Evaluation of the Dimensions Program

Acknowledgement

Report language

In writing any report, authors must choose words from a language that changes and evolves over time. When writing about equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), we respect that individuals may differ in the terms they prefer, and preferred terms may shift. Indeed, the terminology used by the Tri-agency over the course of the program evolved. For example, Dimensions materials initially referred to underrepresented groups, but as the program evolved this term was replaced by equity-deserving groups, as evidenced in the Dimensions Handbook published in 2022.

This report uses language adopted by the Tri-agency at the time of writing.

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Acronyms

Advance HE	Advance Higher Education
Athena SWAN	Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network
CEGEP	Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel
CFREF	Canada First Research Excellence Fund
CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
CISE	Chairs for Inclusion in Science and Engineering
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRC	Canada Research Chair
CRCP	Canada Research Chair Program
CWSE	Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering
EDI	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
EDICap	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Institutional Capacity Building Grant
LGBTQ2S+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit Plus
NFRF	New Frontiers in Research Fund
NSERC	Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
PDEC	Program Design Expert Committee
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
SPFR	Survey on Post-secondary Faculty and Researchers
UCASS	University and College Academic Staff System Survey

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Dimensions program that covered the period of April 2018 to March 2023. The purpose was to provide an assessment of the program's relevance, design and delivery, and performance.

Announced in 2018 as a five-year pilot, the Dimensions program is a federal Tri-agency initiative that aims to help post-secondary institutions break down systemic barriers and enable them to contribute to creating a culture where EDI is embedded across all aspects of research. The administration of the Dimensions program is the responsibility of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) on behalf of the Tri-Agency. Seventeen post-secondary institutions participated in the initial cohort and contributed to the co-development of the Dimensions program with NSERC.

Key Findings

The evaluation found that there is a continued need to address systemic barriers and support EDI in Canadian post-secondary institutions and that equity-deserving groups face ongoing challenges in academic career advancement and representation. The Dimensions program raises the profile of EDI within post-secondary institutions and helps to consolidate and strengthen existing EDI-related activities. While the Dimensions program is unique within the Canadian post-secondary research ecosystem, it is well-aligned with the Tri-Agency Action Plan, other Tri-agency EDI initiatives, as well as grants administered by NSERC or the Tri-agency that have a strong EDI component. Additionally, the program's unique approach of identifying and addressing systemic barriers for five equity-deserving groups (i.e., women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of racialized groups, and members of LGBTQ2S+ communities) distinguishes it from similar international programs, underlining its significance in promoting a diverse and inclusive research ecosystem in Canada.

The Dimensions program was co-developed by NSERC and the seventeen institutions that participated in the initial cohort. Overall, this process worked well by fostering inclusivity and mutual learning between institutions and NSERC, and resulted in a program tailored for the Canadian post-secondary research ecosystem. Key resources developed by the Dimensions program include the Dimensions Charter that outlines EDI principles and actions that institutions commit to apply, and the Dimensions Handbook, which provides comprehensive information and tips for institutions that aim to achieve research cultures and practices that are equitable, diverse, and inclusive. However, participating institutions sometimes experienced

challenges with the process of simultaneously developing and participating in the program, which required considerable time and resources. The COVID-19 pandemic further impacted implementation, leading to slowed EDI-related work in participating institutions which necessitated flexibility on behalf of NSERC.

It is important to recognize that institutional culture shifts take time, as well as leadership, effort, financial and human resources. While Dimensions is a relatively new program, there have been notable early EDI-related changes within the seventeen institutions participating in the initial cohort. These changes include: increased EDI awareness; the creation of dedicated EDI positions, offices, and committees; changes in hiring practices; and the use of EDI data for informed decision-making. The program also resulted in the creation of an informal community of practice through which participating institutions learned about each other's EDI work, successes, and challenges. A key component of the Dimensions program is the recognition that post-secondary institutions can receive for their efforts to increase EDI in their environments and across the research ecosystem. All of the institutions that applied for recognition from the Dimensions program were successful.

Recommendations

As Dimensions was a five-year pilot program, the recommendations are framed in a manner that considers how the program could provide ongoing support to the post-secondary research ecosystem if it were to continue, and what could be done with the information learned and materials developed if the program does not continue.

Recommendation 1: Share the learnings from Dimensions and position the program to be the driver and connector of EDI initiatives across the Tri-agency.

The evaluation found the value, relevance, and effectiveness of the Dimensions program as a driver for advancing EDI within and across Canadian post-secondary institutions. Based on the evaluation findings, it is recommended that the learnings from the pilot and the Dimensions program, if it continues, are leveraged across the Tri-agency to connect, and support the various EDI initiatives related to individual grants or broader agency strategic priorities. By focusing on institution-wide transformation to support the advancement of EDI, the Dimensions program and the learnings generated through the program could be positioned as a framework that drives, strengthens, and streamlines EDI activities and connections across Tri-agency initiatives and grants.

By facilitating such connections and improving various EDI activities, there is an opportunity to develop a cohesive understanding and approach to EDI across the Tri-agency. To support the use of Dimensions and its learnings as a framework across the Tri-agency, NSERC (as the agency administering the Dimensions program) should consider developing a Dimensions learning and information hub where EDI-related tools, resources, and expertise are available. This hub would include program resources including the Dimensions Charter and Dimensions Handbook, as well as tools and resources developed for individual grants and programs and that can be shared more widely. For example, the CRCP and CFREF are two grants that have specific EDI-related expectations for institutions; the resources and findings from Dimensions could support and inform those expectations moving forward. Additionally, programs seeking to further integrate EDI in their design and expected outcomes, such as the College and Community Innovation Program, may benefit from a better understanding of systemic barriers for equity-deserving groups and the specific activities that can help eliminate those barriers.

Recommendation 2: Create a repository of resources developed by post-secondary institutions to support the advancement of EDI within the Canadian research ecosystem.

The evaluation found that while post-secondary institutions may be interested and willing to support transformational change to advance EDI, such culture shifts take time, awareness, leadership, and resources (human, material and financial).

The Dimensions program can help institutions advance their efforts to support EDI by creating a repository of resources to help identify and eliminate systemic barriers for equity-deserving groups. It is recommended that NSERC create a repository of the resources developed by the institutions that participated in the initial cohort, which can be accessed and added to by other Canadian post-secondary institutions. This repository will enable institutions across Canada to learn from one another and may accelerate their EDI-related activities as they will not have to "start from scratch". Additionally, this repository is an opportunity to acknowledge the work and contributions of the initial 17 institutions that participated in the Dimensions program and ensure that their progress and learnings to date are valued and not lost.

Recommendation 3: Examine opportunities to revise, streamline and expand certain features of the Dimensions program to facilitate participation including moving up through the stages of recognition.

The evaluation found that post-secondary institutions valued the Dimensions program, and it accelerated many positive changes to support the recognition and elimination of systemic barriers for equity-deserving groups. While it was co-developed to reflect the variety and reality of institutions within the Canadian post-secondary research ecosystem, there remain opportunities to improve certain aspects of the program's design and delivery. This opportunity for improvement is expected given that Dimensions is a new program and has only completed one recognition process.

