

BETTER TOGETHER

Cultivating Equitable and Inclusive Organizations in Ottawa

Summary Report on Phase I of Ottawa's Equity Project



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- + Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
- + City of Ottawa
- + Ottawa Carleton District School Board
- + Ottawa Public Library
- + Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre
- + University of Ottawa
- + Vanier Community Resource Centre
- + Youth Services Bureau

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 BEGINNINGS

In support of the Ottawa Immigration Strategy's (OIS) objective to develop Ottawa's integration capacity, the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) seeks to facilitate the creation of structures and relationships that will help service providers design inclusive programs, governance structures and policies to better serve immigrants and ethno-cultural minority communities.

This goal received an unexpected and much welcomed jolt of energy in the spring of 2012, when the Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC) approached OLIP with some seed funding and an idea for a project to build the capacity of local mainstream organizations to be more welcoming to immigrants. Over the next few months, together with CCHC, OLIP helped formulate the project and engaged a small project team to take it forward – *the OLIP Equity Project* was born.

“OLIP seeks to facilitate the creation of structures and relationships that will help service providers design inclusive programs, governance structures and policies to better serve immigrants and ethno-cultural minority communities.”

1.2 OBJECTIVES

Many local organizations have dedicated considerable time and resources to become more accessible to immigrants and racialized populations. Through this process, they have gained an appreciation of the multi-layered, complex, and demanding nature of equity and inclusion work.

While recent OLIP consultations revealed that challenges persist in even the most dedicated organizations, they also revealed that local organizations have accumulated valuable experience and insight over the years. Unfortunately, given the pressures and time constraints faced by all organizations, they have not had many opportunities to engage in inter-organizational learning and support.

To this end, the OLIP Equity Project offers participating organizations the opportunity to learn from each other's experience, validate one another's successes, and to receive supports for continued progress. Ultimately, the project aims to facilitate equitable access to social, health, and education services for immigrants and racialized populations by:

- + engaging a number of mainstream Ottawa organizations that have significant history in working to become more inclusive;

- + facilitating a process of reflection to identify the approaches and resources that they have found to be helpful;
- + facilitating inter-organizational learning to develop shared knowledge and strategies;
- + sharing these learnings with a broader circle of local organizations seeking to become more inclusive; and
- + facilitating the creation of a common strategy that supports on-going collective learning and systemic change.

1.3 FOCUS

The OLIP Equity Project is focused on improving the inclusion of two specific populations: Immigrants and Racialized Populations. Reflecting work in the area of diversity, inclusion and equity, the project also addresses the intersectionality of various axes of inclusion and equity, such as: race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, etc.

For the purposes of this project the question of inclusion is being examined with respect to five inter-related domains of a mainstream organization's experience:

- + **Community Connections** – the quality of an organization's relationship with its constituency, in all its diversity, including the type and depth of this relationship, and whether it permeates all aspects of the organization; Service Delivery – how organizations can identify and reduce barriers so that immigrants and racialized populations experience welcome and ease of access to services that are offered in a culturally appropriate manner;
- + **Human Resource Management** – what human resource management practices support an organization's ability to engage the expertise

and experience of immigrants and racialized populations in all areas of the organization (recruitment, retention, promotion, etc.);

- + **Governance** – how to effectively engage immigrants and racialized populations in the governance processes and decision-making of the organization; and
- + **Broader Systems** – the supports or impediments organizations experience in relation to their journey toward inclusion from the broader policy, regulatory and funding systems within which they function.

These 5 domains represent major themes that were explored throughout the interviews and dialogues. In order to stay true to the themes foregrounded by the participants in the initial phase of the project, insights gained from the process have not been organized strictly in terms of these domains. Nonetheless, a certain affinity exists between the project design domains and insight categories: Community Connections Domain, and Partnerships Insights, Human Resources Management Domain, and People and Training Insights; Governance Domain, and Policy and Governance Insights; Broader System Domain, and Contextual Considerations Insights. The Service Delivery Domain emerges here and there throughout the Insights Gained sections, but was somewhat less at the forefront of the initial phase of the project.

Finally, the project draws on two complex and interdisciplinary fields of study: Diversity, Inclusion and Equity; and Organizational Change.

Diversity Inclusion and Equity studies are central to the philosophical underpinning of the frameworks that organizations have employed in their journeys toward inclusion. Various frameworks have been developed and employed over the years. Those that

proved most salient during the first phase of the project include: Cultural Competency, Anti-Racism, Health Equity, and Anti-Oppression. These will be discussed in section 4.1 Evolution of Equity and Inclusion Work, and section 4.2 Movement toward Asset-based Approaches.

Organizational Change theory is a broad field encompassing all aspects of the organizational change process. It has evolved over the years, first focusing on organizational structures, then processes, and more recently on organizational culture. Organizational Change is addressed throughout the report, but is most directly treated in section 4.3 Evolution of Organizational Change Theory.

