

Integrating EDI into Policy Development: A Framework for the University of Waterloo

Who is this resource for? This resource is for anyone engaged in policy work at the University of Waterloo: a member of a drafting or working group, those responsible for establishing policy committees, or those creating a new or amending/reviewing an existing policy.

What is this resource? This resource is part of the University's commitment to the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. It continues implementation of the Presidential Anti-Racism Task Force recommendation to review the policy management framework and existing policies through these principles. It is a dedicated resource describing how to "do" policy work through the lens of the PART principles. Throughout the document, hover-over examples illustrate key points. Linked documents provide greater depth on specific topics. A list of consultation resources is available on the webpage associated with this document. This is a starting point, not a comprehensive guide.

Why EDI Matters in Policy Work

- Policies are an opportunity to recognize and address inequity and barriers. However, policies can also create and perpetuate inequity and barriers.
- EDI is fundamental to our mission. Our core values of curiosity, excellence, integrity, respect, and courage require us to dismantle systemic barriers and ensure all community members can contribute to and benefit from our innovations.
- Policies that account for diverse experiences from the outset require fewer revisions, generate fewer complaints, and face less resistance during implementation. When policies work for those facing the greatest barriers, they work better for everyone.
- The University operates in a framework of human rights and equity legislation, for example, non-discrimination and accommodation. Policies follow these legal standards.

Imperatives for EDI in Policy-Making

Three critical stages where EDI must be embedded

Committees matter

- Committees can only solve problems they can perceive, and perception is shaped by lived experience. When perspectives are absent, their realities become invisible to the policy process. The committee embeds their own circumstances as the norm.
Example
- **Encourage diversity of perspectives**, including those that challenge and make us uncomfortable. Diversity means intersectional representation: visible diversity plus diversity of roles, career stages, disciplines, and experiences within identity groups.
- **Address power dynamics**: recognize that power dynamics operate in varied ways and change over time: they can shift across settings, operate formally and informally, and be difficult to perceive because they are layered. Identifying power dynamics requires constant analysis and reanalysis. **Examples**.
- **Ask reflective questions**: Who is this policy intended to serve? How can we encourage diversity of opinions? How might diverse community members see themselves in this policy? Do we know of barriers that exist? Who can we ask so we are not making assumptions? Whose voice is missing?

- **Request support** from the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism for guidance early in the process and consult our in-depth policy guide [\[link to consultation guide\]](#) and brief diversity metrics [\[link to equity survey\]](#). For specific data, request from [\[link to university data and statistics request form\]](#).

Assumptions and "use-case" perceptions happen in drafting

- Whether conscious or not, we imagine a use-case: a "typical" user of a policy. This mental model creates assumptions we employ when drafting policy. This opens doors for those who match our imagined user and creates obstacles for those who do not. **Example.**
- **Make your assumptions explicit** by naming your imagined "typical" user and ask: who doesn't fit this profile? Describe the problem you imagine the policy is solving. Test assumptions through consultation.
- **Ask reflective questions:** What is the policy intended to do? Whose experience is being centered throughout the policy? What barriers prevent compliance? Test these assumptions through consultation with diverse community members.
- **Request support** from the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism.

Consultations matter

- No matter how diverse our committee or thoughtful our drafting, vital perspectives will be missing. Consultation discovers whose voices we didn't know we needed.
- **Genuine engagement** means: giving adequate time to respond, asking specific questions, sharing decision-making power where possible, explaining how feedback shaped the policy, and being transparent when feedback cannot be incorporated. Performative consultation damages trust and undermines policy legitimacy. **Example.** For more, see EDI-R Office [\[link to infographic on performative consultation\]](#).
- **Recognize that data is always incomplete** and does not override what people experience. Check out EDI-R Office [\[link to infographic on bias in data\]](#). Target consultation: identify who is most affected and prioritize their input.
- **Engage with experts** for specific questions or reviews. Request support from the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism to help you find who you need.

What: Understanding EDI in Policy Context

Core definitions and frameworks

Equity is the principle of fairness that recognizes people have different needs, experiences, and barriers. It requires providing varied levels of support and resources to ensure everyone has the same opportunities to succeed. **Example**

Diversity refers to the presence of human differences within a group or organization. This includes: race, ethnicity, Indigenous identity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, socioeconomic status, nationality, language, disciplinary background, and their intersections. Avoid tokenizing. **Example**

Inclusion is the practice of creating environments where any individual or group is welcomed and valued. It requires examining and changing implicit cultural norms, unwritten procedures, and embedded practices that create "insider" and "outsider" dynamics.

Example

Intersectionality recognizes that people experience multiple identities simultaneously (e.g., a racialized woman with a disability) and that these identities interact to create unique

circumstances. This lens must inform how you think about equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout. This is crucial for data-driven policies since how you collect, disaggregate, and interpret data shapes which problems become visible and what solutions seem viable. See example. **Example**

These Concepts Matter Together

Equity, diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality are fundamentally different frameworks for understanding what fair treatment looks like and how to achieve it through policy. There are other equally important frameworks, such as anti-racism, decolonization, indigenization, reconciliation, accessibility, and justice, that offer distinct perspectives on systemic issues. Each framework asks different questions and suggests different interventions, even when addressing the same issue; some, like decolonization and indigenization, are rooted in inherent rights and community sovereignty, not institutional inclusion. **Example.**

How to Embed EDI Into Policy Work

Concrete practices for each EDI dimension

In order to contemplate EQUITY in policy-making, you:

- Explicitly prioritize addressing barriers faced by specific groups based on data, consultation, and institutional commitments
- Adjust requirements to account for different starting points and circumstances
- Build in flexible processes for alternate pathways to achieve the same outcome
- Allocate resources proportionally to need to create equity to ensure equal treatment.

Example

In order to contemplate DIVERSITY in policy-making, you:

- Ensure multiple perspectives shaped committee formation, policy drafting, and consultations
- Document diversity of opinion through deliberations or consultation summaries
- Acknowledge the "typical" user(s) you're imagining and the assumptions that shape requirements. **Example**

In order to contemplate INCLUSION in policy-making, you:

- Write in jargon-free, accessible formats and language
- Create mechanisms for ongoing feedback during development
- Build in supports for full participation rather than just access
- Consider inclusion within the committee itself. **Example**
- Resource: See communications and inclusive language guide by [\[link to university of waterloo plain and inclusive writing style guide\]](#)

In order to contemplate INTERSECTIONALITY in policy-making, you:

- Discuss how race, class, gender, ability, and other factors key to the context you are examining shape experiences and any data you are analyzing
- Discuss how a policy that works for one segment of a group may not work for all
- Acknowledge that solutions must be flexible to address overlapping barriers.

Example

Request support from the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism (EDI-R) for:

• identifying potential barriers or unintended impacts	• recommending consultation pathways and community contacts
• analyzing interest group convergence	• equity data requests
• policy text review	• [link to website]