



Future Skills Centre Centre des **Compétences futures**

Project Insights Report

Municipal Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation Sharing Platform

**PARTNERS**

City of Kingston
Diversity Institute

**LOCATIONS**

Across Canada

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☰ Executive Summary

Municipal governments are key employers and shape the communities they serve, but little research has examined how they engage with Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation (EDIR) and the levers they use to influence local practices. Approaches vary widely depending on geography, population size, socioeconomic conditions, and demographics. Large urban cities face different issues than smaller centres, especially those that are rural and remote, where municipalities often experience youth outmigration, gaps in infrastructure and services, stretched financial and human resources, and limited interaction across different identity groups.

Led by the City of Kingston, in collaboration with the Diversity Institute and with support from the Future Skills Centre, the Municipal Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation Sharing Platform was established to provide municipalities with a centralized space to strengthen local capacity to advance EDIR initiatives. Working with a community of practice across 66 municipalities, this project identified user needs and developed a prototype platform of shared resources to support EDIR strategies regardless of size or stage of development.

Consultations revealed that municipalities face several ongoing challenges to advancing EDIR, including limited data, scarce resources, lack of commitment and EDIR prioritization, and difficulties achieving diverse leadership and workforce representation. Participants also echoed the literature review findings, noting that resources are fragmented with many lacking applicability to different contexts.

As such, both the selection of the content and the design of the platform's structure were guided by the need for relevance across different municipalities. This approach has shown to be valuable, with feedback from municipalities and stakeholders indicating high satisfaction with the platform, particularly as smaller municipalities found practical guidance to address resource constraints, while larger ones appreciated insights into how smaller communities advance EDIR with limited capacity.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1** To date, 144 participants from 66 municipalities have contributed to consultations, emphasizing the need for a centralized Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation hub that provides accessible, contextually relevant resources to help navigate the fragmented landscape of existing frameworks and tools.
- 2** Municipalities reported facing ongoing challenges, including lack of municipal and organizational data, limited resources and funding, inconsistent buy-in, lack of equity and reconciliation prioritization, and difficulties achieving diverse representation within their leadership and workforce.
- 3** Measurement and tracking of equity and inclusion metrics emerged as one of the areas where municipalities require the most support.

The Issue

While municipalities are at the forefront of serving increasingly diverse communities, there is limited understanding of their approaches to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation (EDIR), internally or externally, and even less on the levers they use to shape local practices. The context in which municipalities operate differ considerably in terms of demographics, political imperatives, strategic priorities, and access to resources.

For example, while the proportion of women is fairly consistent across municipalities, the representation of Indigenous Peoples and racialized populations, along with the overall ethnic composition, differs greatly from one community to another. The proportion of persons living with disabilities varies depending on the age distribution of the population, while the number of individuals identifying as 2SLGBTQ+ can be shaped by the inclusiveness of the community. Larger cities may have whole departments devoted to EDIR, whereas smaller communities may lack this capacity. Levels of knowledge and access to talent and resources also vary considerably, with communities at different stages of developing and implementing EDIR initiatives.

Recent research from the Diversity Institute also showed significant variations in the extent of representation of different equity-deserving groups in leadership roles across sectors and larger cities in Canada. For example, while women are relatively well represented on municipal councils in most cities, Black, racialized, and Indigenous Peoples remain significantly underrepresented in most leadership roles. The degree of representation varies widely across regions, with few instances where the composition of leadership reflects the demographic realities of the communities they serve.

Variability in resources, institutional capacity, and local priorities results in different strategies and levels of engagement in EDIR. While some municipalities have established comprehensive EDIR frameworks, dedicated staff, and measurable objectives, others may just be starting to engage in foundational activities such as conducting assessments to identify equity gaps and focusing on building awareness across departments. Some jurisdictions may be reluctant to adopt new strategies due to perceived financial costs, staffing limitations, or uncertain political environments.

While municipalities may have well-developed and innovative approaches to addressing EDIR, the information is fragmented, and sharing is limited. The municipal EDI Community of Practice was developed to promote more sharing across municipalities and includes 165 municipalities. This project aimed to address these challenges by providing a shared national platform to promote sharing of information, best practices, and experience across municipalities, informed by research and stakeholder consultations.



What We Investigated

The City of Kingston, with support from the Diversity Institute and funding from the Future Skills Centre, led a project to assess municipalities' needs, develop a curated and accessible platform that would support municipalities of varying sizes and levels of readiness in advancing their EDIR efforts by providing access to shared and continuously updated resources. This project is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the EDIR needs and challenges within different municipalities of different sizes, contexts, and regions across the country?
2. How can accountability and transparency in EDIR implementation be enhanced while cultivating a shared sense of ownership among municipalities?
3. How can a shared platform address the needs of individual municipalities while remaining adaptable to municipalities at different EDIR maturity levels?