1.4 PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations, which have been engaged in inclusion work for some time, participated in Phase I of the project:

- + Centretown Community Health Centre
- + Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
- + City of Ottawa
- + Ottawa Carleton District School Board
- + Ottawa Public Library
- + Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre
- + University of Ottawa
- + Vanier Community Resource Centre
- + Youth Services Bureau

1.5 PROJECT ADVISORS

The following advisors, each of whom possesses extensive experience in the area of equity and inclusion, were engaged to help guide the project:

- + Caroline Andrew, University of Ottawa
- + Suzanne Doerge, City for All Women Initiative (CAWI)
- + Rashmi Luther, Carleton University
- + Hamdi Mohamed, Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization
- + Rashida Youmouri, City for All Women Initiative



PROCESS

In recognition of the complexity of the issues being examined, the project was intentionally designed as an iterative process providing participants with multiple opportunities to revisit their ideas. Through this process the knowledge and insights of each organization, including their experience with various inclusion frameworks and lenses, will continue to evolve and to be refined throughout the life of the project. Phase I of the project included the following components:

2.1 CONSULTATIONS WITH ADVISORS

Project advisors provided input on how to structure the dialogues with members of the participating organizations, and on the development of an effective framework capable of guiding on-going learning processes.

2.2 CONSULTATION WITH INITIAL PARTICIPANTS

Through initial interviews, experienced members of each participating organization identified key highlights of their organizations' journey toward becoming more inclusive. Sketches of each organization's experience have been compiled in a document entitled, *Organizational Journeys toward Inclusion*, and are available on the OLIP website (olip-plio.ca)

2.3 DISCUSSION PAPER

A discussion paper outlining the project's objectives and process, documenting the findings of the initial interviews, and sketching the journey of each organization toward inclusion was then prepared. This paper was distributed to the participants in preparation for the first dialogue. A modified version of the paper entitled, *The Journey Toward Inclusion*, is available on the OLIP website.

2.4 INITIAL PARTICIPANT DIALOGUES

Between August 2012 and April 2013, four dialogues were held with the initial participants. Throughout these dialogues, participants were invited to move beyond careful, guarded, and polite conversations in order to share the full breadth of their organizations' journey, including the challenges and setbacks that they have experienced. In order to make such an open discussion possible, the dialogues were held under the Chatham House Rule, which states that:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed¹.

The specific content of the dialogues will accordingly not be made public. Rather, the insights gained throughout Phase I of the project, including the rich and valuable content that emerged from the dialogues, are summarized in this report.

1. When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.



KEY FACTORS AFFECTING OUTCOMES

Throughout the initial phase of the project, several themes, ideas, factors of success, and challenges repeatedly came to the forefront. Many emerged in the initial interviews and first participant dialogue, and then were revisited and discussed at length during the subsequent dialogues. From this process key insights into inclusion work and organizational experiences emerged – these are presented here.

The factors discussed in the section emerged as key elements in the process of organizational change toward becoming more inclusive of immigrant and racialized populations. They have been organized in five categories: Contextual Factors; Policy and Governance; People and Training; Partnerships, and Celebration.

3.1 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Reflecting the fundamental importance of context in this type of work, contextual factors consist of variables over which individual organizations have no control, but which are of major importance in organizations' journeys towards inclusivity. Contextual factors often influence other factors, facilitating or hindering given strategies. Perhaps the clearest insight gained thus far is that the process of change is highly political, complex, dynamic, continuous, non-linear,

and is never truly over. Once planted, the seeds of inclusion must be cultivated and nourished, and change agents must remain responsive to an ever changing and sometimes unfavourable environment.

3.1.1 EXTERNAL CONTEXT:

The external context refers to all the factors that are found in the broader context within which organizations operate, such as the political climate, the policy environment, the funding regimes, the economy, as well as changing demographic trends, public attitudes, and media leanings.

a. Political Climate, Policy Environment, and Funding Regimes

The political climate has a vital impact in facilitating organizational change toward inclusion. When federal, provincial, and/or municipal governments lead the way with the adoption of equity and inclusion promoting principles as part of their core mandate, they trigger a chain reaction of positive change enabling factors. Clear policy commitments and supportive funding regimes can be very effective in promoting, directing, and sustaining change processes. The adoption of the CAWI Equity and Inclusion Lens by the City of Ottawa, the adoption of the Anti-oppression framework by the Ontario

Association of Children's Aid Societies, and Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy adopted by local school boards stand out as powerful recent examples. Alternately, when political leadership is lacking, or when the political climate is unfavourable, efforts toward greater inclusion within organizations and communities at large tend to suffer.

The 1980s were an especially vibrant period for equity and inclusion work. The Ontario Human Rights Commission's Race Relations Division, established in 1979, was actively working with communities, including Ottawa, to promote organizational change. It did this by working jointly with ethno-cultural communities and institutional sectors, such as school boards, police forces, health and social service agencies, the media, unions and employers, among others. It also worked actively with other provincial Ministries such as Education, Social Services, Housing and the Attorney General, encouraging them to develop policies promoting "race relations" with their respective constituencies. At the community sector, concerned individuals were increasingly coming together to establish groups that demand equality and equity measures through legislative changes, policies, programs and public education. Two milestone reports, Equality Now! Report of the Special Committee on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society (1984), and Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report (1985) are products of this vibrant period of community activism and advocacy. The governments of the time were relatively open and responsive to community advocacy.