The co-development between NSERC and the 17 post-secondary institutions that participated in the initial cohort successfully generated several benefits including enabling an inclusive approach, generating buy in, and providing institutions with opportunities to learn from one another. If the Dimensions program continues, it is recommended that the program shifts from the co-development model to an ongoing program delivery model with the recognition process occurring at regular intervals. Additionally, there are opportunities to further support the recognition process by reviewing and refining the Dimensions Handbook for conciseness, accurate translation, and ongoing changes in language, as well as simplifying the requirements for institutions seeking recognition.

Building on recommendation #2 and the idea of a repository EDI materials, it is also recommended that NSERC (on behalf of the Tri-agency) facilitate the creation of an ongoing community of practice where post-secondary institutions can seek and share ideas, learnings, and ongoing support regrading efforts to advance EDI and generate institutional change. This community of practice could extend to all post-secondary institutions engaging in efforts to support EDI. Through this community of practice, institutions could share promising practices and learn from the experience of institutions that achieved Dimensions recognition.

Program Context

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are priorities in Canada's innovation, science, and industry ecosystem[1]. Research and innovation work best when they consider different viewpoints and expertise. Inclusive environments are essential to help ensure fair access to education, careers, and funding for everyone. At the time the Dimensions: equity, diversity and inclusion Canada program (hereafter referred to as the Dimensions program) was announced in 2018, there was recognition that systemic barriers persisted in Canada's research ecosystem that continued to limit educational and career advancement opportunities for members of equity-deserving groups and prevent their full participation in the ecosystem[2,3]. It is well documented in the literature that researchers from equity-deserving groups experience systemic barriers and challenges that impact their participation within academia[4,5] and that these barriers may be particularly acute for individuals who are members of two or more of these groups[6]. To tackle these issues, it was important to understand these barriers, and work with equity-deserving groups to remove them. Several efforts were made by the Government of Canada and members of the Canadian post-secondary research ecosystem to better understand the state of EDI within the ecosystem to support the path forward.

In 2019, Universities Canada launched a comprehensive national survey to better understand EDI within the post-secondary

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[1] Government of Canada (2017). Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research. Retrieved from: https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/canada-fundamental-science-review/sites/default/files/attachments/2022/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf

[2] Government of Canada (2023). Best practices in equity, diversity and inclusion in research practice and design. Retrieved from: https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/nfrf-fnfr/edi-eng.aspx

[3] Government of Canada (2022). Dimensions Equity, diversity, and inclusion Canada. Handbook for Postsecondary Institutions Applying for Recognition.

[4] Mohamed, T., & Beagan, B. L. (2019) 'Strange faces' in the academy: experiences of racialized and Indigenous faculty in Canadian universities. Race, Ethnicity and Education, 22(3), 338-354.

[5] Kirkham, R., Webster, M., Chen, K. L., & Vines, J. (2016). Using Disability Law to expand Academic Freedom for Disabled Researchers in the United Kingdom. Journal of Historical Sociology, 29(1), 65-91.

[6] Chambers, D., Preston, L., Topakas, A., Saille, S. D., Salway, S., Booth, A., Dawson, J., & Wilsdon, J. (2017). Review of diversity and inclusion literature and an evaluation of methodologies and metrics relating to health research. University of Sheffield. Retrieved from https://wellcome.org/sites/default/files/review-of-diversity-and-inclusion-literature.pdf

landscape and to inform capacity building activities[7]. The results from the survey show that while some progress was made within Canadian universities through the prioritizing of EDI action plans, strategies and policies, there remained numerous EDI challenges to be addressed. One such challenge is a lack of data on the institutional challenges experienced by members of equity-deserving groups and insufficient information on best practices for supporting EDI activities and capacity building in post-secondary institutions. While most institutions that participated in the survey (78%) noted that they are in the process of developing an EDI task force or advisory group, they have limited data regarding the diversity of their student population and most only sometimes consider intersectionality in policy and program development (43%), while 13% never consider intersectionality. Another challenge is a lack of financial resources to recruit and retain students, faculty, professional staff and senior leaders to support EDI-related activities. Survey findings indicated that of the institutions with an EDI office, 32% have one or fewer full-time equivalent staff. It is expected that it will be challenging for institutions to address EDI barriers without sufficient staff to complete the work.

Additional challenges include the barriers members of equity-deserving groups experience when seeking to advance their academic careers. There is a need to address these barriers to increase the number of members of equity-deserving groups within the professoriate and senior leadership of universities across Canada. According to the findings from the national survey conducted by Universities Canada, approximately 60% of senior leaders in Canadian universities identify as belonging to one or more equity-deserving groups with the proportion of women holding senior leader positions (49%) almost proportionate to that or men. Despite these improvements, few women hold the position of vide-president or executive head. Moreover, only 8% of senior leaders are individuals who identify as a member of a racialized group, compared to the proportion of individuals who identify as a member of a racialized group who are full-time faculty (21%), doctoral holders (31%), and part of the Canadian general population (22%).

Statistics Canada also conducted two surveys in 2019 that shed light on the condition of EDI in Canada's post-secondary research ecosystem. The first is the Survey on Post-secondary Faculty and Researchers (SPFR), which is focused on filling data gaps regarding EDI among equity-deserving groups who teach or conduct research at Canadian post-secondary institutions by providing information on career experience including barriers to career advancement. The second is the University and College Academic Staff System Survey (UCASS), which collects data on the socio-economic characteristics of full-time

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[7] Universities Canada (2019). Equity, diversity, and inclusion at Canadian universities: Report on the 2019 survey. Retrieved from: https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/publications/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-at-canadian-universities-report-on-the-2019-survey/

academic teaching staff in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Findings from the SPFR indicate that approximately one-third of academic faculty and researchers identify with at least two equity-deserving groups and that postdoctoral fellows and PhD students are younger and more diverse, as compared to full-time faculty members. For instance, 39% of respondents below age 35 identified with two or more equity-deserving groups, compared with 29% of those 35 years and older[8]. When data from both surveys were combined to attain a more comprehensive picture of the diversity among the faculty and researchers within post-secondary institutions[9] the findings illustrated that tenured faculty at universities tend to be less diverse and that a higher proportion of men (75%) had tenured positions compared to women (63%). Additionally, members of equity-deserving groups reported that they were less likely to feel that hiring practices were fair and equitable at their institution. Specifically, women (23%) were more likely than men (14%), faculty with a disability (31%) were more likely than faculty without a disability (17%), racialized faculty (22%) were more likely than non-racialized faculty (18%) and members of the LGBTQ2S+ communities (26%) were more likely than heterosexual faculty (18%) to disagree or strongly disagree that promotions were fair and equitable at their institution. Finally, faculty and researchers in the social sciences, behaviour and law were less likely to disagree or strongly disagree that promotions were fair and equitable compared to researchers in health, or the natural sciences and engineering.

About Dimensions

Announced in 2018 as a five-year pilot, the Dimensions program is a federal Tri-agency initiative that aims to help post-secondary institutions break down systemic barriers and enable them to contribute to creating a culture where EDI is embedded across all aspects of research.

Dimensions Objectives

1. Create a culture of critical self-reflection related to EDI.
2. Support evidence-based EDI work by collecting and using qualitative and quantitative data.
3. Address key challenges that present barriers to everyone's research career progression.
4. Foster a community of practice that shares promising practices and resources.

