

Project Insights Report

# Workplace Inclusion Charter Expansion



## PARTNERS

Diversity Institute  
City of Kingston



## LOCATIONS

Ontario



## INVESTMENT

\$1,270,287



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## ☰ Executive Summary

Municipal governments are major employers that play a critical role in reflecting and shaping the communities they serve. One tool that has been developed to encourage employers to adopt equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices is the municipal workplace charter. Several have been implemented across the country in communities as diverse as Bow Valley, Alberta; Markham, Ontario; Saint John, New Brunswick; and Peel Region, Ontario.

This report outlines the implementation of the City of Kingston's Workplace Inclusion Charter, which was launched in partnership with KEYS Job Centre in 2019. The goal of the City of Kingston's Workplace Inclusion Charter was to serve as a system that would guide employers, service providers and equity-deserving groups in the labour market in creating more inclusive work environments and facilitating access to new talent among local businesses and employers.

The first phase of the project, which focused on newcomers to Canada, was launched in 2019 and completed in April 2020. The second phase of the project, called the Workplace Inclusion Charter Expansion, ran from February 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023. During that time, the blueprint that had been established for newcomers expanded to support three new equity-deserving groups: racialized people, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples. The charter model was expanded to a few new small or rural communities in the region, with the purpose of testing what works to address demand in those communities.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 There is a significant lack of tailored resources for municipalities to develop and implement EDI strategies; a mixed capacity for uptake of tools; and the need for adaptable and targeted solutions for large, medium and small municipalities.
- 2 Recruiting and engaging municipalities was more difficult than expected. The City of Kingston targeted three to five municipalities but was only able to engage two before the end of the project. An additional municipality endorsed the charter.

## The Issue

Municipalities in Canada are highly diverse in terms of their size, their geography and their demographic makeup. They are at very different stages in their EDI journeys. The challenges around EDI vary significantly with the demographics of a community, such as the proportion of youth and seniors; racialized, immigrant and Black residents; Indigenous Peoples; persons with disabilities; and those identifying as LGBTQ2S+.

Municipal governments are important players in local ecosystems, and their EDI strategies do not just affect their internal processes, such as human resources. They also affect local communities through policies, programs and procurement activities. The Workplace Inclusion Charter was conceived as a tool to help municipal governments work with employers to create inclusive workplaces and opportunities for employment and advancement of equity-deserving groups. A diversity charter is a voluntary code indicating an organization's commitment to promote diversity and equal opportunity in the workplace. In recent years, more attention has been paid to the role of 1) voluntary codes in advancing EDI in leadership roles, and 2) Canadian legislation in advancing employment equity and representation for equity-deserving groups.

One example of a successful charter is the Bow Valley Workplace Inclusion Charter (WIC). Eight Bow Valley employers became signatories. These results demonstrated that a charter that includes a vision and set of signatories working together to create more inclusive work environments can be beneficial for municipalities and the communities living in them.

The Kingston Workplace Inclusion Charter was developed by the City of Kingston's Inclusive Workplaces working group—which was composed of municipal representatives, private sector employers, immigrant professionals and nonprofits—as part of the implementation of its Workforce Development and In-Migration Strategy. In the first phase of the project Kingston engaged with employers to encourage them to adopt more inclusive hiring and employment practices, with a specific focus on newcomers.

The second phase, known as the Workplace Inclusion Charter Expansion, applied the blueprint established for newcomers and expanded the model to support three additional equity-deserving groups: racialized people, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples. In the second phase of the project, Kingston planned to work with three to five other municipalities in the region to replicate its success in different contexts, such as municipal corporations and small and rural communities.

The implementation objectives included the following:

- piloting an enhanced tool kit at the City of Kingston;
- refining and building existing charter tools;
- building up small and rural municipal corporations as EDI champions;
- establishing a “community of practice” to facilitate ongoing workplace EDI skills development among practitioners (inclusion coaches), employers and municipalities.



## What We Investigated

This report details the activities of the first and second phases of Kingston's Workplace Inclusion Charter. The first phase of the project, which focused on newcomers to Canada, was launched in 2019 and completed in April 2020. The results revealed substantial demand for the charter, and its tools exceeded the initial target audience of small and midsize businesses.

The second phase of the project, called the Workplace Inclusion Charter Expansion, ran from February 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023. Specifically, the project addresses and answers the following questions:

- Is a “community of practice” a sustainable and effective solution for ongoing support?
- Are municipalities well positioned to inspire EDI strides in the community?
- Is there a relationship between what the municipality does and what businesses do? Will businesses adopt EDI initiatives because the municipal corporation has done so?
- Is the charter scalable? What adjustments are needed for it to be effective in small or rural communities?

## What We're Learning

The Workplace Inclusion Charter Expansion ran from February 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. No formal evaluation was designed at the outset of the project and data was not collected, but key insights were drawn from a discussion with two key informants. The informants reported that the City of Kingston aimed to recruit three to five municipalities. As of February 2024, two municipalities had adopted and one had endorsed the charter. The City of Kingston encountered challenges with municipalities such as Brockville, Belleville, Peterborough and Gananoque, which were interested in EDI initiatives but did not have the time or resources to meet them.

The project highlighted the following key learnings about the process of introducing EDI initiatives in municipalities:

- When working with municipalities, allow additional time for each step of the process. Complex public organizations with strict hierarchies move at slower paces.
- When working with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in municipalities, tailoring documents such as the charter can incentivize participation.
- Completing surveys can be a barrier for some organizations. It is important to have alternative means of gathering information that can allow them to take the first step in implementation.
- The municipality is a great conduit for connecting SMEs with local business organizations and business improvement associations. The latter can, in turn, host info sessions and connect SMEs with the charter team.

Preliminary findings suggest that smaller municipalities have a need for and strong interest in receiving support with EDI. However, given the challenges in getting uptake on the charter from municipalities, these findings provide an opportunity to reflect on the needs of municipalities and whether they are at the right stage of maturity in their EDI journeys. The charter may be a useful tool for small municipalities that have reached a certain level of progress in their EDI plans, but for municipalities in more preliminary stages, other tools may be required to lay the groundwork for the charter's implementation.

## ★ Why It Matters

An EDI lens is critical at the municipal level since local governments are responsible for policies and programs that can significantly shape the daily lives of residents.



### **State of Skills: What Works for Newcomer Integration**

Industry-specific, employer-driven initiatives have been successful in accelerating and enhancing the employment prospects of newcomers.

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## ► What's Next

Building on the work of the Kingston Workplace Inclusion Charter, the City of Kingston, the Diversity Institute and a network of municipalities from across the country, supported by the Future Skills Centre, are developing a cohesive, adaptable framework and tool kit that municipalities can use to assess, develop and implement EDI strategies effectively. The project aims to produce an easy to navigate, “evergreen” portal that offers examples of strategies, tools and practices municipalities can use to advance their EDI strategies.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact [communications@fsc-ccf.ca](mailto:communications@fsc-ccf.ca).

### **How to Cite This Report**

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