"What appears to have been policy driven [...] was actually the result of community pressure. Policy changes did not just miraculously appear on their own; there was enormous community pressure challenging the segregation of

newcomers [...]. There was an enormous amount of groundswell and an enormous amount of criticism around racism. The policy developed in response."

Over the past decade meaningful change processes have been hampered by diminishing support for advocacy work. Tax legislation has severely limited the advocacy functions open to charitable organizations, leading to a marked decline in advocacy activities and awareness campaigns promoting equity and inclusion.

"People do not feel comfortable causing a ruckus anymore. Funders discourage any kind of advocacy and people are just trying not to get shut down."

"Faith groups have been quiet with fear. Part of the work that needs to be done is figuring out how to nurture grassroots groups so that they can speak out."

Fearing funder reprisals if they were to be perceived as engaging in advocacy, organizations have also grown reluctant to openly speak out about contentious issues. The support and engagement of allies to take up advocacy functions is of critical importance in the current context.

Finally, the growing necessity of showing measurable results in short periods of time has challenged organizations to find creative ways of integrating evidence-based tools and indicators. While these can be useful in some respects, meaningful systemic change tends to be longer term in nature, requiring a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, and participatory community-based research processes.

b. Demographic Change and Community Pressure

Demographic change in terms of the ethno-cultural make-up of communities places pressure on organizations to adapt to changing needs and to better reflect the communities that they serve.

"We got involved because the Board of Directors saw the environment changing and realized that they had to reduce the barriers to services for the people they serve, as well as the barriers to entry for the people they employ."

Demographic change is most likely to lead to effective organizational change when it is accompanied by sustained and organized community pressure.

"There is only so much that can be done from the inside without pressure from the outside. In the absence of pressure from the outside, internal advocates can quickly become marginalized."

Top-down mandated policy directives are best understood as products of broader historical contexts, including active community-based advocacy by different constituency groups. For the most part, past experiences indicate that progressive social policy changes, especially around issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, rarely occur without organized and concerted community pressure.

c. Public Attitudes and the Media

Public attitudes can have a significant influence on the willingness of federal, provincial, and municipal governments to support organizational change toward inclusion. Unfortunately, over the past decade equity and inclusion related issues have been experiencing considerable backlash from a significant portion of the population. Unfavourable public attitudes

are compounded when they find voice in mass media, which have played their part in bolstering an exclusionary political culture. In this challenging context, the successful identification of advocates who speak loud and clear, at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels is of vital importance.

3.1.2 INTERNAL CONTEXT

Internal contextual factors refer to fixed characteristics of organizations. These factors have a significant impact in shaping the avenues for change that are open organizations.

a. Size of the Organization

The size of an organization is clearly a major factor in any kind of organizational change. Large organizations with several thousand employees, multiple locations and decentralized functions face significant challenges implementing organization-wide change processes and the strategies and approaches required differ from those that work in smaller organizations. In smaller organizations much change can be achieved and reinforced through informal, relationship-based approaches while in larger organizations there is much more reliance on formal processes and structures. Improving inclusion through formal processes and structures is especially challenging. Major changes can have unintended consequences, improving the inclusion of some, while deepening the exclusion of others. This challenge is further aggravated by the fact that changes take a long time to implement, and once implemented are difficult to modify. For these reasons, change in larger organizations may require considerably more time and resources.

b. Labour Environment

Unionized workplaces yield particular opportunities and challenges for advancing issues of equity

and inclusion. Unions provide existing employees with many benefits and protections which can be leveraged to achieve greater equity and inclusion. For those organizations seeking to diversify their workforce, however, some collective bargaining provisions, such as seniority clauses, can represent serious impediments.

Paradoxically, seniority provisions are simultaneously a reward and an obstacle. Those who benefit most from its rewards and protections are often European origin individuals who make up the majority of the membership. Conversely, those most disadvantaged are immigrants and racialized individuals who face systemic barriers related to hiring and selection. Given this reality, change agents in large unionized institutions are working with existing employees to better meet the needs of their changing communities, and working with the unions to find creative ways of increasing workforce diversity.

3.2 POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Policy and governance factors include elements over which the leadership of an organization has some control. Changes can often be made to such factors in a top-down, controlled fashion.

3.2.1 ADOPTION OF FORMAL POLICY

Organizations can adopt formal policies to promote greater inclusion as part of their core mandates and/or integrate organizational change toward inclusion as part of their strategic planning. Formal policy commitments originating within organizations are essential to provide clarity of direction to the change process.

3.2.2 ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Formal policies promoting inclusion are most effective when accompanied by on-going monitoring and accountability mechanisms, such as formal third-party evaluations, internal assessments, and annual reporting on key measures of change. Such mechanisms emphasize the long-term nature of organizational change, provide opportunities to celebrate milestones, help to identify gaps and weaknesses in the change process, and serve as a reminder of the work that remains to be done. On-going monitoring and accountability mechanisms are vital to effective policy implementation, as they build legitimacy and credibility for institutional change journeys and help to raise organizational awareness about inclusion and equity issues.