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[8] Statistics Canada (2019). Survey on Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers (SPFR). Retrieved from: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200922/dq200922a-eng.htm
[9] Statistics Canada (2022). Differences in tenure status and feelings of fairness in hiring and promotions among male and female faculty in Canadian universities. Retrieved from: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2022001/article/00007-eng.htm

Inspired by the [Athena SWAN Charter](#)[10][11] that was founded in the United Kingdom and administered by Advance Higher Education (Advance HE)[12], the Dimensions program addresses inequities faced by equity-deserving groups including, women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of racialized groups, and members of LGBTQ2S+ communities. The program seeks to encourage Canadian post-secondary institutions to take part in a transformation to increase EDI and help drive deeper cultural change within the research ecosystem by identifying and eliminating obstacles and inequities, resulting in equitable access to funding opportunities, equitable and inclusive participation in research, as well as embedded EDI-related considerations in research design and practices.

The development of the Dimensions program was also guided by representatives from Advance HE who were contracted to support the develop of Dimensions based on their expertise helping other countries develop and implement programs based on Athena SWAN. Additionally, the Dimensions Program was supported by a Program Design Expert Committee (PDEC), composed of representatives from various equity-deserving groups from various sizes and types of institutions across Canada. The mandate of the PDEC was to provide expert advice on program materials, specifically related to EDI content, language, and approach.

Dimensions has two components: a charter and a recognition program.

The [Dimensions charter](#) outlines EDI principles and actions that institutions commit to and that apply to the evolving realities of their respective environments. All post-secondary institutions (i.e., CEGEPs, colleges, polytechnics, universities), government agencies, national organizations, and research institutes are welcome to sign and [endorse](#) the charter. Those who endorse the Dimensions charter can be identified by displaying the charter endorser logo (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Dimensions charter Endorser Logo

The Dimensions [recognition program](#) publicly recognizes post-secondary institutions seeking to increase EDI in

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[10] The Athena SWAN Charter is a framework used across the world to support and transform gender equality within post-secondary education and research. The charter encourages and recognizes commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths, and medicine (STEMM) employment, and is used to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect women.
[11] Advance Higher Education. (2020). Athena SWAN Charter. Retrieved from: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter
[12] Advance HE is a charity that works with partners across the world to improve higher education for staff, students, and society.

their environments and across the research ecosystem. The recognition program includes four stages that are intended to reflect how strategically EDI work is addressed and conducted by post-secondary institutions. These four stages are:

- Foundation – the institution is in the early stage of strategically addressing EDI in a coordinated way.
- Construction – the institution is strategically addressing EDI in a coordinated way.
- Consolidation – the institution has made significant progress in addressing the issues established in its action plan.
- Transformation – the institution has made substantial progress on issues identified in past or ongoing action plans and can provide evidence that shows representational and cultural change with respect to EDI.

The recognition program is voluntary, and institutions do not receive funding for participation. Institutions seeking recognition submit an application which is reviewed by a committee of post-secondary researchers and individuals with lived experience and expertise in EDI. Each application was evaluated by a panel of 5 reviewers from a pool of 18 reviewers. The committee determined which level of recognition individual institutions received based on their efforts to support EDI, results of these efforts, self-reflections and sharing of learning and findings with the research community. Dimensions-related work is meant to be continuous, iterative, and cyclical, and institutions are expected to move up through the stages of recognition as they continue to drive deeper cultural change within the research ecosystem.

Dimensions focuses on engaging large and small post-secondary institutions and was co-developed with the initial cohort of 17 institutions.

In 2019 when the Dimensions program was official launched, 40 institutions submitted Letters of Intent to participate in the program's initial cohort. A selection committee, including post-secondary researchers and EDI experts, reviewed the applicants' letters and selected institutions using the criteria of institutional commitment and evidence of readiness to advance EDI, while ensuring a balance of institutions across Canada in geographical location, institution type (i.e., colleges and universities), and institution size (i.e., small, and large)[13]. A cohort of 17 post-secondary institutions participated in the initial Dimensions recognition program between 2019 and 2023. The remaining 23 institutions became Dimensions affiliates, who participated in some activities and reviewed program materials over the course of the initial cohort.

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[13] A list of the institutions that participated in the initial Dimensions cohort is found in Appendix A.

The 17 institutions that comprised the first cohort of the Dimensions program worked closely with representatives from NSERC to co-develop the program on behalf of the Tri-agency. The co-development of the Dimensions program was very collaborative and primarily focused on developing the stages of the recognition process and the Dimensions Handbook for post-secondary institutions applying for recognition (hereafter referred to as the Handbook).[14]

Dimensions is grounded in the Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan for 2018-2025.

Under the leadership of the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), NSERC, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) developed the Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan for 2018-2025. This plan aims to help drive changes in Canada's post-secondary research ecosystem through a variety of initiatives, including the Dimensions program and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Institutional Capacity-Building Grants (EDICap)[15]. The Dimensions program and EDICap were both announced in Budget 2018 and administered in parallel by NSERC's Research Grants and Scholarships Directorate on behalf of the Tri-agency with a focus on encouraging post-secondary institutions to improve EDI across Canada's research ecosystem.

EDICap

EDICap is a five-year pilot funding opportunity for colleges and small universities, who can apply to receive up to $200,000 per year, for up to two years. Funds must support projects that identify and eliminate systemic barriers that impede the career advancement, recruitment, and retention of equity-deserving groups. Six of the institutions that participated in the first cohort of the Dimensions program also received an EDICap grant to support their efforts to build EDI capacity to help identify and address systemic barriers experienced by members of equity-deserving groups.

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[14] Further information about the co-development process is found in the section: Findings: Design & Delivery.
[15] NSERC (2022). Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Institutional Capacity-Building Grants. Retrieved from: https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Institutions-Etablissements/EDI-Capacity_eng.asp

Evaluation Approach

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Dimensions program that covered the period of April 2018 to March 2023. The purpose was to provide an assessment of the program's relevance, performance, and design and delivery.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation targeted the following questions:

Relevance

- Is there a continued need for Dimensions to support EDI in Canadian post-secondary institutions?
- How well does the Dimensions program align with the Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan?
- To what extent does Dimensions align with other Tri-Agency EDI initiatives?

Design and Delivery

- To what extent was the Dimensions program designed and delivered as planned?
- To what extent did the co-development model support the design and delivery of the Dimensions program?

Effectiveness

- What activities/mechanisms have the Dimensions pilot recognition cohort developed and/or implemented to support EDI and reduce systemic barriers for equity-deserving groups?
- What EDI-related changes have taken place among pilot participant institutions since the launch of the Dimensions program?

Efficiency

- To what extent is Dimensions being delivered efficiently with respect to administrative and non-monetary costs?

Methods and Data Sources

The evaluation questions were answered using the following methods:

- Six case studies with institutions that were part of the Dimensions initial cohort and received an EDICap grant. Case studies included a document review and interviews with representatives from each institution. A total of 24 interviews were conducted with institutional representatives across the six institutions.
- A document and literature review about EDI in the Tri-agency and the broader research ecosystem.
- Key informant interviews (n = 27) with representatives from the ten of the eleven Dimensions cohort institutions not involved in the case studies, as well as NSERC staff and management, members of the recognition review panel, and members of the Advance HE team.

Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

The following limitations and mitigation strategies apply to the findings presented in this report:

- Not all interviewees were able to answer all interview questions. For example, some interviewees had limited knowledge of how the activities related to Dimensions unfolded over time as several institutions experienced staff turnover in EDI roles. In recognition of this limitation and in an effort to learn as much as possible about the program, the evaluation welcomed partial or limited responses from those interviewees.
- Interviews provide subjective data, which may contain partial, inconsistent, or misremembered information. Where possible, this limitation was mitigated by interviewing multiple individuals and triangulating data across sources.
- The first cohort of the Dimensions program included a small number of post-secondary institutions, which limits the extent to which the findings from this evaluation are generalizable to the broader research ecosystem. This limitation was mitigated by contextualizing and triangulating the data with information from secondary sources.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation gathered meaningful information to address each evaluation question.

Findings: Relevance

There is a continued need to address systemic barriers and support EDI in Canadian post-secondary institutions.

A review of government documents demonstrates the ongoing relevance of the Dimensions program to help address systemic barriers and support EDI efforts within Canadian post-secondary institutions.

- **Equity-deserving groups continue to experience barriers to career advancement and are not proportionately represented among the highest academic positions.** According to the findings from the 2021-2022 UCASS, while women represent 42% of the faculty population, they only represent 32% of full professors in Canada, but represent 56% of instructors and lecturers who rank below the position of assistant professor. Additionally, findings from the evaluation of the Tri-agency Canada Research Chairs Program (CRCP) illustrate that there are Canada Research Chairs (CRCs)[16] who are members of one or more equity-deserving groups who faced challenges while becoming and during their time as a CRC that they attributed to their identity. Findings were particularly significant for women compared to men in terms of experiencing challenges when becoming and during their time as a CRC, and for CRCs who are persons with a disability during their time as a CRC. The most common challenges described were gender discrimination between chairs in salary, teaching and recognition, and administrative hurdles at the institution[17].

- **EDI remains one of the Government of Canada's priorities,** as outlined in the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Mandate Letter[18].

- **There are calls for more diversity in Canada's post-secondary research ecosystem**. For example, Canada's Fundamental Science Review acknowledged that Canada's next generation of researchers must be more diverse and

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[16] CRCs are considered to be highly prestigious awards for academics working in Canadian post-secondary institutions. The purpose of the program is to attract and retain some of the world's most accomplished and promising minds. Academics who receive an award aim to achieve research excellence in engineering and the natural sciences, health sciences, humanities, and social sciences.

[17] Government of Canada. (2023). Evaluation of the Canada Research Chairs Program. Retrieved from: https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/about_us-a_notre_sujet/publications/evaluations/2023/CRCP_Evaluation_Report_FinalE.pdf

[18] Government of Canada. (2021). Minister of Innovation, Science, and Industry Mandate Letter. Retrieved from: https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-innovation-science-and-industry-mandate-letter

better supported[19]. More than 50 universities across Canada have signed the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education, which commits the university to specific goals and targets to work towards eliminating anti-Black racism across the institution and to promote Black representation and inclusion in higher education[20].

- **Canada's Tri-agency are committed to supporting EDI in post-secondary research.** The Tri-Agency Statement on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion outlines the Tri-agency's plan to implement EDI principles across the agency's programs, policies, and practices. Additionally, the Tri-agency have sponsored an Expert Panel through the Canadian Council of Academies to examine the state of knowledge regarding measures that organizations in Canada and around the world are implementing to achieve EDI in the Canadian post-secondary research system.

- **The Tri-agency are adding more EDI requirements to programs, grants, and initiatives** (e.g., CRC Program, Canada First Excellence Research Fund, College and Community Innovation Program) as it fulfills its commitment to support EDI in the post-secondary research ecosystem. Several institutional representatives noted that their institutions are better positioned to fulfil Tri-agency requirements due to their participation in Dimensions. They rely on the action plans, tools, and resources that they developed through Dimensions to fulfill various Tri-agency EDI requirements.

Dimensions raises the profile of EDI within post-secondary institutions and helps to consolidate EDI-related activities.

Key Findings

The Dimensions program supports postsecondary institutions in their EDI work.

Dimensions was perceived to be a valuable federal program to promote EDI.

"Because it's a federal program and initiated by the Tri-council, it gives an external power. People pay attention to it. It's always hard to launch something that's completely new, but the fact that it's a federal program is quite impactful." - Institutional Rep.

"Prior to Dimensions there was little enthusiasm for thinking about EDI in a systematic way." – Institutional Rep.

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[19] Government of Canada (2017). Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research. Retrieved from: https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/canada-fundamental-science-review/sites/default/files/attachments/2022/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf

[20] Queen's University (2022). Implementing the Scarborough Charter at Queen's. Retrieved from: https://www.queensu.ca/principal/implementing-scarborough-charter-queens#:~:text=More%20than%2050%20universities%20and,have%20signed%20the%20Scarborough%20Charter.

Evidence from key informants reinforced the relevance of and continued need for the Dimensions program. All institutional representatives interviewed for the evaluation said the program supported EDI within their institutions, by raising the profile of EDI and serving as an umbrella framework for institutional EDI initiatives. The findings from the case studies and key informant interviews indicate that the first cohort of the Dimensions program was a success and there is a need for the program to continue. Evidence is summarized below.

- **Institutions recognize the need for EDI and to do work in this area.** All institutions in the initial cohort had been doing some EDI work prior to engaging in the Dimensions program, demonstrating an awareness of the need to advance EDI in the post-secondary research ecosystem. Dimensions helped institutions consolidate their EDI work institution wide.

- **Dimensions strengthens existing EDI work.** Many institutional representatives noted that as a federal program, Dimensions gave legitimacy to EDI and their EDI-related activities within their institution and helped them build on these activities. Others said Dimensions helped expand institutional attitudes towards the role of EDI, for example by rethinking how to consider the voices of equity-deserving groups within institutions.

- **Dimensions' role in the Canadian research ecosystem is valued.** One unique aspect of Dimensions was the involvement of institutions in its co-development. It was noted by many institutional representatives that they, and their institutions benefitted from opportunities to work together and share their learnings, while also receiving guidance from NSERC. Also, Dimensions encouraged participating institutions to build collaborative, rather than competitive, EDI efforts.

- **Dimensions' role is distinct.** Unlike other federal programs, Dimensions is not a granting program and institutions do not receive any funds for their participation. Additionally, rather than imposing external targets, the program supports institutions to self-assess and create targeted action plans to move toward greater EDI.

Dimensions is well-aligned with the Tri-Agency Action Plan and other Tri-agency EDI initiatives.

The document review revealed that the Dimensions program aligns well with other Tri-agency initiatives seeking to advance EDI within the post-secondary research ecosystem, including the Tri-Agency Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and the Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan for 2018-2025. Dimensions was established in Objective 2 of the EDI Action Plan, along with the EDICap as they were offered in parallel, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Objective 2. Equitable participation in the research system
Influence the achievement of an inclusive post-secondary research system and culture in Canada

Objective-level key performance indicators:
1. Proportion of those who teach or conduct research at Canadian post-secondary institutions from underrepresented groups
2. Proportion of students enrolled at Canadian post-secondary institutions from underrepresented groups

* Targets (for both indicators) are year-over-year improvement, with the goal of each group's participation being representative of the Canadian population.

Outcome 2.1	**Initiative 2.1.1**
Tri-agency helps drive systemic and research culture change within Canada's post-secondary system	Implement two pilot initiatives: a Canadian adaptation of the UK's Athena SWAN program (**Dimensions**) and an **EDICap**

Figure 2: Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan objective related to Dimensions

Interviews with institutional representatives confirmed Dimensions supports the achievement of an inclusive post-secondary research system and culture in Canada by guiding and encouraging institutions to strengthen and support data collection to drive informed decision-making, and by prompting reviews of policies and processes to mitigate bias to reduce systemic barriers for the educational and career advancement of equity-deserving groups.

