




Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada

Management Response and Action Plan (MRAP) for the Evaluation of the Dimensions: equity, diversity and inclusion Canada program 2018–2023 and the Equity, diversity and inclusion Institutional Capacity-building grants

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Context

In the 2018 federal budget, the government announced the creation of two Tri-agency¹, five-year pilot programs which represented an important investment to increase research excellence, innovation and creativity through greater equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the postsecondary sector. The first pilot program, Dimensions: equity, diversity and inclusion Canada, (hereafter referred to as Dimensions), consisted of implementing a Canadian version of Athena SWAN, a United Kingdom program managed by Advance HE. The objective of Dimensions was to encourage and recognize commitments made by postsecondary institutions towards advancing

EDI in the research community. The name Dimensions was adopted to reflect how Canada's approach was broader and addressed barriers and discrimination faced by multiple equity-deserving groups, in all disciplines and at all types of postsecondary institutions—CEGEPs, colleges, polytechnics and universities. Equity-deserving groups included women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of visible minorities/racialized groups, and members of LGBTQ2+ communities; however, institutions were encouraged to include other groups relevant to their community.

Dimensions also recognized that a multiplicity of perspectives, lived experiences and the overall complexity of diverse individuals foster increased research excellence, innovation and creativity within the postsecondary sector. It took a multidimensional approach to EDI to achieve a future research community where all can thrive. The pilot provided support and a community of practice for all postsecondary institutions to help drive cultural change within the Canadian postsecondary research ecosystem. Dimensions had two components: a charter, which 146 institutions endorsed, and a recognition component, which was co-developed with a cohort of 17 postsecondary institutions to make it uniquely adapted to Canadian realities.

The second pilot was the Equity, diversity and inclusion Institutional Capacity-Building grants (hereafter referred to as EDICap). EDICap was inspired by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE: Organizational Change for Gender Equity in STEM Academic Professions program, which focuses on broadening the implementation of evidence-based systemic change strategies that promote equity for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) faculty in academic workplaces and the academic profession. EDICap held two funding competitions, one in 2019 and the second in 2021. Applicant institutions could request and receive up to \$200,000 per year, for a maximum of two years. This funding was non-renewable. Successful institutions were expected to use the funds to support projects that identify and eliminate systemic barriers that impede the career advancement, recruitment, and retention of equity-deserving groups.

Both Dimensions and EDICap were administered by NSERC on behalf of the Tri-agency.

Evaluations for the two pilots were conducted jointly to assess their relevance and effectiveness.

Comments from Management

The federal research funding agencies have undertaken many initiatives to foster a more equitable, diverse and inclusive research ecosystem in Canada over the years. The Tri-agency Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan guides the agencies' initiatives and decisions to contribute to a system-wide transformation and outlines measures to increase equitable and inclusive access to granting agency funding opportunities. It also details how the granting agencies can influence the achievement of an inclusive postsecondary research system and

culture in Canada. Despite these efforts, much more needs to be done; we must address systemic barriers that limit the full participation of all talented individuals. Moreover, we must create a culture where embedding EDI considerations into all aspects of research becomes second nature.

Both the Dimensions and EDICap pilot programs were discontinued due the termination of the pilot period and of the allocated funding prior to completion of the evaluation reports. The evaluation reports provide perspectives from the institutions that were involved in the pilots, including descriptions of how they implemented these initiatives and the perceived impacts on the culture within these institutions. The observations are consistent with the feedback received directly from institutions participating in the Dimensions pilot and recipients of the EDICap.

Dimensions and related documentation were designed collaboratively, using a co-development process. The three agencies acknowledge the important contributions made by collaborating institutions and individuals. The cohort of 17 Canadian postsecondary institutions provided extensive comments, feedback and suggestions, and they shared promising practices, expertise and valuable assistance. Dimensions was also developed with the support of the Program Design Expert Committee, consisting of EDI experts who provided detailed advice and input into the content of the handbook and program design. Acknowledgements and thanks are also extended to the Advisory Committee on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy ([ACEDIP](#)) for its oversight and guidance.

In addition to the cohort, 23 affiliate postsecondary institutions also provided insightful comments in the creation of the program. [Advance HE](#) and other international partners that have implemented similar programs, have also provided invaluable collaborations. Finally, thanks are given to the participants of the various rounds of consultations ([fall 2018](#) and [winter 2019](#)) held across the country at the outset of the program, which informed the development of the program and Dimensions charter.

We present this action plan to provide information on the management response to the recommendations contained in the evaluation report.

Management Action Plan

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
Share the learnings from Dimensions and position the program to be the driver and connector of EDI initiatives across the Tri-agency.	Agree	Continuously engage with Tri-agency staff to ensure the learnings from Dimensions are integrated into program and policy development. Continuously engage and support postsecondary institutions to ensure the learnings from Dimensions are shared and put to good use by the postsecondary sector.	Associate vice-president, Research grants and scholarships	Ongoing

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
Create a repository of resources developed by postsecondary institutions to support the advancement of EDI within the Canadian research ecosystem. (applies to both programs)	Agree	Work with internal and external stakeholders to explore the possibility of creating a repository of resources developed by the institutions.	Director, Discovery, Research grants and scholarship	Spring 2025
Examine opportunities to revise, streamline and expand certain features of the Dimensions program to facilitate participation including moving up through the stages of recognition.	Agree	Any future program development will explore initiatives with the research community to leverage the lessons learned and momentum developed by the Dimensions pilot.	-	-

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
Examine opportunities to improve certain design and delivery features of the EDICap.	Agree	Any future program development will leverage lessons learned from the EDICap pilot.	-	-

¹ The organizations that make up the Tri-agency are the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

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