3.2.3 DEDICATION OF RESOURCES

On-going, dedicated resources are critical to effective organizational change. Without adequate resources, organizational journeys toward inclusion will not move forward. While funders often provide supportive policy direction this is seldom matched with funding to support the time required for the necessary program and organizational development work. Organizations must make available the time needed for the conversations, training, planning and evaluation in order to sustain this process.

3.2.4 WORKFORCE DIVERSIFICATION

Workforce diversification is absolutely essential to long-term and enduring organizational change toward inclusion. While numerically representative and diverse workforces do not always yield more equitable and inclusive workplace cultures and practices, especially when based on hiring those who

are most compatible with existing organizational cultures, when done properly, it has powerful transformative potential. When combined with a commitment to increasing diversity of thought and to valuing people's diverse experiences and insights into their respective communities, including different approaches to service delivery, workforce diversification becomes a powerful means of improving equity and inclusion. This strategy is most effective once diversity permeates every strata of an organization, from the Board of Directors to senior staff, and from technical and front line staff to the volunteers.

"If you want transformation, you have to hire from the communities that you wish to serve."

"Having people from diverse communities around the hiring table is really important."

Even when the workplace context is amenable, however, workforce diversification policies can be difficult to implement as they are sometimes met with hostility. There is a common perception that there must necessarily be a trade-off between competence on the one hand, and diversity on the other. There is a fear that diversification policies will lead to a general lowering of standards. Diversification policies are also sometimes vehemently opposed by existing employees who fear that doubt could be cast on their own competence and merit. As all levels of the workforce become more diverse, efforts toward more equitable hiring practices begin to happen more organically, but initial decisions to diversify staff generally require solid leadership commitment. One way to overcome such resistance is to focus on gaps in the qualifications and skills of existing staff within an organization to better serve its changing community. Language skills, cultural competency, intimate

knowledge of a given community and of its networks can be a good starting point.

Finally, in terms of age diversity, it is often assumed that younger people are more familiar with the context and reality of diversity, but youth sometimes lack substantive experience of diversity within their own lives. Overall, while diversity of representation is essential, employees approach to diversity, their comfort level with difference, and their sensitivity to issues of marginalization are more important than generational differences. While some have a special aptitude for working in diverse environments and being inclusive, these are skills which are honed by experience.

3.2.5 LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Journeys toward inclusion represent long-term commitments of staff and resources. While changes to formal policies, the adoption of accountability mechanisms, and the hiring of new staff members can be achieved relatively quickly and easily, changing organizational cultures and community perceptions requires true intent and commitment, and can take a long time to achieve. Moreover, given the ever changing external context within which organizations operate, the journey toward inclusion is fraught with setbacks, and is never truly complete.

3.3 PEOPLE AND TRAINING

There is a tendency among organizations and individuals committed to change to want to change the big picture by implementing change from the Board down. Yet experience dictates that changes to governance structures and policies alone are unlikely to bring about substantive change. In order to succeed, the journey toward inclusion needs to be supported by dedicated leaders, change agents,

and allies within the organization. Change processes can be stimulated, but they must also be allowed to happen organically, permeating throughout the organization and changing individual relationships and interactions until the very culture of the organization changes.

3.3.1 SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP AND CHAMPIONS

Strong leadership is very important in the process of organizational change. Commitment from the Board, Directors and other organizational leaders signals a clear shift in organizational philosophies and provides direction to the staff and volunteers. It is crucial to enabling and sustaining work toward equity and inclusion, and in responding to potential public backlash and media scrutiny. Support from the Board and other organizational leaders is not a given, however, and care must be taken to inform the Board about the framework being proposed, the rationales for its introductions, and its organizational benefits. It may take some time to gain Board and leadership support, but this is a very important step in the process. Without real buy-in, the process of change will suffer. Given the long term-nature of this work, succession planning is crucial to ensuring the process of change is carried forward when new Board members and directors arrive.

3.3.2 CREATION OF STAFF POSITIONS DEDICATED TO EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Of central importance to the process change is the creation of staffing positions that are fully or partially dedicated to an organization's work toward inclusion and equity. While this is more common in larger organizations, medium-sized and smaller organizations can designate specific responsibilities

and time allocations for specific positions to support this change process.

A central challenge for these dedicated change specialists lies in ensuring that their position functions as a supportive resource to the many other managers and employees that need to take responsibility for change. Key to their success is their ability to relate with people on a human level and to build trusting relationships throughout the organization.

"We need to find ways of seducing, encouraging and engaging people to walk with us in doing this work. We need to invest time in finding the people who will be our allies. Finding allies within the organization is absolutely crucial."

Their location within an organization's structure can also have a significant impact on their effectiveness, as they typically work across departments and benefit from being identified with the organization's senior manager rather than any one department such as human resources.

It is critical that this important organizational priority is not left to them alone to achieve. Those who are attracted to this type of work are often driven and passionate individuals who are truly committed to the process of change. They are asked to take on very sensitive issues and to perform many roles every day. Their work can elicit fear, resistance, and hostility in their colleagues. If they are left isolated and unsupported, the process will suffer and the work will likely take a personal toll on the agent.