Dimensions is well aligned with NSERC's EDICap grant. Both initiatives were announced in Budget 2018 and were created to promote equitable and fair participation in Canada's research ecosystem. Institutional representatives from colleges and small universities noted that they appreciated the complementary nature of these initiatives, as the funding from the EDICap supported activities required to seek Dimensions recognition (e.g., self-assessment, data collection).

Dimensions is also well aligned with other initiatives, programs, and grants administered by NSERC or the Tri-agency that have a strong EDI component. Examples include:

- New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF)

- Canada First Excellence Research Fund (CFREF)

- Canada Research Chairs program (CRCP)

- NSERC 2030 Strategic Plan (Pillar 2)

- Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering (CWSE)

- Chairs for Inclusion in Science and Engineering pilot (CISE)

In particular, some institutional interviewees said the Dimensions program helped their institution to demonstrate they meet the EDI requirements when applying for or reporting on other grants, particularly CRC. As noted by one institutional representative *"Dimensions is a way that institutions can align the legalities of CRC requirements with the benefits that EDI can bring to their institution."* Some of the institutions that participated in the first cohort of the Dimensions program leveraged the activities required for the program to support the EDI requirements of the CRC program. For instance, the self-assessment team and data collection required for Dimensions aligned with the CRC program requirement for the collection of disaggregated self-identification data from all nominees and CRCs.

Canada's Dimensions program is unique compared to EDI programs in other countries' post-secondary research ecosystems.

The initial cohort of 17 post-secondary institutions participating in the Dimensions recognition program included both universities and colleges. They were distributed across all Canada and included a mix of large, medium and small institutions. For a complete list of these institutions see Appendix A: Dimensions Initial Cohort.

The evaluation findings show that Dimensions is different from other EDI programs based on the Athena SWAN model. Unique aspects of Dimensions include:
- a focus on five equity-deserving groups;
- working with colleges and universities;
- emphasizing stories and voices (rather than focussing on quantitative data);
- giving participants flexibility in how they approach their EDI work;
- a program design generated through co-development with institutions; and
- different stages of recognition.

"Canada's Dimensions program is the most different of all the [EDI] charter programs around the world." – Stakeholder

Findings: Design and Delivery

Dimensions program design

As noted previously, the initial cohort brought together a group of 17 post-secondary institutions to share their experiences and learnings related to EDI and to help co-develop the Dimensions program. It was determined that the program would focus on identifying and addressing systemic barriers for five equity-deserving groups (i.e., women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of racialized groups, and members of LGBTQ2S+ communities). Institutions that participated in Dimensions did not receive any funding from the Tri-agency to support their efforts.

The co-development model worked well overall.
Almost all Institutional representatives and stakeholders appreciated the inclusive, co-development approach that enabled institutions to learn from each other and contribute to shaping the program.

The co-development of Dimensions resulted in a program that is uniquely designed for the Canadian post-secondary research ecosystem.

The Dimensions program was the result of a co-development model between NSERC and the 17 institutions that participated as the initial cohort. These institutions were often highly engaged in the process by participating in meetings and working groups and contributed to all aspects of program development, including refining the Handbook and designing the recognition program. The development of the Dimensions program encouraged institutions to consider and find creative solutions to long-standing challenges related to EDI in the research ecosystem, including: increasing coordination across the institution, including the voices of equity-deserving groups in all phases and aspects of EDI work, and considering intersectionality and how to address issues experienced by all five equity-deserving groups.

"The co-development has been one of the most fabulous parts of the Dimensions program. The best way to do it. – Institutional Rep

"[Dimensions] made us, less competitive with one another, and that's, I think one of the biggest outcomes of the Dimensions program." – Institutional Rep

The co-development process was intentional and designed to ensure the program was informed by and reflected the realities and priorities of institutions in the Canadian research ecosystem, particularly as they related to EDI. NSERC staff and the cohort benefited from advice and guidance from representatives of Advance HE and the PDEC.

Most aspects of the co-development process worked well.

Most institutional representatives appreciated the opportunity to collaborate through the co-development process, which enabled hearing diverse perspectives (i.e., college and universities), having rich discussions, and bringing institutions into a collaborative rather than a competitive process. As one institutional representative commented, *"You learn from the expertise across the country in ways that you couldn't do, if you only did it yourself."*

Co-development enabled an inclusive approach to designing Dimensions. The co-development process ensured a variety of post-secondary institutions had a say in what the program would look like and brought together colleges and universities in a way that had not be done before, but that was noted by some representatives as valuable in terms of building relationships and being inclusive. Colleges and small universities, who often have fewer resources than large universities, especially appreciated having *"a seat at the table in a way they haven't been"* to provide input to ensure the program meets everyone's needs.

The co-development process supported:
- Inclusion
- Learning
- Buy-in

Institutions and NSERC learned from each other. Almost all institutional representatives and stakeholders spoke about the benefits of institutions learning from each other through the co-development process. Some mentioned that having the perspectives of both small and large institutions helped highlight different realities and experiences, which was enriching for those involved. The process helped NSERC further understand the complexity of EDI within the post-secondary research ecosystem and identify opportunities to work together to navigate this complexity.

Co-development supported buy-in from all participating institutions. Some institutional representatives indicated that the co-development process helped foster engagement from all institutions involved in the initial cohort. While all of the institutions wanted to participate in Dimensions, some were better equipped as they had existing knowledge and experience of building local culture into their EDI work. The co-development process leveraged this expertise to help institutions that had less knowledge and experience.

Some aspects of co-development presented challenges for institutions.

Despite the overall positive experiences of most institutional representatives with the co-development process, some noted challenges that impacted the process and presented opportunities for improvement for any future efforts by the Tri-agency. **Collaboration takes time.** Some institutional representatives and stakeholders mentioned that working collaboratively can take longer than working separately as extra time is required to involve all stakeholders.

Accommodating diverse institutional contexts is complex. Involving different types of institutions in different locations and with different needs added to the complexity of the co-development process. What was a key area of concern or challenge for some institutions was not for others. Additionally, smaller universities and colleges did not have the same resources to provide input to the process and often have fewer resources to engage in EDI related activities.

Key Findings

COVID changed the way Dimensions was delivered as planned in-person meetings had to be conducted remotely.

COVID-19 taught some valuable lessons.
"*COVID taught us valuable information about inequities – it helped us to understand [Dimensions] should be a continuous project.*" – Institutional Rep

Developing and participating in the program at the same time was difficult. Some institutional representatives noted it was difficult to participate in Dimensions while the program was under development. For some, developing the framework took time away from supporting their respective institution in its EDI work.

Institutions needed clarity as the program was co-developed. A few institutional representatives mentioned they would have appreciated more and clearer communication from NSERC about what to do, and what to expect, as the program was developed. Areas for improvement in communication included providing more details about evolving roles and giving clear information about timelines and next steps.

The implementation of Dimensions was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic slowed down EDI work as institutions had to prioritize the shift to the remote delivery of academic activities and programs. All institutional interviewees said that staff at their respective institution had limited capacity to take on the work for the Dimensions program, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, which resulted in the delay of planned EDI-

related initiatives. The inability to meet in person was also a barrier to the interpersonal component of planning and executing EDI-related initiatives. Nonetheless, most institutions were still able to plan and implement EDI activities that closely aligned with original plans to support the Dimensions charter and to seek Dimensions recognition.

