

Embedding Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) in Research-Intensive Organizations



Webinar Report

On October 22nd, 2020, Shift Health convened an exceptional panel of leaders to discuss embedding inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) in research-intensive organizations. Over **100** people across Canada and around the world attended this virtual webinar.

You can view the video [here](#).

All organizations share a responsibility to make inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) central to their missions, but two features make research-intensive organizations unique in their aspiration to advance IDEA principles, practices and cultures.

First, research-intensive organizations are, by definition, creating knowledge and generating innovations that will define our future, and they therefore share a powerful responsibility to ensure that this future is rooted in justice.

Second, research-intensive organizations share a set of paradigms, practices and cultural touchstones that can conceal or deny the systemic prejudices and barriers they can simultaneously reinforce and propagate: merit; scientific objectivity; excellence; collegiality; reason.

We recognize that embedding IDEA in the systems, culture and practices of research-intensive organizations is a journey, not a destination—a journey that begins with listening and learning.

Research-intensive organizations are complex and can be resistant to change, and if IDEA is to be transformative and sustainable, it is incumbent on all of us to design IDEA strategies that are specific to an organization's context, history and aspirations.

*Dr. Ryan Wiley
Shift Health*



We are grateful to the expert panelists who brought unique lived experiences and deep expertise in research leadership to a conversation on what it means to embed IDEA into research-intensive environments. Facilitated by Dr. Ryan Wiley, President, Shift Health and Dr. Anne Mullin, Principal, Shift Health, the panel featured:

Dr. Imogen Coe, Founding Dean and Professor, Faculty of Science, Ryerson University

Dr. Ivan Joseph, Vice President, Student Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University

Dr. Jackie Ottmann, Vice Provost, Indigenous Engagement at University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Mahadeo Sukhai, Head of Research and Chief Accessibility Officer, Canadian National Institute for the Blind

To date, researchers have been expected to bring specific abilities, perspectives and even appearances to the job, and the tools we use to do research reflect these expectations.

What is needed to make careers in research more accessible to more people and re-imagine the tools we use to do research?



Reimagining our tools takes creativity... It is about understanding what it is we're trying to do and how it is we're trying to do it in the backdrop of different abilities and different backgrounds and different perspectives.

*Dr. Mahadeo Sukhai
CNIB*

We can enhance the accessibility of research and research careers to more people by applying inclusive design principles to the development of research cultures, tools, processes and systems. Inclusive design, as defined by the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University, requires us to consider the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference¹. We must acknowledge that there is no such thing as an average human being and that we cannot create a truly inclusive research environment through a one size fits all approach. We must also impress upon researchers the importance of considering the accessibility of research tools (e.g. surveys, study centres, sample collection) to a diverse population of participants. When we understand and accept that anybody can contribute to research—as researcher or research participant—we can identify and deconstruct the systemic barriers limiting participation in research and drive better science that is increasingly objective and reflective of reality.

Other ways of knowing—including Indigenous ways of knowing—are often, and unfairly excluded from scholarship and scientific research.

How can we work through these prejudices and uplift Indigenous ways of knowing and being in science and scholarship?

For Indigenous peoples, diversity and difference are seen as something essential for the community. Likewise, there is an opportunity for research-intensive organizations to embrace Indigenous ways of knowing—which are complex and sophisticated—as essential to discovery, knowledge creation and scholarship. Science is very much embedded and woven throughout Indigenous philosophies, values and belief systems. Indigenous

science is deeply rooted in an understanding of the powerful connection between land, the environment and people. As we recognize how fragile these connections are, Indigenous science and ways of knowing stand to strengthen the perspectives and practices of research-intensive organizations. As part of its commitment to Indigenization and decolonization, the University of Saskatchewan has empowered a task force to review and renew University standards so that colleges and departments have direction on how to change their evaluation frameworks to be inclusive of Indigenous scholarship. This is creating a need for a tremendous amount of education to clarify what constitutes Indigenous research and Indigenous methodologies and to distinguish it from community-driven research.



Research strategies have to ensure Indigenous Peoples have a place at the table, their voices are honoured and real outcomes come from their participation. We have to acknowledge barriers and systematically dismantle them.

*Dr. Jackie Ottmann
University of Saskatchewan*

¹<https://legacy.idrc.ocadu.ca/about-the-idrc/49-resources/online-resources/articles-and-papers/443-whatisinclusivedesign>

While most research-based organizations have accepted IDEA as an imperative, many have a long way to go to create a culture that reflects the principles of IDEA.

Where should research-intensive organizations start?

It begins with leadership. We need to hire for IDEA as a core competency among research leaders by not only expecting a diversity statement from potential recruits, but also giving weight to evidence that candidates have successfully applied IDEA principles in the workplace. Further, we will not benefit from the broadest range of talent in research until we train people to understand the bias that is built into things like CVs, recommendation letters and volunteerism, which can be a proxy for privilege. We must also build research training programs that build the skills (e.g. community-engaged research, the application of sex- and gender-based analysis) so that our graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and investigators effectively and responsibly integrate ideas of race, gender and sexuality into their research. This is the work that must be done to ensure that research—and research results—are inclusive.



We're losing talent, ideas from incredible people because of harassment, lack of representation, lack of feeling of belonging. IDEA is not 'lowering the bar', it's raising the bar of research and we're missing this opportunity.

*Dr. Imogen Coe
Ryerson University*

Many organizations are taking important steps to develop more diverse workforces through designated hires from underrepresented groups.

What is needed to create an environment in which designated hires can thrive?

Most importantly, designated hires cannot be done in isolation. They must be recruited in clusters so that new hires have a support system that is intentionally introduced and available during challenging times.

Designated hires also benefit from having a mentor—someone from inside or outside the organization, who may look or be very different from the hire, but is steadfastly committed to helping new hires succeed as they navigate their career trajectory. IDEA training within the institutions should also be provided and incentivized but not mandated to avoid the risk of creating silent resisters. Ultimately helping designated hires thrive depends on clustered hiring, access to mentors and participation in a community of willing allies for underrepresented individuals.



If you mandate EDI and diversity training it won't stick and it creates silent resisters. You have to provide training and cultivate the willingness to help and knowledge to serve as an ally for underrepresented folks and designated hires.

*Dr. Ivan Joseph
Wilfrid Laurier University*

What can we do now and what should we measure as we strive to embed IDEA in research-intensive organizations?

Dr. Ivan Joseph

Call to Action: Work with the private sector to create support systems and employment opportunities that help underrepresented students prepare for post-secondary education.

Metric: Percentage of students from diverse backgrounds in universities.

Dr. Jackie Ottmann

Call to Action: Stop implementing band-aid solutions and really engage in questioning and dismantling systems that prohibit the implementation of IDEA.

Metric: Growth in the amount of community-led, Indigenous-led research and evolution in the way this research integrates new perspectives and design.

Dr. Imogen Coe

Call to Action: Practice intentional reflection as an individual and as an organization.

Metric: Increase in the diversity of leaders in STEM-based organizations.

Dr. Mahadeo Sukhai

Call to Action: Resource, recognize and reward those leading and championing IDEA initiatives appropriately.

Metric: Measure inclusion not only by assessing diversity but also by assessing engagement and participation.

Shift Health brings a science mindset to strategy consulting for the health research and innovation ecosystem. You can read about our approach to developing IDEA strategies [here](#).

To learn more, please connect with Dr. Anne Mullin, Principal, Shift Health at amullin@shifthealth.com.