Asked to do so much, change agents are left with very little time for reflection. They have few opportunities to engage in insightful conversations with

others engaged in similar issues and situations, and to learn from others' experiences. This is a critical gap. Accordingly, more spaces for energizing and empowering conversations, creative problem solving, and critical reflection appear to be vital for supporting equity and inclusion work, as well as for sustaining the energy and creativity of its practitioners.

3.3.3 SHARING RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Work toward inclusion can easily become associated with particular individuals within an organization making it difficult to effectively integrate the work and its responsibilities into all aspects of institutional culture. Yet, the change process is really everyone's responsibility, meaning that ideally everyone should take ownership of the process, and be held to some level of accountability. When responsibilities get relegated to a person or a committee, the individuals and issues can also become isolated in turn. Finding ways of sharing responsibilities helps break down this isolation and helps to harness people's different perspectives, talents, creativities, and networks, while also surfacing points of tension and disagreement for more open discussion. Sharing responsibility for the process of change helps to integrate equity into the organizational mainstream rather than letting it reside in the margins as a token. It is a true sign of progress when people begin to take ownership over the process.

3.3.4 STAFF TRAINING

Effective staff training is a key factor of success in an organization's journey toward inclusion. Training workshops are a necessary component for gaining staff buy-in and developing broad commitment to share responsibility in the process. Workshops are an invaluable tool for addressing underlying tensions and for maintaining and deepening trust among staff.

a. Formal Staff Training

Formal staff training supports staff in adapting to changing organizational policies and priorities. It is most effective when it is on-going and regular, and it is most likely to be received positively when it is provided as a way of facilitating and improving the work that staff is already doing. When it is perceived as representing ever changing policy and philosophical directions, training can quickly lead to change fatigue and to rejection by the staff. The content of staff training should be responsive to staff and organizational needs, evolving as organizations move deeper into the journey toward inclusion.

A key factor to successful training is that it be delivered by individuals who are credible and skilled in both process and content. Training workshops provide rare opportunities for airing fears and anxieties and for saying things that may be "politically incorrect". Skilled trainers try to elicit these concerns so they can be addressed in the open. Workshops where everyone is in agreement or engaged in self-censorship fail to move the process forward.

b. Informal Staff Socialization

For smaller organizations in particular, informal, person-to-person, relationship based strategies can be simple and effective means of increasing trust and comfort between ethno-culturally diverse staff, as well as between staff and the communities they serve. Providing informal opportunities for staff to socialize together, such as shared meals, music and social activities can help to lessen defensiveness in the face of intercultural blind spots and assumptions, create a learning environment, and build an increasingly inclusive organizational culture.

"People were expressing the need to do things differently and suggested a multicultural lunchtime potluck. As little as that is, it has brought along a sense of family within the organization.... Giving people an opportunity to know each other, to laugh together, to learn about each other's cultures and practices, to share and educate one another. This can make a big difference."

Such informal, uncontrolled, organic exchanges facilitate the learning of inclusion as a practice, rather than simply as matter of policy. As members of the staff learn to relate to one another, the barriers that separate them begin to crumble, they begin to question their preconceptions, and they gain a more nuanced understanding and appreciation for others. Once trust has been developed within an organization, honest and open conversations about the issues of barriers to inclusion begin to take place within the context of real relationships, which can ease difficulties and resistance. This creates a more inclusive and welcoming organizational culture, and yields organizations that are better able to meet the needs of the diverse communities they serve.

3.3.5 INCREASING SYNERGY OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

As organizations begin to achieve a workforce that reflects the community that they serve, the recognition of various barriers happens much more quickly, and the desired changes in service delivery happen much more organically and rapidly.

"Inclusion becomes more organic; the lens becomes natural and no longer needs to be imposed."

"There is a certain connection with the community, a trust that has been built over the years, so that outreach to diverse communities happens naturally....There was a conscious effort to hire a diverse workforce and it slowly began to happen more naturally as the staff became more diverse...."

3.4 PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with immigrant organizations and diverse ethno-cultural communities are essential to the process of organizational change.

3.4.1 PARTNERSHIPS WITH IMMIGRANT ORGANIZATIONS

Partnerships with organizations representing immigrants and/or racialized populations offer invaluable insight into the challenges and barriers faced by newcomers and immigrant communities, and help organizations to identify and to address issues related to workforce diversification. These partnerships also help to increase awareness and understanding in the development of inclusive organizational cultures and of culturally appropriate services.

3.4.2 CREATION OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Building and sustaining strong organizational relationships with diverse constituent communities is another vital component of the journey toward inclusion. Developing and nurturing these relationships requires time, as well as a willingness to do continual outreach, and to respectfully and meaningfully engage diverse communities as equal partners. Once established, these relationships provide concrete evidence of the progress made by an organization, facilitate service delivery, and reinforce

organizations' commitment to the communities they serve.

3.5 CELEBRATION!

Last but not least, celebration is vital to successful organizational change over the long-term. Organizational journeys toward inclusion involve working through layers of awareness, resistance and forward movement. Barriers are recognized and addressed, only to find deeper layers of unintended exclusion at play. It is therefore essential that the organization and its leadership celebrate milestones along the way.