In response, NSERC provided deadline extensions and was flexible with institutions as they navigated their Dimensions work during the pandemic. Institutional interviewees appreciated that the NSERC team adapted quickly in response to COVID-19 and provided these extensions and flexibilities.

Unexpected positive impacts resulting from COVID-19 included the following:

- Institutions' ability to do remote work increased rapidly, which in turn allowed their planned EDI activities to reach a wider audience.
- Issues related to equity were highlighted, for example, how access to childcare and to the internet affect individuals' engagement in work and education.
- Faculty and staff became more aware of and understanding about colleagues' circumstances, which led to more conscious efforts to support each other.

The development of Dimensions resulted in many valuable EDI-related resources.

The co-development of Dimensions resulted in many useful EDI-related resources to help post-secondary institutions break down systemic barriers and enable them to contribute to creating a culture where EDI is embedded across all aspects of research. Most institutional representatives said they greatly valued the Dimensions resources, including the Dimensions charter, Handbook, webinars, and information sessions.

The **Dimensions charter** is an important part of the Dimensions program. By signing and endorsing the charter and taking action to achieve its goals, colleges, universities, and other institutions recognize that EDI strengthens the research community, enhances the quality and impact of research, and provides opportunities for a diverse range of participants.

Dimensions EDI Resources Created
- Dimensions Charter
- Dimensions Handbook
- Webinars & Information Sessions

Many institutional representatives indicated that the **Handbook**, is a useful, well-formatted, and easy to use guide. This is partially attributed to the participation of institutions in helping to develop the Handbook through the co-development process. The Handbook is intended to help institutions complete their application to receive Dimensions recognition. It provides comprehensive information and tips for institutions that aim to achieve research cultures and practices that are equitable, diverse, and inclusive. Many used the Handbook as a tool when planning and executing EDI initiatives. One institutional representative said, *"It provides lots of ways to mobilize groups and poses questions to encourage reflection."* The Handbook also helped guide institutions on preferred language choice, which reflected the values that institutions were seeking to promote. While institutional representatives confirmed the value of the Handbook, some also recognized the Handbook could be refined in future iterations, such as making the content more concise and ensuring translated versions are optimal. Additional information about potential revisions for the Handbook are available in the section titled, *Opportunities to improve Dimensions.*

Webinars and information sessions were also well-received by the institutions that participated in the initial cohort. Webinars provided opportunities for institutions to get information, share promising practices, learn from others, reflect, and develop relationships with other institutions.

Applying for and giving recognition took work

Among the initial cohort, 10 institutions (59%) applied for recognition[21], including five small and five large institutions. When asked about applying for recognition, institutional representatives from institutions that did and did not apply for recognition noted that the process was a lot of work in order to complete the required documentation and demonstrate all of the EDI-related activities and outcomes that occurred. Additionally, of the institutions that did not apply for recognition, some institutional representatives (from both large and small institutions) said that it was because they did not have the resources to complete the application on time.

Almost all of the members of the recognition review committee interviewed for the evaluation noted that participating in the recognition process took significantly more time and was more onerous than expected. While they appreciated the purpose, goals, and results of the Dimensions program, it was noted that the time required to evaluate each application was more then what was expected and several of them had to complete this work in the evenings or on the weekends. It was also noted that

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[21] The list of institutions that applied for and received recognition is found in Appendix A.

the meetings to discuss the results of their evaluations and for institutions to present their applications were long and sometimes difficult to accomplish when the conversation would shift to other areas or broader discussions about EDI in the research ecosystem.

Institutions that applied for Dimensions recognition found it had value

The institutional representatives whose institutions applied for recognition spoke about the value of a Dimensions recognition and said that it:

- Validates institutional commitment to EDI principles.
- Provides accountability for institutions' EDI efforts.
- Provides an opportunity to recognize institution's EDI efforts.
- Motivates institutions and reinforces their commitment to work towards the next stage of recognition.
- May enhance institutions' reputations.

"Dimensions recognition has reputational value. It shows that the leaders of our research on campus really recognize the importance of EDI in our research activities. It also indicates that EDI is something we're committed to enough to participate in self-reflection. We're open about what we're really working on and we're willing to share our experiences with others." - Institutional Rep

"Recognition is very valuable because it recognizes all the effort that's been made. It shows that we are on the right track, and we are an EDI university. We included in our strategic plan that we want to get Stage 2-Construction recognition in 5 years. It positions us for future grant applications. It's a great benchmark to have." – Institutional Rep

While most Dimensions design and delivery features supported program implementation by post-secondary institutions, there are some opportunities for improvement.

Institutional representatives made the following suggestions to refine the **program Handbook, materials, and resources:**
- Consider the realities of smaller institutions that have fewer resources to do EDI-related work.
- Record webinars to share asynchronously.
- Expand resource materials to include discussion papers or "how to" guides to further support institutions EDI activities.
- Make videos and written materials accessible to those with visual impairments.
- Continue to refine the handbook, including shortening it, reviewing the French translation, and inviting input from a broader representation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.
- Remain sensitive to how thinking and speaking about EDI evolves and update the handbook accordingly.

Additionally, several institutional representatives whose institutions sought recognition and members of the recognition review panel provided following suggestions to improve the **recognition process**:
- For institutions to use the recommended application format, stick to the word limit, and use graphics in their applications.
- Involve equity-deserving groups in the presentation of applications.
- Offer a hybrid of virtual and in-person discussions, with breaks between presentations.
- Simplify the reviewer feedback form and reduce the reliance on appendices.
- Ensure review discussions stay focused.

Findings: Activities & Changes Driven by Dimensions

Since its announcement in 2018, the Dimensions program has garnered national attention and buy-in from many different kinds of Canadian institutions. At the time of writing this report 143 organizations across Canada have endorsed the Charter including colleges, universities, polytechnics, and CEGEP, and also government agencies, national organizations, and research institutes. Forty post-secondary institutions submitted a Letter of Interest to participate in the initial Dimensions cohort and 17 have been accepted. The remaining 23 affiliated institutions were involved in reviewing Dimensions documents and expressed interest in joining the next phase of Dimensions recognition. Finally, 10 institutions applied for and received Dimensions recognition in 2023.

Institutions engaged in various EDI-related activities as part of Dimensions.

The 17 post-secondary institutions involved with the initial cohort of the Dimensions program engaged in many EDI-related activities, such as:

- Formed committees and working groups which sometimes included Self-Assessment Teams (SATs) required for Dimensions recognition.
- Refined and created EDI-related policies and plans. Some examples include EDI Action plan, equitable hiring plans, sexual harassment policies and procedures and gender identity policies.
- Collected EDI-related qualitative and quantitative data from students, staff, and faculty.
- Engaged with equity-deserving groups through focus groups, interviews, discussion groups and town halls.
- Shared information with other institutions through EDI strategies, "show and tell" sessions, or by connecting with local and likeminded institutions.

Despite delays due to COVID-19, institutions engaged in activities that aligned with their original plans to support the Dimensions charter and required to seek recognition.

It takes time for institutional culture shifts, but EDI-related changes have occurred within participating institutions.

It was emphasized by almost all institutional representatives that shifting organizational and system-wide culture takes time. Consequently, many of the observed changes described below are reflective of early stages of change.

