

# Health Intelligence



## Embedding Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility in Research-Intensive Organizations

For research-intensive organizations, COVID-19 and our collective awakening to the insidious realities of racism have exposed the limitations of accepted approaches to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility. Prevailing models are fragile and, when challenged, the good intentions on which they're built can succumb to the discriminatory habits they conceal. More than ever, research organizations need to be bold if they are to create environments that uplift human potential, support innovation and optimize organizational performance.

Research-intensive organizations—and the world—have experienced two resounding shocks in 2020 that are forcing us to re-examine and strengthen approaches to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA).

COVID-19 has reinforced how sexist and unequal our health research and innovation systems remain and how effortlessly we revert to patriarchal and oppressive patterns. While many research-intensive organizations have made admirable progress in

IDEA in recent years, COVID-19 has destabilized professional and personal equilibriums, exposing many marginalized groups—and women in particular—to systemic and structural disadvantages that are beginning to undo progress. Indeed, preliminary data show a decrease in the number of preprint submissions by female academics during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1,2</sup>, reinforcing the need to continue to develop and implement resilient strategies, policies and infrastructure that embed IDEA.

Compared to December 2019, preprints submitted to medRxiv in April 2020<sup>2</sup> had:

**15.7%** Fewer women as first authors

**6.8%** Fewer women as last authors

Further, our awakening to the toxicity of anti-Black racism and discrimination against Indigenous and other racialized/minoritized populations has shown us that IDEA cannot simply be about expanding the sense of welcome and inclusion. It requires those in positions of privilege and power to acknowledge and rebel against the malignant forces that are deeply entrenched in our institutions and antithetical to both the aspirations of IDEA and the pursuit of research excellence. And it requires universities—hubs of scholarship and innovation—to advance research needed to improve diversity and inclusion across every sector.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in Canada—a country with an enormously diverse talent pool—women and minoritized groups continue to be undervalued and underrepresented at all levels of research.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, equity-seeking groups produce higher rates of scientific novelty than the majority,<sup>5</sup> but their contributions are discounted and less likely to earn academic recognition.

A study<sup>4</sup> of 1.2 million PhD recipients from 1977 to 2015, shows that “...**demographically underrepresented students innovate at higher rates** than majority students, but their novel contributions are discounted and less likely to earn them academic positions.”

Acknowledging the critical importance of improving diversity within the research ecosystem and holding institutions accountable for creating positive change, the Canadian government has recently implemented a number of signature initiatives.<sup>6</sup> For example, the revised Canada Research Chairs program

requires institutions to adopt greater transparency in their processes for allocation and renewal of chair positions; and in the recently launched *Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada* program, a charter and grants were designed to help academia achieve greater research excellence, innovation and creativity by making the research community as diverse as possible.<sup>7,8</sup>

Institutions awarded **ADVANCE** Institutional Transformation grants **increased women STEM faculty members from 16% to 24%, and increased new women hires in STEM roles from 25% to 35%.<sup>9</sup>**

Similar initiatives have been implemented outside Canada—such as the landmark Athena Swan Charter in the UK and ADVANCE in the USA. Although evaluating the overall impact of these initiatives can be difficult due to the complexity of the issues they tackle, Athena Swan and ADVANCE do appear to be contributing to an increase in female STEM faculty members and improving the visibility, leadership skills, career development, and satisfaction of women in STEM.<sup>9</sup>

Prioritizing IDEA within organizational strategy not only enhances the quality of research but, as detailed by the Global Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, also improves organizational performance by attracting and retaining talent, building stronger teams, enhancing organizational profile and increasing engagement and productivity.<sup>10</sup>

*If research-based organizations in Canada want to remain globally competitive, IDEA must become a foundational priority.*

## Embedding IDEA within research-based organizations

While most research-based organizations have accepted IDEA as an imperative, many are taking a standardized approach that falls short of identifying, acknowledging and tackling context-specific manifestations of racism, ableism, misogyny and discrimination. IDEA cannot be treated as a generic solution to issues that are highly specific to an organization's history, aspirations and communities.