Victories large and small can be lost in the face of having to continuously adapt to changing needs, of knowing the road that lies ahead, and of seeing the mountains that still need to be climbed. This makes it all the more important that organizations make the time to take stock and to celebrate. Celebrations help infuse some joy in the journey. They also help to maintain motivation and hope, for leaders, change agents, staff, and most importantly for the communities that the organizations serve.



GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON FRAMEWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PRACTICE

4.1 EVOLUTION OF EQUITY AND INCLUSION WORK

The equity and diversity field has changed significantly over time. Initially, there was a greater focus on developing initiatives that targeted one specific excluded group at a time. This single issue approach was followed by an incremental or additive model that began to include other excluded groups and to develop initiatives accordingly.

The additive approach was critiqued for its tendency to engage with excluded groups and their issues as if they existed in discrete silos. Moreover, the ever changing make-up of groups and issues being prioritized often led to frustration and perceptions of loss when earlier issues remain unresolved and inadequately addressed. With the addition of new groups and priorities, without corresponding increases in human and financial resources, equity and inclusion becomes a more competitive terrain for already scarce and dwindling organizational resources. This

climate can quickly lead to hostility and resistance to change.

Based on earlier critiques of these models, and their limitations in analysing the common threads between the root causes of the different forms of exclusion, the current preference is toward the adoption of an intersectional lens in developing initiatives around equity and inclusion. Intersectional lenses address the cross-cutting nature of many axes of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, accent, age, religion, ability, etc.

"This strategy also helped to break down the resistance, by creating certain solidarity among excluded groups because everyone can feel that they are being included."

Intersectional lenses are appreciated for the opportunities they present to engage resistant colleagues in conversations about the multiple and complex connections between different equity categories and

issues. Most people have experienced some forms of exclusion and privilege. Inviting people to reflect on the forms of exclusion that they have experienced creates a propitious climate for a discussion about privilege. Such conversations concurrently increase understanding while minimizing resistance to change.

While intersectional lenses have considerable merit, they are very challenging to implement, as they require much time-consuming individual internal work, in organizations which already face serious time and resource constraints. Moreover, while such work can be guided and encouraged, it cannot be forced, and progress can be difficult to assess. Another concern is that because there is a tendency to generalize experiences, the lens may hamper attempts to address some of the historic and structural specificities of different groups and communities. Equally problematic is that the more contentious issues, particularly racism, may be relegated to the margins or ignored all together. This is of particular concern because most of the newcomer communities are currently also “visible minorities”. As such, they are vulnerable to racialized exclusion and marginalization.

*The ‘R’ word

“With an intersectional approach, the worry becomes that the more difficult to address ‘isms’, such as ‘racism’, will be ignored in favour of the less contentious ‘isms’....Why is it that Canadians have become so reluctant to discuss racism? People become really uptight around discussions of white privilege.”

Addressing issues of race, racism, racialization tends to provoke the most tensions and resistance in the work toward equity and inclusion. For example,

there is a common tendency for people to confuse discussions of racism and privilege with fears that they will be labelled a “racist”. This erroneous association functions to divert attention away from the structural/systemic nature of the issues and rearticulates them as acts of a few misinformed individuals who can be educated or made to behave better through punitive mechanisms. Intersectional analyses can make it very easy to avoid discussions about racism altogether. Conversely, approaches that seek to engage with the issue of racism directly are often met with hostility and resistance.

4.2 MOVEMENT TOWARD ASSET-BASED APPROACHES

Talking about all the “problems” of marginalization, exclusion, inequity, discrimination, etc., tends to reinforce an understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion as problems, or societal burdens that have to be addressed and dismantled. This emphasis can obscure the positive aspects of equity and inclusion, such as the value and benefits they bring to organizations, communities, and society. Reframing the issues in a more balanced light, including recognizing that individuals and communities, categorized as “equity” groups, are people with diverse assets (knowledge, skills and experiences) to contribute gives new life and meaning to the work. This reframing also includes repositioning equity work away from its association primarily with “problems” toward one where it is recognized as an invaluable “opportunity”. From this perspective, equity and diversity are recognized as strengths and organizational assets.

Informed by Black feminism, community development, and diversity as good business practice, this movement toward asset based thinking is growing. It is based on a belief that diversity offers strengths and opportunities in that the different knowledge,

experience, insights and solutions people offer are considered as assets to be tapped and leveraged. In this light, the problem becomes the failure to recognize the value of diversity, rather than diversity itself.

Over the past 10-15 years there has been a growing awareness in the field of organizational change that the traditional problem-solving approach often achieves unintended negative outcomes. A growing body of research indicates that asset-based methodologies such as Appreciative Inquiry achieve significantly improved outcomes. A superficial critique of these methodologies can suggest that they avoid the ‘problems’ but when applied properly they do not shy away from identifying and addressing ‘problems’ but address them from a very different starting point and strategy.

In essence, the idea is not about representation for the sake of representation, but about how to leverage the knowledge and the skills that people have. There is a shift toward understanding that individual skills and experiences can add value and can contribute to the growth of organizations. This is where diversity really dances.

“If there are 6 people around a table and they all have the same perspective, 5 of them are irrelevant.”