Dimensions raised the profile of EDI across institutions by bringing people together, increasing awareness about EDI, and beginning to shift culture. All institutional representatives reported that participating in Dimensions highlighted the importance of EDI and that their institutions are becoming more equitable, diverse, and inclusive. For example, one institution dedicated a portion of their annual budget to EDI activities.

Institutions created dedicated EDI positions, offices, and committees. Some institutional representatives mentioned that participating in Dimensions led to the creation of dedicated EDI positions within their administration, many at the leadership level. This dedication of resources to EDI reflected shifts in institutional priorities and helped build capacity to undertake EDI work with dedicated staffing. However, some of the EDI positions were temporary or part-time, which was less than ideal for supporting culture change over time.

Institutions changed hiring practices as they reviewed, revised, and implemented recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion policies, procedures,

and guidelines to ensure EDI principles were embedded throughout each process. While some institutions have completed similar activities in relation to the CRCP, Dimensions required an institution-wide approach.

Dimensions supported the increased use of EDI data to make informed decisions. Institutions began collecting EDI-related data, which helped them develop a baseline understanding of the current level of diversity among the student and faculty populations. Many institutional representatives said the data helped their institutions identify gaps and barriers that need to be addressed and will inform future decision-making to support EDI.

Dimensions created an informal community of practice, where institutions learned about each other's EDI work, successes, and challenges.

Some institutions improved physical spaces resulting from their EDI work. For example, one institution made physical spaces more accessible. Another created a new safe space for members of the LGBTQ2S+ communities.

All of the institutions that applied for Dimensions recognition were successful.

All ten post-secondary institutions that applied for Dimensions recognition were successful. Four received recognition at the Foundation stage and six at the Construction stage. It was expected that institutions would receive an early-stage of recognition as this is a new program and many institutions are still learning about how to engage in EDI-related activities. It also reflects the need for sustained effort to fully integrate EDI into the culture (i.e., ways of knowing and ways of doing) of Canadian post-secondary institutions. Institutions that received the Dimensions Recognition were very proud of their achievement and developed various media communications to share their accomplishments with their communities and the other institutions. This developed a sense of pride and belonging for holding the Dimensions Recognition,

Findings: Shifting Culture

In addition to time, institutional culture shifts take leadership, effort, as well as financial and human resources.

The importance of leadership was stressed by many institutional representatives and some stakeholders as setting the tone for institution-wide EDI efforts. It particular, leaders must be aware of the need for specific, measurable actions towards EDI, and willing to make the necessary commitment to bring about change. This commitment then needs to be translated into resources to allow for the dedication of time and effort by institutions to engage in activities that support EDI and will eventually bring about a deeper cultural shift within the Canadian research ecosystem.

Institutions need resources to do EDI work and shift culture. Institutional representatives, especially among colleges and small universities that participated in the case studies, discussed the need for resources and capacity to implement EDI-related initiatives. In the case studies, institutional representatives spoke about the fact that staff working on EDI-related projects were stretched thin because of their many responsibilities and that without the proper resourcing EDI work may end up sitting on the side of people's desks. Some of these institutional representatives and stakeholders also noted that while some institutions created positions related to EDI they were often at the office or

management position and there remained a lack of senior management positions (e.g., Associate Vice-President or Vice-President) dedicated to EDI. It was felt that this level of leadership dedicated to advancing EDI was crucial to achieve the goal for shifting the culture within institutions. As noted by one institutional representative, *"there should be an associate vice president that focuses only on EDI. This would demonstrate commitment... and take pressure off the other senior leadership members to always remind one another of the EDI focus."*

Several of the colleges and small universities that in the case studies also spoke about the importance of having EDICap funding as it enabled these institutions to do EDI work that they otherwise would not have had sufficient financial resources to undertake. As one representative noted, *"It will be challenging to continue [EDI] initiatives when the grant is over because we do not have the resources internally."* Other institutions described a synergy between the EDICap and Dimensions initiatives, and a need for both programs to continue. *"The two programs were needed and were beneficial; I hope they continue into the future." – Institutional Rep*

Because the colleges and small universities that participated in Dimensions generally relied on grant funding for one or more of their EDI-related positions, some of the positions offered were temporary. This presented another challenge for these institutions as they noted that there was fierce competition within the post-secondary research ecosystem for individuals with expertise in EDI. Consequently, these individuals were sought after and often chose permanent positions over temporary or contract positions. One institutional representative described the challenges their institution experienced when trying to hire someone who could take on EDI work: *"We went through three different hiring processes to get someone; it was very difficult.... We are still looking for another EDI role."* Findings from the evaluation suggest that larger institutions may not experience as many challenges finding and keeping staff to support their EDI-related activities. Some institutional representatives who noted that without proper resources, efforts to advance EDI within their respective institutions will be limited. These findings are supported by findings from the 2019 Universities Canada Survey that stated that institutions are expected to experience challenges addressing EDI barriers without sufficient staff to do the required work.

There are opportunities for the Tri-agency to continue to facilitate EDI change across the Canadian research ecosystem.

Almost all institutional representatives and stakeholders spoke about the importance of maintaining and strengthening exchanges between institutions and between institutions and the Tri-agency. They also expressed strong support for the Tri-agency to facilitate the EDI change. One suggestion made by many institutional representatives that participated in the initial cohort was the creation of a formal Community of Practice to continue the dialogue established with the co-development process and to seek and share ideas, learnings, and ongoing support to generate institutional change. They suggested that this community could be managed the Dimensions program on behalf of the Tri-agency. This community of practice could also extend to other post-secondary institutions engaging in efforts to support EDI.

"Dimensions is potentially transformative for Canadian postsecondary education because it embeds EDI in fundamental ways into research culture." – Institutional Rep

Several institutional representatives also said that NSERC and specifically the Dimensions program, provides a reliable reference point for questions about EDI, which is especially important as issues of EDI are continually evolving. Post-secondary Institutions are looking to NSERC to provide ongoing updates to the EDI tools developed through Dimensions and to continue to refine those tools to address potential future issues and shifts in the research ecosystem in relation to EDI.

Dimensions provides a guiding framework for institutions to act on clearly outlined EDI principles. The program also emphasizes that the institutions needed to know their environment first (collection of data and environmental scan) to plan appropriate and targeted actions. Dimensions also has the weight of a government-led initiative, which helped with leadership buy-in at the institutional level. It was noted by some institutional representatives and stakeholders that failure to formalize Dimensions into a continuing program, could have a negative impact on the moral of the initial cohort and affiliate institutions as it may undermine the time and effort already dedicated to the program and dampen their motivation to continue advancing EDI.

Findings: Efficiency

The Dimensions program was delivered efficiently with respect to administrative and non-monetary costs.

The Dimensions program had an annual budget of $1M over 5 years, for a total budget of $5M. It must be underlined that the Dimensions program is not a grants program since it did not provide direct funding to the participating institutions. Consequently, the program's efficiency cannot be assessed with the traditional approach of calculating its operating ration (i.e., the cost of administering the program for every dollar of grant funds spent).

