from moving more freely between faculties, which would allow research teams to be more representative of the communities they work with. Another participant mentioned that the expectations on researchers/educators are growing with regards to EDI, but there is not enough support and training available to enable researchers to meet the expectations placed on them.

- One participant noted that many decision-makers are blind to biases, barriers, and systemic discrimination. There is often a lack of awareness as the system was designed by privileged groups (typically: white males), who may not be able fix the system, because they do not see its failures.

Key takeaways:
- EDI is a complex, poorly defined concept that may mean different things to different people.
- Consequently, addressing EDI is an ever-evolving process that affects all steps and aspects of the research, teaching, and KMb process. It requires on-going conversation and reflection about what to do and how to do it. Biases and exclusion can occur in unexpected places.
- Canadian SSP organizations have made progress on EDI – but a lot of work remains.
- By taking EDI seriously, it transforms all steps in the research process, from the underlying research paradigm to data collection to the dissemination of findings. Addressing EDI in research requires intellectual humility and both learning and un-learning. For example, it will require expanding the definition and assessment of excellence in research and academia to be more inclusive and supportive of EDI-centered approaches and products.
- Opportunities to learn about EDI have grown exponentially but implementing EDI in the classroom is still challenging.
- Organizations at the SSP interface need to turn 'lip service' to EDI principles to tangible actions by identifying biases, barriers and systemic discrimination and reforming institutional structures and norms to encourage EDI-centered research, teaching, and knowledge mobilization activities.