4.3 EVOLUTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE THEORY

While different approaches have evolved to help integrate equity and inclusion into the consciousness and cultures of organizations, their effectiveness has been unevenly spread. Some positive developments have been made in the areas of policy, awareness raising, and community outreach, but progress

in the areas of organizational culture and practices has been more difficult. Organizational change practitioners have devoted much time to understanding how organizations withstand and resist changes to their organizational culture and traditions, and how to help them change.

Over the past 50 years there have been significant changes in how organizational change is studied, perceived, and understood. Initially understood in fairly linear and mechanistic terms, emphasis was placed on changing organizational structures. The levers for change were the definition of positions (roles, responsibilities) and reporting relationships. The classic organizational chart was the instrument used to both communicate and implement change. Proponents of this approach hold that senior management can decide on changes to be made, issue directives, train staff, and expect change to happen consistently across the organization.

By the 1950s the limits of this approach were recognized and a second generation of organizational change practice emerged, which focused on organizational processes. Total Quality Management, Business Process Reengineering and numerous other methods all used an approach that understood organizations primarily as processes with organizational structures being changed as a secondary strategy to support effective process design. This approach enabled organizations to achieve significant improvements in the quality of their work and the satisfaction of their employees. It also utilized a far less mechanistic approach to organizational change that achieved much better outcomes incorporating a better understanding of the human dynamics of change.

Over the past thirty years a third generation of organizational change practice emerged that recognized the overriding power of organizational culture. Proponents of this approach understand organizations as complex human systems, and recognize the essential importance of relationships as the foundation of organizations and the key point of leverage for organizational change. There is a growing body of practice that demonstrates that consciously cultivating the desired organizational culture is the most effective way to achieve desired change within an organization – a view that emerged repeatedly during the OLIP Equity Project dialogues.

Building a healthy organizational culture is essential in the process of organizational change toward inclusion. Emphasizing organizational culture results in organizational practices that focus on fostering healthy respectful relationships between people. This latest approach to organizational change has a clear affinity with current equity and inclusion models that emphasize intersectionality, individual work and practice, and relationship-based approaches to fostering nuanced understanding and inclusion.



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FRAMEWORK SPECIFIC INSIGHTS

Organizations have chosen a variety of frameworks to advance equity and inclusion over the years. These include frameworks known as Cultural Competency, Anti-Racism, Health Equity, and Anti-Oppression. The decision to adopt a particular framework is often a political one. It can be influenced by the comfort level of the leadership, the culture of the organization, the perceived receptivity of staff members, external policy direction, and/or pressures from constituent communities.

Each framework has its own strengths and limitations, and partially based on these, agencies may make a conscious decision to shift from one framework to another over time. While different organizations may apply the same framework, these will interact with the external and internal context of a given organization, as well as with the other factors discussed above, and will therefore look and function very differently from one organization to the next.

5.1 CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The cultural competency framework promotes equity and inclusion through cultural knowledge, awareness, and competency. Under this framework, staff is trained to become competent in others' culture and organizations strive to offer services in ways that are deemed to be appropriate for particular cultures.

The framework helps to begin polite conversations around issues of inclusion and to engage in some

preliminary work on issues pertaining to immigrants and racialized populations. This framework tends to encounter relatively little resistance, as it offers employees a generally welcomed opportunity of gaining additional skills and competencies.

Overall, while the framework can help to improve cultural understanding, it does not provide the tools to name and to remove barriers to equity and inclusion, as issues of privilege and power fall outside of the framework's intended scope.

"The premise of the framework is that if one just understands the situation and responds in a culturally competent way, the issue will be resolved the framework fails to address power imbalances."

The framework makes it particularly difficult for immigrants and racialized groups to name racism, as it tends to be reframed as cultural misunderstanding. What is more, it tends to focus on the more 'exotic' aspects of cultural differences, promoting generalizations about cultures, people, and experiences, thereby rendering unhelpful generic solutions to complex issues and experiences. In the end, the framework celebrates cultural diversity, but fails to counter privilege and to change dynamics created by power imbalances.

5.2 ANTI-RACISM

The anti-racism framework identifies racism as a clear and pervasive ideology of exclusion of racialized populations, seeks to counter racist ideology, and strives to identify and to dismantle systemic and structural barriers to the full and equitable inclusion of racialized individuals. It is effective in enabling individuals to name racism and to have discussion around structural power, but it also tends to elicit hostility and resistance within organizations. Because it contains a significant advocacy component, and because public attitudes are unreceptive, this framework is difficult to adopt given the current context.

5.3 HEALTH EQUITY

The health equity framework seeks to address disparities in health outcome across different racial, ethnic, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic populations, by identifying and removing barriers to health care services as well as other barriers to good health. While the framework has a relatively limited focus, it effectively enables individuals and organizations to have conversations about inequitable health outcomes among given populations, to name barriers to access, to identify ways of removing these barriers, and to develop programming in order to better meet the needs of given populations. Overall, the framework creates opportunities to effectively address issues of equity and inclusion in service delivery and access to health care.