The project undertook an iterative process, guided by continuous consultations and refinement, to ensure the shared platform was relevant and useful in both its structure and content:

1. Needs assessment: Defined the platform's objective, its structure and contents, and the types of tools and information needed through extensive consultation with the municipal EDI Community of Practice led by the City of Kingston, as well as review of existing resources. This included consultations with key informants (August–September 2024).

2. **Prototype development:** Based on the needs assessment, the structure and functionality of the platform was developed and populated with examples of leading practices as well as curated resources. The content and structure of the platform were guided by the Diversity Institute's Diversity Assessment Tool (DAT), which informed the categorization of over 260 best practices into four core areas: aligning strategy with organizational goals, internal processes, policies and programs, and community engagement. These four categories were further broken down into 14 sub-categories and 77 topics. Resources were gathered through a national literature scan, contributions from community partners, and peer-reviewed municipal submissions. The platform is designed to allow regular updates and includes an FAQ section to support usability. The site's navigation system is built for ease of use, with expandable menus and filters by topic, resource type, population size, and municipality type. Bilingual accessibility is also supported, prioritizing original French-language resources when available.
3. **Prototype validation:** To validate and refine this structure, the City of Kingston organized seven workshops between August and September 2024, engaging 139 attendees from 62 municipalities. Feedback on the prototype was then collected through surveys, focus groups, and consultations, with modifications made on an ongoing basis until December 30, 2024.
4. **Prototype integration:** Based on the feedback, the tool was revised and more feedback was solicited, including opportunities to add to the platform. Feedback from a demo event (December 2024) and a follow-up survey (March-April 2025) informed further refinements. The survey, using a combination of Likert scale and open-ended questions, was completed by 40 participants representing 32 unique municipalities.
5. The final tool was launched at an event organized by the City of Kingston at Toronto Metropolitan University on May 15, 2025.

What We're Learning

Municipal feedback from initial consultations expressed a need for centralized, practical, and contextually relevant resources, while also identifying several ongoing challenges related to EDIR—including a lack of municipal and organizational data, limited resources and funding, inconsistent buy-in across departments, a lack of prioritization of EDIR efforts, and difficulties achieving diverse representation within their leadership and workforce.

Survey findings identified the following EDIR areas where municipalities require the most support: measurement and tracking of EDIR (66.7%); human resources (33.3%); garnering support for implementing EDIR strategies (33.3%); governance, leadership and strategy (25%); organizational values and cultures (25%); and outreach and engagement (25%).

Feedback from municipalities and other stakeholders during the rollout of the platform indicate high levels of satisfaction, with the platform receiving a recommendation score of 8.6 out of 10. A large majority of respondents (92.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that the platform is valuable and comprehensive, and 87.5% found it to be a unique and centralized source of information. Slightly fewer (77.5%) agreed that the resources directly addressed the needs of their municipality. Respondents found the language to be clear, the layout navigable, and the design visually appealing.

A majority of respondents indicated that the platform provided new insights or practices. Respondents from smaller municipalities shared that the wide range of best practices offered practical guidance for embedding EDIR into governance structures, especially in communities with fewer internal resources. In turn, larger municipalities noted the value of seeing how smaller municipalities are addressing EDIR despite their limited resources.

In terms of implementation potential, nearly one-half of the respondents (47.5%) reported that their municipality was already actively implementing EDIR strategies and policies, while 37.5% are in the process of developing them. Notably, none of the respondents indicated they would not use the platform, with 87.5% planning to use it either actively (45%) or occasionally (42.5%). Anticipated challenges in using the platform included limited capacity and budgets, especially in smaller municipalities, as well as difficulties securing buy-in from leadership.

★ Why It Matters

Insights gained from this project have implications for enhancing EDIR practices in local governance. Key takeaways include the value of comprehensive resources, the emphasis on reflective learning, the necessity for user-driven platforms that facilitate real-time engagement, and the importance of fostering cross-regional collaboration.

A key indicator of this project's success is the purposeful engagement of municipal representatives. By utilizing the Diversity Institute's evidence-based Diversity Assessment Tool as the foundation for discussions, this focused approach allowed for a deeper exploration of specific EDIR challenges faced by municipalities, resulting in actionable recommendations. The project provided a platform for sharing best practices, emphasizing accountability and continuous improvement. Such structured approaches not only enhance collaboration among stakeholders but also ensure that initiatives are aligned with community needs and evidence-based strategies.



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▶ What's Next

Widespread dissemination and sustained engagement will be essential to ensure the platform's ongoing relevance. While the development process already engaged municipalities through direct feedback and collaborative input, much of the participation was concentrated in Ontario. Future dissemination efforts will focus on increasing involvement from other provinces to ensure the platform reflects the full diversity of regional contexts and experiences across Canada. To continue building momentum, efforts have focused on strategic outreach and partnerships aimed at promoting the use of the platform and supporting its implementation.

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

How to Cite This Report

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