

Project Insights Report

Driving innovation through inclusion: ACCELERATE Leadership



PARTNERS

Coalition of Innovation
Leaders Against Racism



LOCATIONS

Across Canada



INVESTMENT

\$483,740



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Executive Summary

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are key drivers of the innovation needed to boost Canada's global competitiveness and deliver meaningful, future-proof jobs. The innovation economy represents a significant opportunity for increased prosperity for Canada and those who live here. Despite some progress, however, diverse people are underrepresented in Canada's innovation workforce and receive less funding and opportunities for research and development.

In February 2023, the Coalition of Innovation Leaders Against Racism (CILAR), in partnership with KDPM Consulting Group, TD Bank and MaRS Discovery District, received funding from the Future Skills Centre (FSC) to design and deliver the ACCELERATE Leadership pilot, which equips top executives and C-suite innovation leaders to champion EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion), as it is a key enabler of organizational innovation, growth and global competitiveness. [Blueprint](#) worked with CILAR and ACCELERATE partners to design and implement an evidence generation strategy for the pilot.

The ACCELERATE Leadership pilot was grounded in a growing body of research that underscores the importance of EDI for organizational innovation and growth and was informed by the expertise and experience of all the partners involved. It built on partners' existing tools and resources (including those supported by FSC).

The model included four core components: the recruitment phase, Inclusive Leadership Labs, a Community of Progress (via [DISCO](#)) and coaching sessions. Once the program was underway, program partners made a few notable changes to the model to improve delivery. Since both the development and piloting phase of the program are now complete, the next stage of ACCELERATE involves refining the model.

Blueprint worked collaboratively with ACCELERATE Leadership partners to develop an evidence generation strategy for the pilot, including guiding principles, evaluation questions and data sources. Our approach sought to answer questions about the program's relevance to participants, stakeholders and the ecosystem; implementation and efficiency; individual and organizational outcomes; and sustainability.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 The ACCELERATE Leadership program is positioned to fill a gap for leaders in the ecosystem.
- 2 Most participants found value in the resources, tools and frameworks that ACCELERATE provided.
- 3 Participants viewed community-building to be particularly valuable and found the live peer-learning activities embedded in the program particularly beneficial.

► The Issue

Although racialized folks make up 64% of workers in Canada, working Canadians, they are underrepresented in Canada's innovation workforce. In coming up with the idea for the ACCELERATE pilot, partners were mindful of the strong evidence base emphasizing the benefits of EDI for the growth and long-term success of the innovation economy. For example, when companies establish inclusive business cultures and policies, they report a 59.1% increase in creativity, innovation and openness. There is also evidence of an opportunity for greater (and faster) EDI adoption in the innovation sector.

The literature base strongly suggests that active buy-in from C-suite leadership, from oversight to implementation, is critical to EDI integration within an organization. When a CEO sets the strategy and frequently communicates EDI progress, a company is 6.3 times more likely to have a diverse leadership team—and to be an industry leader.

However, to the best of our knowledge, few initiatives and training programs focus on developing EDI competencies (and buy-in) among C-suite leaders in Canada. As a result, very limited evidence and few baseline metrics exist about the effectiveness of training programs designed to influence C-suite leaders' attitudes, behaviours and/or competencies with respect to embedding EDI within their organizations' business practices, products, services and/or workplace cultures.



What We Investigated

The ACCELERATE Leadership pilot took place in three iterative phases:

1. **Develop** (completed): The first phase involved leveraging proven tools and strategies to increase EDI practices to develop the ACCELERATE Leadership model.
2. **Pilot** (completed): This report presents findings from our pilot phase, in which we tested the program model with a small number of C-suite leaders.
3. **Refine** (in progress): The third phase will involve refining the model based on learnings that emerged during the pilot phase and delivering it on a larger scale. In other words, the next steps will be to further refine the model based on pilot learnings and consider expansion and scaling to additional audiences and organizations.

We also identified several questions that we would seek to answer through our evidence generation activities.

1. **Relevance and coherence:** To what extent—and in what ways—is the pilot meaningful and valuable to stakeholders? Are stakeholders interested, engaged, willing to share their experiences and knowledge, and committed to the pilot? Does the pilot meet a need in the ecosystem and sectors and enable stakeholders to accelerate their EDI journeys?
2. **Implementation and efficiency:** To what extent is the pilot implemented as intended? What is working well and where are there opportunities to strengthen and streamline the pilot's implementation?

3. Individual outcomes: To what extent—and in what ways—do participating individuals experience new or accelerated changes (e.g., in behaviours, attitudes, competencies and confidence)?

4. Organizational outcomes: To what extent—and in what ways—do participating organizations experience promising signs of change (e.g., in processes, practices, and commitment to and integration of EDI)?

5. Sustainability: What resources, funding and enabling conditions do we anticipate are needed to sustain and effectively scale ACCELERATE in the future?

✓ What We're Learning

Our evidence generation activities led to four key findings:

1. The ACCELERATE Leadership program is positioned to fill a gap for leaders in the ecosystem. The partners designed ACCELERATE in recognition of the benefits of EDI, and the opportunity to embed it in innovation-sector organizations (including not-for-profit organizations) across Canada. The program intended to fill a gap in the supports currently available for C-suite executives as they advance EDI within their teams and organizations. Program participant feedback regarding their motivation to apply suggests that there is demand for this type of programming in the innovation sector.

2. Most participants found value in the resources, tools and frameworks that ACCELERATE provided. Participant feedback confirmed that the materials shared were valuable and useful, particularly for those newer to EDI concepts.

3. Participants viewed community-building to be particularly valuable. Participants emphasized that they especially appreciated small group discussions with their peers, during which they could share questions, challenges and solutions and hear each other's perspectives related to embedding EDI in their work.

4. Participants saw context-specific, actionable EDI advice as essential to ACCELERATE's effectiveness. Participants noted an opportunity to further tailor the training to make stronger

connections to their day-to-day environments, ultimately ensuring that the pilot is relevant and aligned with their work, organizational contexts and stages of EDI learning. They consider this critical to ACCELERATE's future impact and value for leaders and organizations.

★ Why It Matters

The ACCELERATE Leadership pilot aims to fill a gap in available training for C-suite leaders in Canada and contribute to the evidence base on what works in accelerating EDI adoption within the innovation sector more broadly.



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How to Cite This Report

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