During the first five years of the program, a team of an annual average of three full-time equivalent NSERC employees engaged in a number of activities to support the design and implementation of the Dimensions program. Throughout the program, they conducted approximately 70 information sessions and conference presentations with post-secondary institutions across Canada to create awareness about the Dimensions program and understand current and future interest in participating in the program. The NSERC team also conducted approximately 44 working group meetings and collaborative workshops with the 17 institutions participating in the initial cohort as part of the co-development process. These workshops and working group meetings focused on understanding and developing key requirements and materials of the Dimensions program (e.g., self-assessment activities, data collection, action plan development, Dimensions Handbook). At the end of the cycle for the initial cohort, the NSERC team recruited members for the recognition selection committee and facilitated the review of the institutional applications for Dimensions recognition. NSERC also hosted two sets of virtual meetings for the recognition process.

Dimensions was initiated as a "made-in-Canada Athena SWAN" that was attached to a sole source trademark agreement and a service contract with Advance HE with dedicated annual funds. However, the addition of four equity-deserving groups for Dimensions, the inclusion of colleges and the COVID-19 pandemic limited the extent to which the Advance HE team was able to support the development and implementation of the Dimensions program. Consequently, the NSERC team was required to play a bigger role and the contract funds were not fully utilized.

In addition to the salaries for dedicated NSERC staff and management to support the design and implementation of Dimensions, the program budget was primarily spent on the following activities[22]:

- Licencing fees for the right to use the Athena SWAN material and name.
- Professional services from Advance HE, including bi-weekly meetings, as well as presentations and workshops on various EDI-related topics with institutions participating in the initial cohort.
- Interpretation services for various presentations
- Interpretation services for review committee meetings
- Translation and editing services of various materials including the Dimensions Handbook.
- Professional services for a graphic designer for the Dimensions Handbook.
- Small stipends for members of the recognition review committee.
- Conferences related specific EDI topics and/or developments in the Canadian research ecosystem.

When considering the efficiency of the Dimensions program, it is important to recognize the significant amount of time invested and volunteered by members of the recognition review committee, as well as the resources invested by the initial cohort institutions to be able to participate in the program's co-development, to comply with program requirements and to seek recognition. Almost all institutional representatives and stakeholders that participated in the evaluation highlighted the fact that the 17 institutions from the initial cohort invested considerable financial and human resources to fulfill program requirements. Some of the institutions invested dedicated resources while others offered their staffs' volunteer time to participate to the co-development and recognition processes. While Dimensions provided the drive for participating institutions to mobilize their resources in support of EDI, there was no funding provided from the Tri-agency. However, some of the colleges and small universities received EDICap funding, which helped to supplement and support their work for Dimensions.

When considering the volume and work conducted program stakeholders and the results of the Dimensions program in relation to its administrative and non-monetary costs, it appears that the program was delivered efficiently.

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[22] NB: This is not an exhaustive list of expenses but highlights the key areas of spending.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the evidence collected through the evaluation of the Dimensions program. As Dimensions was a five-year pilot program, the recommendations are framed in a manner that considers how the program could provide ongoing support to the post-secondary research ecosystem if it were to continue, and what could be done with the information learned and materials developed if the program does not continue.

Recommendation 1: Share the learnings from Dimensions and position the program to be the driver and connector of EDI initiatives across the Tri-agency.

The evaluation found the value, relevance, and effectiveness of the Dimensions program as a driver for advancing EDI within and across Canadian post-secondary institutions. Based on the evaluation findings, it is recommended that the learnings from the pilot and the Dimensions program, if it continues, are leveraged across the Tri-agency to connect, and support the various EDI initiatives related to individual grants or broader agency strategic priorities. By focusing on institution-wide transformation to support the advancement of EDI, the Dimensions program and the learnings generated through the program could be positioned as a framework that drives, strengthens, and streamlines EDI activities and connections across Tri-agency initiatives and grants.

By facilitating such connections and improving various EDI activities, there is an opportunity to develop a cohesive understanding and approach to EDI across the Tri-agency. To support the use of Dimensions and its learnings as a framework across the Tri-agency, NSERC (as the agency administering the Dimensions program) should consider developing a Dimensions learning and information hub where EDI-related tools, resources, and expertise are available. This hub would include program resources including the charter and Dimensions Handbook, as well as tools and resources developed for individual grants and programs and that can be shared more widely. For example, the CRCP and CFREF

are two grants that have specific EDI-related expectations for institutions; the resources and findings from Dimensions could support and inform those expectations moving forward. Additionally, programs seeking to further integrate EDI in their design and expected outcomes, such as the College and Community Innovation Program, may benefit from a better understanding of systemic barriers for equity-deserving groups and the specific activities that can help eliminate those barriers.

Recommendation 2: Create a repository of resources developed by post-secondary institutions to support the advancement of EDI within the Canadian research ecosystem.

The evaluation found that while post-secondary institutions may be interested and willing to support transformational change to advance EDI, such culture shifts take time, awareness, leadership, and resources (human, material and financial).

The Dimensions program can help institutions advance their efforts to support EDI by creating a repository of resources to help identify and eliminate systemic barriers for equity-deserving groups. It is recommended that NSERC create a repository of the resources developed by the institutions that participated in the initial cohort, which can be accessed and added to by other Canadian post-secondary institutions. This repository will enable institutions across Canada to learn from one another and may accelerate their EDI-related activities as they will not have to "start from scratch". Additionally, this repository is an opportunity to acknowledge the work and contributions of the initial 17 institutions that participated in the Dimensions program and ensure that their progress and learnings to date are valued and not lost.

Recommendation 3: Examine opportunities to revise, streamline and expand certain features of the Dimensions program to facilitate participation including moving up through the stages of recognition.

The evaluation found that post-secondary institutions valued the Dimensions program, and it accelerated many positive changes to support the recognition and elimination of systemic barriers for equity-deserving groups. While it was co-developed to reflect the variety and reality of institutions within the Canadian post-secondary research ecosystem, there remain opportunities to improve certain aspects of the program's design and delivery. This opportunity for improvement is expected given that Dimensions is a new program and has only completed one recognition process.

The co-development between NSERC and the 17 post-secondary institutions that participated in the initial cohort successfully generated several benefits including enabling an inclusive approach, generating buy in, and providing institutions with opportunities to learn from one another. If the Dimensions program continues, it is recommended that the program shifts from the co-development model to an ongoing program delivery model with the recognition process occurring at regular intervals. Additionally, there are opportunities to further support the recognition process by reviewing and refining the Dimensions Handbook for conciseness, accurate translation, and ongoing changes in language, as well as simplifying the requirements for institutions seeking recognition.

Building on recommendation #2 and the idea of a repository EDI materials, it is also recommended that NSERC (on behalf of the Tri-agency) facilitate the creation of an ongoing community of practice where post-secondary institutions can seek and share ideas, learnings, and ongoing support regrading efforts to advance EDI and generate institutional change. This community of practice could extend to all post-secondary institutions engaging in efforts to support EDI. Through this community of practice, institutions could share promising practices and learn from the experience of institutions that achieved Dimensions recognition.

Appendix A: Dimensions Initial Cohort

Institutions that applied for and received recognition

- **Mohawk College (Ontario)**
- Mount Saint Vincent University
- **Sheridan College (Ontario)**
- Toronto Metropolitan University
- Université Laval
- University of British Columbia
- University of Calgary
- University of Ottawa
- **University of Winnipeg**
- **Wilfrid Laurier University**

*Bold text denotes Dimensions participants that also received an EDICap grant.

Institutions that did not apply for recognition

- Camosun College
- Holland College
- **Lethbridge College**
- Simon Fraser University
- University of New Brunswick
- University of Saskatchewan
- **Vancouver Island University**