Incorporating IDEA practices and principles within a research-intensive institution is challenging. Resistance can arise among individuals who are unaware or skeptical of the evidence linking IDEA to research novelty, productivity and talent development; defensiveness and denial can surface when highly educated, cosmopolitan individuals are asked to acknowledge their privilege or recalibrate their notions of objectivity, social consciousness and equitable meritocracy. Robust and thoughtful engagement of all stakeholders—reinforced by a clear rationale for prioritizing IDEA—is critically important. Moreover, courage to be bold, comprehensive and reflect on an institution's unique context is essential to advancing a compelling and relevant strategy that sustainably integrates into the fabric of an organization.

Finally, ensuring that strategies are accepted, adopted and optimized requires leaders to set—and model—clear behavioural standards; hold all leaders accountable for embracing, contributing to and sustaining a cultural shift; and measure impact as a means to identifying successes and

directing course-corrections.

*When developing an IDEA strategy, organizations must have the courage to engage skeptics, confront in-house issues and transform behaviour.*

## Developing a successful IDEA strategy

An authentic IDEA strategy—implemented through governing principles and practices—signals institutional commitment, directs human and financial resources to IDEA priorities and initiatives, and enables measurable benefits in terms of research novelty, productivity and talent development and retention.



### Department of Chemistry<sup>11</sup>

Chemistry at York was the first academic department in the UK to receive the Athena SWAN Gold award. They have held the Gold award since 2007. Their IDEA strategy and initiatives have:

- Increased recruitment of students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Contributed to 100% retention of female faculty following maternity leave—at a time when over 50% of mothers change jobs.<sup>12</sup>

The strategic planning process therefore includes:

- Conducting a rigorous and honest institutional assessment that surveys the research community (from trainees to leadership) to identify issues/gaps related to IDEA;
- Understanding an institution's unique context, research foci, challenges and goals;
- Monitoring and assessing quantitative and qualitative metrics and regularly reviewing and refining priorities and approaches based on the institution's evolving context.

*Implementation of a specific IDEA strategy that speaks to an organization's unique history, aspirations and communities can increase access to top talent, drive research productivity and unleash scientific novelty.*

## How can we help you?

Shift Health Associate, Dr. Imogen Coe, is leading our efforts to strengthen IDEA in research-intensive organizations. An internationally recognized thought leader in the area of IDEA in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), Dr. Coe has advised academia, government and industry on best practices and approaches to improve IDEA, has contributed to national dialogue about these issues through various

platforms and has recently collaborated with Dr. Ryan Wiley, President of Shift Health, on a Lancet publication that reviews effective strategies to shift organisational culture and climate towards gender equality.<sup>13</sup>

Supported by our team of experienced consultants, all of whom have advanced research degrees (e.g. PhDs, MScs) coupled with expertise in strategic planning for research-based organizations in Canada and beyond, Dr. Coe and Shift Health will help you to:

- Engage stakeholders within your organization to understand your current IDEA context.
- Integrate best practices in IDEA for research to support the development of IDEA plans customized to your institutional context.
- Establish mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and refine strategies as the institutional context evolves.



DR. IMOGEN COE

<sup>1</sup> <https://theconversation.com/women-are-getting-less-research-done-than-men-during-this-coronavirus-pandemic-138073>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.natureindex.com/news-blog/decline-women-scientist-research-publishing-production-coronavirus-pandemic>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/inclusive\\_innovation\\_at\\_the\\_person\\_diversity\\_institute#](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/inclusive_innovation_at_the_person_diversity_institute#)

<sup>4</sup> Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Canadian Universities. Report on the 2019 National Survey. <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Equity-diversity-and-inclusion-at-Canadian-universities-report-on-the-2019-national-survey-Nov-2019-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Hofstra et al., (2020). Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. The Diversity-Innovation Paradox in Science.

<sup>6</sup> Diversity Dividend: Canada's Global Advantage. <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/diversity-dividend-canadas-global-advantage>

<sup>7</sup> Canada Research Chairs: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Requirements and Practices. <https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/index-eng.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: Dimensions. [https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/Dimensions\\_Dimensions\\_eng.aspx](https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/Dimensions_Dimensions_eng.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> Rosser et al., (2019). Lancet. Athena SWAN and ADVANCE: effectiveness and lessons learned.

<sup>10</sup> <http://centreforglobalinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GDIB-V.090517.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.york.ac.uk/chemistry/ed/gender-equality/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.citywomen.co.uk/over-half-of-mothers-change-jobs-after-maternity-leave/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)33188-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)33188-X/fulltext)