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Project Insights Report

Advancing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation in Canadian Municipalities: A Playbook of Promising Practices

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LOCATIONS
Across Canada

PUBLISHED
November 2026

CONTRIBUTORS

Executive Summary

Municipalities shape many aspects of daily life. They are employers, policymakers and regulators, service providers, purchasers of goods and services, and partners to communities, businesses, and other governments. At the same time, demographic shifts are reshaping communities, creating opportunities to strengthen how municipalities attract and retain talent, design policies and programs, deliver services, allocate resources, and engage communities.

This project examined promising approaches to advancing equity, diversity, inclusion and reconciliation (EDIR) across Canadian municipalities. The research builds on previous work developing the Municipal EDIR Sharing Platform, which included more than 260 promising practices identified and organized into four dimensions: Aligning Strategy with Organizational Goals, Internal Processes, Policies and Programs, and Community Engagement.

A review of promising practices shows that advancing EDIR requires a system-wide approach, embedded into how municipalities hire, make decisions, allocate resources, deliver services and engage communities. However, no single approach exists. Sustained EDIR progress requires moving from commitments to implementation through clear goals, accountability, capacity building, meaningful engagement and measurement.

KEY INSIGHTS

1. EDIR is most effective when embedded across municipal operations: Promising practices extend beyond standalone initiatives into strategy, human resources, procurement, planning, service delivery, economic development, and community engagement.

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2. Moving from commitment to action requires accountability: Clear goals, assigned responsibilities, leadership, resources, and measurement help municipalities translate EDIR commitment into sustained action.

3. There is no single model for advancing EDIR across municipalities: Promising practices provide reference points that municipalities can adapt based on their local context.

The Issue

Municipalities shape many aspects of daily life. They are employers, policymakers and regulators, service providers, purchasers of goods and services, and partners to community organizations, businesses, and other orders of government. Their decisions affect both employees and the residents.

Communities across Canada also continue to change through immigration, an aging population, growing representation of racialized communities and Indigenous Peoples, increases in people identifying as persons with disabilities, and other demographic shifts. These changes create opportunities for municipalities to strengthen how they attract new talent, design programs, deliver services, and engage communities.

EDIR provides a lens through which municipalities can respond to the needs of the communities they serve, but municipalities are at different stages of their EDIR journeys: Some have comprehensive EDIR strategies, while others focus on specific priorities, such as accessibility or anti-racism. The way municipalities approach EDIR differs based on size, geography, governance structures, resources and capacity, and community demographics. Persistent inequalities also shape municipal EDIR priorities. Inequities in access to services, housing security, and disaster outcomes can affect communities differently, requiring municipalities to understand how policies, programs, and services may create or reinforce barriers.

One ongoing challenge is translating EDIR commitments into practical actions across municipal operations. This includes embedding EDIR in policies, processes, programs, and services that affect both municipal workplaces and the communities they serve.

Director, Research – Special Projects, Diversity Institute



What We Investigated

This project drew on a multi-phase research initiative that identified, organized, and shared approaches to advance EDIR in Canadian municipalities. The Municipal EDIR Sharing Platform was developed to share these resources.

The project included several phases:

- **Needs Assessment:** A review of existing EDIR evidence, tools, and resources, such as the Diversity Institute's Diversity Assessment Tool and Playbook and publicly available resources from municipalities.
- **Engagement:** Seven webinars held in 2024 brought together 139 participants representing 62 municipalities to explore current EDIR priorities, practices, and implementation challenges.
- **Framework and prototype development:** A municipal EDIR framework was developed around four interconnected dimensions, including 1) Aligning the Strategy with Organizational Goals, (2) Internal Processes, (3) Policies and Programs, and (4) Community Engagement. It was further divided into 14 sub-categories and 110 topics.
- **Identification and review of promising practices:** More than 260 promising practices were gathered through a review of research, direct municipal submissions, and a scan of municipal practices across Canada.
- **Testing and refinement with municipal users:** A prototype of the Municipal EDIR Sharing Platform was tested with municipal users to gather feedback. The platform was formally launched in May 2025.

This research draws on that work to highlight promising practices across the EDIR framework that municipalities can adapt to their own priorities and contexts.

What We're Learning

Across more than 260 promising practices, four common elements emerged:

Connect EDIR to strategy and accountability: Effective approaches begin with understanding municipal context, identifying priorities, and establishing clear goals. Implementation requires defined responsibilities, resources, and mechanisms to monitor progress. Promising practices show that municipalities use different governance structures to advance EDI, including committees to oversee implementation and decentralized structures to embed EDIR across municipal functions.

Examine internal structures and culture
This includes governance and leadership, human resource practices, and organizational culture. Internal practices bring diverse voices into decision-making and address barriers across the employee lifecycle.

Apply an EDIR lens to policies, programs, and services
Municipalities can incorporate EDIR into policy and program design, implementation and evaluation through approaches such as universal design, human rights principles, and disaggregated data. EDIR is also being applied across procurement, planning, transportation, economic development, cultural and social programs, communications, digital services, emergency management and resilience planning.

Engage communities meaningfully and show the results
Embedding EDIR into community engagement practices can help municipalities understand community needs, identify barriers, incorporate lived experiences, and show how community input informs decisions. Relationships with Indigenous Peoples and governments also require distinct approaches that recognize Indigenous rights, histories and jurisdiction.

No one-size-fits-all approach exists for advancing EDIR
Municipalities differ in size, geography, governance, resources, capacity and community context. Promising practices should be viewed as reference points that municipalities can adapt, combine and build upon to reflect their own priorities and needs.

Why It Matters

Municipalities have several levers to advance EDIR. As employers, policymakers, service providers, purchasers of goods, and community partners, municipalities can embed EDIR across internal operations and community-facing functions.

For municipal leaders, the findings highlight the importance of connecting EDIR commitments to implementation. Strategies and goals can set direction, but sustained action depends on leadership, clear responsibilities, appropriate resources, coordination across functions, measurement and mechanisms to review and adapt approaches over time. This research suggests value in combining dedicated EDIR expertise with shared responsibility across municipal departments, helping maintain specialized knowledge while embedding accountability.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of adaptation rather than replication. Municipalities operate with different resources, governance structures, demographics, and community priorities. Promising practices provide reference points rather than a checklist of required actions. Municipalities can adapt approaches according to their context, responsibilities, needs and capacity.



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What's Next

Future work can continue expanding the evidence base, particularly by identifying additional approaches from smaller and rural municipalities and across areas of municipal activity where fewer examples may be available.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen evidence on implementation and outcomes. Promising practices show what municipalities are doing, but sustained progress requires municipalities to measure results, identify barriers and use evidence to refine policies, programs and practices over time. Continued research can clarify how different approaches are implemented across municipal contexts and what they achieve.

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

Coppens, L., Cukier, W., Sverko, K. (2026) Project Insights Report: Faire progresser l'équité, la diversité, l'inclusion et la réconciliation dans les municipalités canadiennes : recueil de pratiques prometteuses. Toronto : Centre des Compétences futures. https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/edir-in-canadian-municipalities/

Funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program

Canada

Advancing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation in Canadian Municipalities: A Playbook of Promising Practices is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

The Future Skills Centre acknowledges that the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee share a special relationship to the 'Dish With One Spoon Territory,' where our office is located, bound to share and protect the land. As a pan-Canadian initiative, FSC operates on the traditional territory of many Indigenous nations across Turtle Island, the name given to the North American continent by some Indigenous peoples. We are grateful for the opportunity to work in this territory and commit ourselves to learning about our shared history and doing our part towards reconciliation.

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