5.4 ANTI-OPPRESSION

The anti-oppression framework recognizes multiple, intersecting ideologies of exclusion and oppression, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, etc. It seeks to make explicit that these ideologies validate hierarchical relationships, reinforcing

the power and privilege of dominant groups, while marginalizing, excluding, and oppressing others. The framework seeks to counter these oppressive ideologies by making their manifestations in everyday practices visible, and by inviting individuals to become aware of their privilege and to monitor their own beliefs and practices with a view to ending their own participation in oppression. One of the core components of the anti-oppression framework is its promotion of a shift from 'power over', which is based in the practices of control and coercion, to 'power with', which is based in the practices of consensus and collaboration.

The framework effectively enables organizations and individuals to address privilege and structural power issues and has much potential to substantively move organizations forward toward greater inclusion, yet is by far the most demanding of the four frameworks.

Anti-oppression demands that individual members of the staff engage in self-reflection to become aware of their privilege, to identify their own participation in oppressive practices, and to change these practices.

"Anti-oppression is a brain practice in the sense that the more you do it, the better you get at it, but the learning is never over."

This process poses many challenges. First, the process asks staff members to be conscious of their thoughts, words, and actions all the time, and this is not easy. The staff in many organizations is generally composed of very committed individuals who perceive themselves as advocates. They are generally doing their best with limited time and resources, and asking them to acknowledge their participation in oppressive practices can be painful and destabilizing. It can evoke fears in individuals that they will be perceived

as an oppressor, leading to defensive responses, including accusations of reverse discrimination and racism. Finding the right facilitator to accompany the staff through this process is of vital importance. Getting people to internalize anti-oppression is most challenging.

Second, the personal, unstructured, and ambiguous nature of the framework can be disconcerting and exhausting. It can be especially uncomfortable for individuals who prefer the safety and security of being given clear directions about the 'right way' of doing things. Asking staff to engage in 'power with' practices while they are in clearly asymmetrical positions with the populations they serve represents a dramatic shift in the way of doing things, and without clear direction, some employees can feel overwhelmed and at a loss.

Third, the framework is not easily amenable to the development of a clear set of measures, time frames, and expected outcomes, which poses significant challenges in both the process of gaining Board approval, and of obtaining funding. Funders demand reports and evaluations based on linear measures of outcomes that are usually short term in nature. These are tough to provide, as it is difficult to measure anti-oppression progress, especially when it comes to changes in organizational culture and practices, in the short term.

Finally and perhaps most problematically in a context where most newcomer and immigrant communities are also "visible minorities", is that more contentious issues such as racism can be ignored in favour of less contentious issues. Thus, organizations seeking to improve the inclusion of racialized communities with the help of an anti-oppression framework must be

strongly committed to keeping racism at the centre of their analysis and practice.

For all these reasons, the framework can be met with firm resistance from the Board, management, and staff.



NEXT STEPS

The OLIP Equity Project Team has submitted a grant application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for Phase Two of the project. If granted funding, the core focus of the second phase of OLIP's Equity Project will be the development of a fully functioning community of practice for inclusion and equity practitioners working within mainstream institutions in Ottawa.

With the aim to promote equitable access to social, health and educational services for immigrants and racialized populations, the community of practice will:

- + provide an on-going forum for peer support and learning, in part through the coordination and facilitation of regular face-to-face meetings of the practitioner network;
- + develop and share resources to support this work, such as frameworks, best practices, tools, etc.;
- + develop online tools to support peer networking and sharing of resources, such as websites, online forums, social media, etc.;
- + identify common training and development needs and facilitate shared learning;
- + address barriers to inclusion and equity experienced in the policy frameworks and systems of participating institutions;
- + continuously reach out to other mainstream institutions to promote inclusion and equity and engage other practitioners in this field of work;
- + increasingly involve more local institutions to participate and benefit from the OLIP Equity Project;

- + promote greater community-wide awareness that overtime will create an enabling environment for institutions to progress towards real equity;
- + bridge equity and inclusion knowledge with the broader and more focused knowledge on organizational development and change management in order to gain new insights that will help participating organizations to progress more effectively in serving immigrants and minority residents.

Through these activities, the community of practice will support and strengthen the capacity of participating mainstream Ottawa organizations to adapt, innovate, collaborate and embrace more sustainable ways of working together in order to become more inclusive.

The OLIP Equity Project is designed to have a transformative impact on the practice of equity and inclusion work within Ottawa's mainstream organizations. Responding to one of the core needs identified in Phase I, it will ensure that change practitioners will no longer have to work alone on the very complex task of promoting inclusion. Practitioner will have access to a supportive network of experienced peers that will help them overcome challenges, validate good approaches, develop new learnings and share resources with each other.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources will be made available on the OLIP website:
<http://olip-plio.ca/knowledge-base/olip-research-publications/>

- + Organizational Journeys toward Inclusion
- + The Journey toward Inclusion
- + Synopsis of Frameworks, Approaches, & Toolkits

“ *Creating structures and relationships to help service providers design programs, governance structures and policies that are inclusive of immigrants and racialized minority communities* ”

**Priority 1, OLIP's Community & Institutional
Capacity Development Sector**

Ottawa Immigration Strategy

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